

Studies on Interdiscursivity^{*}

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The present paper defines interdiscursivity as the mixing of diverse genres, discourses, or styles in a single text. It also traces the origin of interdiscursivity and takes it as a special kind of intertextuality. Then the paper gives a review of interdiscursivity studies in literary and non-literary fields. The former is usually conducted from the stylistic approach, while the latter from the CDA (critical discourse analysis) approach. The contributions and limitations of the previous studies are also summarized with the purpose of presenting an objective picture of the research. Based upon the detailed review, the paper offers some perspectives for the future research. It is hoped that this will shed some light on our understanding of interdiscursivity.

Keywords: interdiscursivity, stylistic approach, CDA (critical discourse analysis) approach, perspective

Introduction

Interdiscursivity refers to the mixing of diverse genres, discourses, or styles associated with institutional and social meanings in a single text. This linguistic phenomenon permeates through language use, especially in contemporary institutional settings. A case in point can be found in a mediating event, in which three kinds of activities, namely, the disputing parties' bargaining and inquiring, the mediator's offering of law knowledge, and voicing of advice, intermingle in the process to achieve settlement. Thus, it can be seen as interdiscursive through the hybridity of three genres: bargaining, counseling, and therapeutic. This kind of interdiscursive relationship exhibits a fascinating trend of modern language use. The present paper will give a survey of the studies on interdiscursivity so as to present some perspectives for the future research.

Studies on Interdiscursivity

Interdiscursivity is a notion of the Bakhtinian tradition in literature, with piecemeal researches in stylistics and CDA (critical discourse analysis), more usually as a special kind of "intertextuality". In this part, we will briefly trace the origin of interdiscursivity so as to better understand its modern manifestations. We will also review in brief the different approaches of the study and try to present an objective comment on each of them.

Interdiscursivity as a Special Kind of Intertextuality

The term "interdiscursivity" was coined by Fairclough (1992) when he accounted for the more overarching

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concept of “intertextuality”. He (1992) defines intertextuality basically as “the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth” (p. 84). Drawing upon Bakhtin’s (1986) work, Fairclough (1992) further introduces the classification of intertextuality by French discourse analysts, namely, “manifest” intertextuality and “constitutive” intertextuality. Manifest intertextuality refers to the explicit presence of one text in another through the techniques of discourse representation, presupposition, negation, metadiscourse, and/or irony. Constitutive intertextuality refers to the mixing configuration of discourse conventions such as genres, activity types, and styles associated with different types of discourse. In order to emphasize that the focus is on discourse conventions rather than other texts as constitutive, Fairclough introduces the new term “interdiscursivity” to replace “constitutive intertextuality”.

However, the concept of interdiscursivity can be traced back to Bakhtin’s dialogized “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). For Bakhtin, utterances in language are always dialogized and changing, which results in what he calls “hybridization”—the mixture of different utterances within a single piece of language. Bakhtin describes this complex mixture of utterances as heteroglossia. What Bakhtin holds in terms of the concept of dialogized heteroglossia brings us to the issue of interdiscursivity, and Bakhtin is more concerned with the language in specific social situations.

In the late 1960s, Kristeva (1986; actually written in 1966) introduces Bakhtin’s theory into France and coined the term “intertextuality”. For Kristeva (1986), intertextuality implies “the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history” (p. 39). Here, the Bakhtinian notions of dialogism and heteroglossia have been rephrased within Kristeva’s attention to text, textuality, and their relation to society and history.

Based upon Kristeva’s expression of intertextuality, the French discourse analysts draw a distinction between “manifest” and “constitutive” intertextuality. The latter is highlighted by Fairclough as “interdiscursivity” in order to echo Pêcheux’s notion of “interdiscourse”¹, and to foreground various elements of “orders of discourse”², such as genres, discourses, and styles. Thus, Pêcheux’s “interdiscourse” and Foucault’s “the order of discourse” can be seen as precursors of “interdiscursivity”, and they constitute the two theoretical bases for interdiscursive study in CDA, which will be discussed in detail in the section “Interdiscursivity in Non-Literary Texts: The CDA Approach”.

From this rather brief diachronic review, we can see that all texts are intertextual, in the sense that each utterance is a link in a chain of speech communication, or that each text contains within itself evidences of the histories of other texts. As a special kind of intertextuality, interdiscursivity is related to the whole language system involved in a text. As Allen (2000) suggests, it is a term by no means exclusively related to the study of literary works or to written communication in general. So in what follows, we will review how interdiscursivity is approached in literary and non-literary texts, both written and oral.

Interdiscursivity in Literary Texts: The Stylistic Approach

Interdiscursivity in literary texts, which manifests itself more usually as genre mixing or genre switching,

¹ “Interdiscourse” can be understood as configuration of different elements of discourses (i.e., discursive practices), within, e.g., a social field or a social institution. This is a very important notion in that it allows us to understand more specifically the textuality of hegemony, or in other words, the discursive processes by means of which subjects are produced and the common sense maintained.

