Special Issue – (Critical) Discourse Studies and the (new?) normal: Introduction

STEFANIA MACI

University of Bergamo

stefania.maci@unibg.it

MARK MCGLASHAN

Birmingham City University

Mark.McGlashan@bcu.ac.uk

July 2022 marked somewhat of a 'return to normal' for many of those who attended the 9th CADAAD conference in Bergamo. For many of us, it was the first in person conference we had attended following the national lockdowns and quarantine measures introduced after the 2020 outbreak of COVID-19. Such measures disrupted – or at least coloured – norms and practices across all areas of social life. It was therefore unsurprising that work in (Critical) Discourse Studies began to respond to these changes by examining emergent discourses in the context of new norms and reconfigured social practices. Alongside a usual focus for (C)DS on institutional and political discourse during the pandemic (e.g. Vásquez & Jaworska, 2022; Williams & Wright, 2024), work also began to consider how some of the most basic and banal aspects of social life like touching one another as part of physical greetings (Katila et al., 2020), handling physical money (Mondada et al., 2020), and buying bread (Weatherall et al., 2022) were discursively reconfigured and "[became] interactionally relevant in a pandemic world" (ibid., p. 90).

Our choice of theme – (Critical) Discourse Studies and the (new?) normal – as well as the hybrid online/in-person format for the conference sought to respond to this COVID-19 zeitgeist and reflect on several years of turbulence, including for (C)DS as a field. Would everything – conferences, teaching, ways of *being* in academia – simply go back to 'normal'? Or would there be a 'new normal'? What would this look like? But we also sought to provide – through the return to a somewhat 'normal' conference format – a space for considering how (C)DS can respond to myriad social issues as it always has. This special issue is arranged around two parts, each of which reflects just a few of the themes emerging from the conference.

Part 1 concerns **Women's and Children's Rights and Issues of Abuse**. Althobiti's paper examines how Saudi women are represented in different media contexts (Saudi and British newspapers) and finds that Saudi

women are represented in both contexts as being increasingly socially independent and agentive as opposed to being stereotypically submissive or oppressed. Vogel's paper considers shifts in the practices of the third sector organisation Save The Children Sweden following a range of national social reforms through which principles of marketisation began overtaking those of charity. The paper analyses a range of documents and conversations internal to the organisation to explore how this shift in focus from welfare advocacy and challenging the state towards providing welfare services requested by the state is legitimised in discourse. Phili's paper returns to a focus on representation and analyses sexual metaphors in online comments responding to a story in the Botswana newspaper The Voice about an instance of alleged sexual abuse of a woman by a man. The work finds that metaphors are used to generalise women as 'traders' of sex, as food (to be consumed), and as animals (*bitches*); men are generalised as *dogs* that perpetrate sexual abuse. Finally, Foubert et al. study testimonies of incestuous sexual abuse recounted online by victims using the #MeTooInceste hashtag on Twitter. This paper finds that where victim testimonies refer to incest as a specific form of sexual abuse and directly identify perpetrators, reactions to these testimonies are supportive but tend to talk about sexual abuse in more general terms (making the focus on incest less specific) and to erase acknowledgement of specific perpetrators.

Part 2 looks to broader **Societal and Political Crises** and includes three papers.

Gallant's article presents a theoretical and methodological discussion on intercultural approaches to collective action and conflict resolution, specifically relating to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of 'peace, justice and strong institutions'. The paper articulates a proposal for intercultural polylogue (i.e. equitable conversations between two or more cultural partners designed to enhance mutual appreciation and understanding) and integration of knowledges around conflict resolution emerging from different cultural traditions. Specifically, Gallant suggests that 'more intuitive and holistic' systems and practices of knowledge creation and dissemination emerging from indigenous peoples and cultures may be integrated with those more institutionally dominant 'analytical and reductionist' Western systems of knowledge production to better account for and address global crises that affect us all. Sabbah et al.'s contribution concerns press reportage during a period of plural crises (what might be termed 'polycrisis') and focuses on a specific 'triad of crises' involving the concurrent outbreak of COVID-19, a longstanding economic crisis, and the 2020 Beirut explosion in which 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored in the centre of Beirut exploded leading to 218 deaths and widespread destruction in Lebanon's capital city. The work analyses appraisal in press reportage to examine the construal of a single crisis – and its relevance and relativity to other crises – in a time of polycrisis. Finally, Zawadzka-Paluektau contributes new research to an ever-expanding body of work in discourse analysis on the representations and constructions of migrants and refugees. The paper identifies metaphorical representations of immigrants in Spanish, Polish, and UK press reportage, and finds commonalities across each of these languages in how migrants and refugees are dehumanised through metaphorical representations.

References

Katila, J., Gan, Y., & Goodwin, M. H. (2020). Interaction rituals and 'social distancing': New haptic trajectories and touching from a distance in the time of COVID-19. *Discourse Studies*, *22*(4), 418–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445620928213

Mondada, L., Bänninger, J., Bouaouina, S. A., Gauthier, G., Hänggi, P., Koda, M., Svensson, H., & Tekin, B. S. (2020). Doing paying during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Discourse Studies*, *22*(6), 720–752. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445620950860

Vásquez, C., & Jaworska, S. (Eds.). (2022). COVID-19 and the discursive practices of political leadership [Special Issue]. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *47*.

Weatherall, A., Tennent, E., & Grattan, F. (2022). 'Sorry everything's in bags': The accountability of selling bread at a market during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Discourse & Society*, *33*(1), 89–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265211048732

Williams, J., & Wright, D. (2024). Ambiguity, responsibility and political action in the UK daily COVID-19 briefings. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *21*(1), 76–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2110132