

Discussion Questions for Norman Fairclough's *Analysing Discourse*

Chapter 2: Texts, Social Events and Social Practices

(Version 2)

Introduction

Q1. Norman Fairclough says that social life is made up of various kinds of social events. He also says that social events have two main kinds of *causes*: (a) **social structures** and **social practices** and (b) **social agents** [= people]. When news journalists report on an event (such as 9.11 or the Iraq War), which of these two types of cause do they usually emphasize? Why?

Texts and social agents

Q2. Journalists are social agents. When they write a news story, how much freedom do they have to 'make meaning' by 'texturing' texts, (that is, by establishing relationships between elements in texts)? For example, how much freedom do journalists have to describe the Iraq War as 'an invasion' rather than 'a war', or the people responsible for 9.11 positively as 'heroes', 'martyrs' or 'freedom fighters' (or more neutrally as 'bombers' or 'attackers') rather than 'terrorists'?

Social events, social practices, social structures

Q3. NF describes **orders of discourse** as 'the linguistic elements of networks of social practices'. What 'linguistic elements' are involved in the social practice of television news programmes?

Q4. NF also describes orders of discourse as 'the *social* control and organization of linguistic variation'. Can you think of an example of how the language in texts such as TV news programmes are socially controlled and organized? Who does the controlling and organizing, and how do they do it?

Social practices

Q5. Look at the elements of social practice shown in the box on page 25. Can you give examples of these elements that are articulated together in the social practice of 'playing an online computer game' or 'watching a movie in the cinema'?

Discourse as an element of social practices: genres, discourses and styles

Q6. Describe the genres, discourses and styles of the social practice of either (a) doing 'karaoke' or (b) a newspaper report about a traffic accident.

Text as action, representation, identification

Q7. The first sentence of Example 9 (page 244) is: 'Companies that are successful on the web operate differently from their laggard counterparts'. Can you identify the Action, Representation

and Identification meanings in this sentence?

Dialectical relations

Q8. Consider the social practice of being a *male* TV news presenter (= ‘announcer’). What discourses, genres and styles are involved? How are they dialectically related (that is, how are the discourses *inculcated* in the styles of presenters and how are the discourses *enacted* in the genres of presenters’ talk. And how are the styles and genres of presenters *represented* in the discourse of news presenting?

Q9. Repeat Q8, but for *female* news presenters. Are there any differences in discourses, genres and styles, or in how they are dialectically related?

Mediation

Q10. What genres are regularly involved in the **genre chain** of reporting business news from the Wall Street (New York) stock market in the Chunichi Shinbun in Nagoya? Does the report in the newspaper represent the end of the genre chain? How might the chain continue?

Genre chains

Q11. What social practices are associated with the genre chain discussed in Q10?

Genres and governance

Q12. In 34B NF suggests that ‘the mass media’ are ‘a part of the apparatus of governance’. That is, the mass media are a tool with which powerful groups in society (politicians, business leaders, etc.) control ordinary people. Do you agree? Why/Why not?

Genre mixing

Q13. Can you think of an example of a genre of media text which seems to be a ‘hybrid’ mixture of genres?

Relational approach to text analysis

Q14. NF says his approach to text analysis is a ‘relational’ one. On page 35 there is a chart of the various levels of his analytical framework. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach for studying media texts? Can you think of a better way to study the media?

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