² This term originates from Foucault, referring to networks of social practices in their language aspect, or the social organizations of linguistic variations. We can also see it as the abstract social counterpart of “interdiscursivity”.

has been widely studied from the stylistic approach. These studies can be said to have their origins in 20th-century literary stylistics, particularly in the seminal essays of Bakhtin. The major concerns of this approach are how literary texts are formed through interdiscursivity and what aesthetic as well as social significances are achieved through this text-forming scheme.

Bakhtin (1981, 1986) explores the reasons for genre mixing by examining the artistic and ideological resonances of literary and non-literary styles in a text. For him, poetry's formal and stylistic difference from the context-influenced style of non-poetic language indicates a thinking and behavioral pattern that is free from the dangerous contamination of ordinary life. He further emphasizes that novel is a pluralistic discourse. It intentionally mixes many different genres which are widely separated in time and social space. And this conscious genre hybridization (or interdiscursivity) is a major device for creating artistic language-images in the novel (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 358-366). However, to Bakhtin, this genre hybridization is not an easy process; it implies friction and struggle.

Toward the end of the 20th century, there have appeared quite a few broad studies on interdiscursivity in photographs and films. For example, Collins (1989) and Hutcheon (1989) have explored the political dimensions of postmodern texts by focusing (in part) specifically on the ideological significances of genre combination in films. Knee (1994), however, takes genre compounding or hybridizing in films as a means of weaving together the plots.

But the most detailed exploration of interdiscursivity is found in Bradford's *Stylistics* (1997), where Bradford applies his theory of "double pattern"³ to the analysis of genre mixing and/or genre switching in poetry, novel, and drama. For him, this interdiscursive feature of poetry is a main factor that gives rise to the tension between the two poles of the "double pattern". Bradford ascribes this kind of interdiscursivity to the political and social disorders at that time. This mode of interdiscursivity, however, is more clearly shown in Shakespeare's dramas. Bradford even thinks that this genre mixing in Shakespeare's dramas maps the distinction between European civilization and the savages of the new world. For Bradford, the novel is an all-inclusive framework of genres and linguistic styles; the unskillful use of interdiscursivity can mirror the immaturity in some of the 18th-century novels.

In short, the stylistic approach has successfully introduced the social and cultural factors into the analysis of linguistic structures. This view helps us better understand the macro relationship between literature and social/historical context. However, such analyses from the stylistic approach are focused on the surface level and fail to reveal in depth the operating process of interdiscursivity, for they do not take the dynamics of communication and the cognitive elements into consideration. Furthermore, no satisfactory theoretical model for the understanding of interdiscursivity has ever been offered in the stylistic approach.

Interdiscursivity in Non-Literary Texts: The CDA Approach

Ample studies on interdiscursivity in non-literary texts have been made from the CDA approach. These studies are mainly concerned with the interdiscursive relations in texts, with a view to understanding social

³ As Bradford (1997) proposes, this double pattern consists of two poles, namely, the pole of "cognition" and the pole of "literary convention", which interact with each other and produce a dynamic tension between the real and unreal dimensions of literature. It is through this dynamic tension that literature achieves its unique charm and aesthetic value. For more information, see also WU and QIN (2004).

change or conducting social research. As a mediating link, this approach bridges the gap between linguistic analysis and social research by scrutinizing the social and critical significance of interdiscursivity. This attempt has brought the dynamics of communication back into the studies of interdiscursivity through analyzing the relevant discursive practices.

Fairclough (1992, 2003, 2010) thinks that interdiscursivity is more than a stylistic phenomenon; rather, it has important implications for social practice. Thus, interdiscursivity is central to an understanding of the process of social change. Fairclough's study combines the constitutive view of discourse illustrated by Foucault and the dynamic view of discursive practice as well as its relationship with social practice. He accounts for this phenomenon with Gramsci's conception of hegemony and Habermas' theory of colonization of the "lifeworld" by social systems. Fairclough (1992, pp. 200-224) also holds that the interdiscursive relations in texts can reflect the three interlocking tendencies of contemporary public discourse, namely, the "democratization" of discourse, the "commodification" or "marketization" of discourse, and the "technologization" of discourse⁴. All these changes in language use are part of wider processes of social changes affecting the development of postmodern society.

According to Bhatia (1995), the phenomenon of mixing "private intentions" with "socially recognized communicative purposes" is characteristic of and widely used in a number of professional domains, resulting in a "mixing" and often "blending" of genres. A great deal of such instances of mixed genres are becoming established and are being given innovative names such as *infomercial*, *infotainment*, or *advertorial*. Against this background of intense interdiscursivity, Bhatia (1995) explains that:

This dynamic complexity of professional communication is the result of several factors, including the ever-increasing use of multi-media, explosion of information technology, multi-disciplinary contexts of the world of work, increasingly competitive professional (academic as well as business) environment, and the overwhelmingly compulsive nature of promotional and advertising activities. (p. 1)

In *Worlds of Written Discourse* (2004), Bhatia puts forward a multi-perspective four-space model of discourse analysis as a development of his own theory. Taking the generic variation and dynamism into consideration, he offers a detailed account of interdiscursivity and its application potential in terms of the increasing hybridization of organizational life.

