Discourse as Critique
Post-Structuralism

David Carter and Marion Carter

Discourse Analysis Workshop
7 August 2015

Discourse - Laclau

• “This totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic, is what we call discourse [. . .] Every social configuration is meaningful [. . .] it establishes a system of relations with other objects, and these relations are not given by the mere referential materiality of the objects, but are, rather, socially constructed. The systematic set of relations is what we call discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987, p. 82).

• Eg. An Earthquake – The relationship between ontology and the ontic.
Logics of Critical Explanation

- A focus on logics (Glynos and Howarth, 2007):
  - **Social Logic**: rules, practices, concepts, categories, and sedimented social practices that structure social interactions and relations identified through a strongly contextualised reading of the social landscape.
  - **Political Logic**: the space in which the emergence, institution, and constitution of new norms, rules, and social practices are publicly contested.
  - **Fantasmatic Logic**: this provides space to examine how subjects are ‘gripped’ by ideological presuppositions and pathologies that sustain their identity.

Paradiastole: Rhetorical Redescription

- **For Quintilian:**
  
  the essence of the technique may thus be said to consist of replacing a given evaluative description with a rival term that serves to picture the action no less plausibly, but serves at the same time to place it in a contrasting moral light. You seek to persuade your audience to accept your new description, and thereby to adopt a new attitude towards the action concerned (Skinner, 2002, p. 183).

- A redescription changes a concept (by de- or re-valuing):
  - *re-conceptualisation* (a revision in meaning)
  - *re-naming* (a change of the name)
  - *re-weighting* (a shift in significance)
  - *re-evaluation* (an alteration of the normative implications)
The UK Starbucks Tax Crisis 2012

A worked example

The 2012 UK Starbucks Tax Crisis

The fundamental problem:
Across 14 years:
- £3b of revenue earned
- £8.6m of taxes paid
- Complex transfer pricing arrangements
Starbucks: Redescriptions

Starbucks Transfer Pricing Arrangements

- Immorality
- Anti-British
- Resolution: A Voluntary Payment of Tax
- Illegality?
- The 'Bad' Apple

Starbucks as Immoral

“We’re not accusing you of being illegal, we are accusing you of being immoral”
Quoting Margaret Hodge, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
The Guardian, 2012

The action comes as a cross-party parliamentary committee slammed companies such as Google, Starbucks and Amazon for their “immoral” tax dodging which was “an insult to British businesses and individuals who pay their fair share”
The Daily Mail, 2012

“Now politicians from all parties are urging Britons to boycott these behemoths over such ‘immoral’ behaviour”
The Daily Mail, 2012
Starbucks as Anti-British

“What Starbucks is doing may be legal, but what it also shows is that business does not operate on a level playing field in the UK... That’s bad for British business, bad for the prospects for growth in this economy, bad for the creation of an atmosphere of tax compliance in the small business community when they can clearly see the tax system picks on them, and bad for communities of the UK that need local initiatives to ensure that they prosper and thrive.”

The Guardian, 2012

“[Starbucks’ methods are]...against the interests of the countries where they operate and is extremely unfair. They are trying to play the taxman, game him. It is disgraceful.”

BBC News, 2012

We seek to be good taxpayers and to pay our fair share of taxes...We don’t write this tax code; we are obligated to comply with it. And we do.

A response from Starbucks

Reuters, 2012