

Book Review

Analysing Power in Language: A practical guide. Tom Bartlett. New York: Routledge, 2014. xii + 212 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-66630-5 (pbk). \$44.95.

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This book offers an understanding of language as a conduit of power capable of impacting people in many ways. In general, the author delineates the difference between text and discourse based on Michael Halliday's systemic grammar and merges it with the notion of symbolic capital à la Pierre Bourdieu. Although written with precision and clarity, Bartlett's practical guide demands that readers have a fair command of advanced knowledge of grammar, especially prescriptive grammar.

The book is well-organized, having an appendix, a glossary, and a list of references that includes definitive publications on systemic grammar and the discipline of cultural studies. It provides a comprehensive answer scheme for the thought-provoking questions raised throughout the text. The heuristic exercises serve as an analytical lens through which to understand a written text or a conversation in its unique context. And to this end, Bartlett advocates a mesoanalysis viewpoint, defined as the middle ground between macro- and microanalysis.

One highlight in the book is Bartlett's explanation of how different themes underpin generic structures of discourse. Another is his description of some possible reasons for (not) developing ancillary or small talk as part of the environment that foregrounds discourses. An important point raised in this book is that the field of discourse may be a distant entity, yet it is created in the present environment. For example, the ritual power of the stock phrase *once upon a time*, which establishes the relationship of the speaker as a story-teller and the hearer as the listener, illuminates an overlapping dynamic incorporating the present/real and past/fictive. The formulaic expression of an age old fairytale operating in the current world is explicated according to the notions of systemic grammar.

Bartlett also discusses a few prevalent grammar conundrums. For example, readers are reminded that it is the use of a verb in a context that determines the process type along the granularity of transitivity or intransitivity. Therefore, it is inaccurate to assume transitivity as a preexisting grammar category at the word level, and it is necessary to identify the configuration of the sentence within which a verb operates. This point is illustrated by contrasting the verb *jump* (p. 46):

Tom jumped when the television exploded.

The horse jumped the fence with ease.

On the other hand, the grammar category complement as a necessary participant in each sentence is identified as a scope in this book. The *do to* probe is introduced to tease out the difference between a scope and a goal in a sentence. This logical evaluation provides the check if the second noun reference is a scope or a goal in the following examples (pp. 52–53):

John Sherwood won a bronze medal in the 400m hurdles.

Two days later Coe joined their club.

The different outcomes from the *do to* test shows that it is inaccurate to claim that **What John Sherwood did to a bronze medal was win it*, and **What Coe did to their club was join it*. The test indicates that *a bronze medal* and *their club* are a scope in the sentences because these noun references provide a circumstance relation with the process of John winning the hurdles and Coe making a decision, respectively. The test sheds more light on the typical problem of confusing a bronze medal and their club as having the participant role of a goal in the sentences.

If a quibble need be raised, it would be the book's paucity of visual representations such as illustrations and diagrams. If included they would have helped to illustrate the relationship between non-linguistic settings and discourse development. Without these it is difficult to imagine the authenticity of the physical layout in a formal discussion constitutive of the discourse environment. Despite its silent role, as mentioned by the author, the setting leaves an impact on the conduit and transformation of the discourse. It is vital to note that different discourse types arise from the design of each setting containing distinct visual elements. Non-linguistic factors impact the configuration of discourse as a medium of communication.

In terms of language pedagogy, the work can be a practical guide for language teachers since it offers many angles from which language learning may be examined. Some of these include the order of categories in sentences, the combination of sentences as text type, and the configurations of discourse as providing a specific function in its context of use. Indeed, there are many subcomponents to account for when approaching a phrase, a paragraph, a text or a prolonged dialogue in language teaching.

Despite the author's admission at the end of the first chapter (p. 15) that the book is not really an introduction at all and it is in fact quite complex, it offers a refreshing read to the functional and grammatical mechanics influencing language communication. Regardless of one's conviction on grammar theory, readers will find a rewarding alternative to an understanding of text within its syntagmatic, paradigmatic, functional, interpersonal, and sociocultural contexts.