Scollon (2000, 2002) combines interdiscursive analysis with ethnographic research that locates discourse as a part of a wider set of social practices in the familial local context of Hong Kong. In his study of news discourse and identity, he applies the "methodological interdiscursivity" as a means of paralleling or engaging directly in the interdiscursive relations. He suggests that the social practices in news discourse produce complex levels of interdiscursivity. In view of these complexities and polyvocalities, he (2002) points out that the social construction of identity in news discourse is a highly interdiscursive process.

According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), the pervasive discursual hybridity (or interdiscursivity) in interactions and texts has been widely seen as a significant characteristic of postmodern social life in that late modernity entails a radical unsettling of the boundaries of social life. They hold that interdiscursive analysis is an

⁴ The "democratization" of discourse is a tendency towards equality in discursive practice and language use through removing power asymmetries; the "commodification" or "marketization" of discourse is pervasive under the impact of the colonizing movement of advertising, marketing, and managerial practices to professional and public service domains; and the "technologization" of discourse involves the more or less self-conscious application of social scientific knowledge for purposes of bureaucratic control.

important aspect of analysis of field relations and an effective key to identifying obstacles to the resolution of social problems.

Wodak (2001) touches upon interdiscursivity from what she calls “the discourse-historical approach”, studying the interdiscursive relations in texts in order to shed light on her critical analysis of social problems. She proposes to tie interdiscursivity to transformational recontextualization and historical change and at the same time to focus on the potential interdiscursive relations through mixing of new genres.

In addition, some other scholars have carried out studies on interdiscursivity from the perspective of “colonization and appropriation”⁵. For instance, Lemke (1995) explores the spread of technocratic discourse into new domains; Bernstein (1996) studies the spread of pedagogical discourse beyond educational institutions.

The CDA approach to interdiscursivity has several advantages over the stylistic approach. Firstly, it goes beyond surface analysis and can help explain how and why interdiscursivity takes shape as it is and what social changes it is meant to reflect. Secondly, unlike the stylistic approach, the CDA approach takes the dynamics of communication into consideration. Thirdly, the data in CDA are rather empirical and are tied more closely to real language use. However, it still needs to be improved in some aspects. For instance, the CDA approach does not take cognitive factors into consideration. Furthermore, the unilinear understanding of the power relations in the CDA approach is rather partial. Unluckily, as the theoretical foundation of this approach, CDA itself has received a lot of criticisms during these years.

Perspectives of the Future Study

The above review shows that the previous studies on interdiscursivity have made great contributions to the understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. The major findings obtained so far have provided us with a clue to the mystery why interdiscursivity is so pervasive in language use. By taking the social and cultural factors into consideration, both the stylistic approach and the CDA approach have thrown some light on how interdiscursivity is produced and what values it may possess. However, the existing piecemeal researches still have a lot of limitations, and more efforts are needed to further explore the complexities of interdiscursivity.

In the first place, considered as a whole, neither of the above-mentioned approaches is comprehensive enough, since they never touch upon the cognitive factors lying behind the functioning of interdiscursivity. This undesirable situation shows that in interdiscursivity studies, what is actually lacking is an applicable theoretical framework, which is based upon the cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of language use. Consequently, the future study should attempt to generate an encompassing theoretical framework, and investigate interdiscursivity in more details.

Secondly, in the previous studies, the producers and consumers of interdiscursive texts are seldom, if ever, considered; the analysts use the linguistic features of the text selectively to confirm their own assumptions. As a result, the productive and interpretative mechanisms underlying interdiscursivity are underestimated. In view of this, the future study should aim to make clear how interdiscursive texts are produced and in what ways they are interpreted.

⁵ The term “appropriation” comes from Chouliaraki and Fairclough in their account for Habermas’ theory of the colonization of “lifeworld” by social systems. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) use the dialectics of “colonization and appropriation” to refer to the bidirectional movements of genres or discourses from one social practice to another within the social order. These movements can be articulated as one social practice colonizing (and so dominating) another, or as the latter appropriating (and so dominating) the former.

Thirdly, the previous studies have never fully unveiled the specific motivations lying behind the choices of interdiscursivity. Accordingly, the future study should endeavor to reveal the underlying force that drives language users to choose interdiscursivity in a particular context.

Finally, although the previous studies have touched upon the functions performed by interdiscursivity, the limited findings are still far from exhaustive. And it would make no sense to study interdiscursivity without making explicit what specific functions it can fulfill. Therefore, the future study should attempt to discuss the pragmatic effects that can be achieved through the functioning of interdiscursivity.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the existing studies on interdiscursivity from the diachronic as well as synchronic dimensions. The first part sketches the terminological issue of interdiscursivity. The second part of this paper outlines the historical development of this notion and classifies the existing studies into two categories, namely, the stylistic approach and the CDA approach. The efforts as well as findings that have been made from these two approaches are reviewed. At the same time, some objective comments on the previous researches are presented. Based upon this review, perspectives of the future study are introduced so as to promote further endeavors towards better understanding of interdiscursivity.

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