

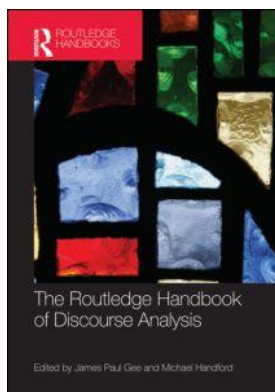
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### **A multicultural approach to discourse studies**

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# A multicultural approach to discourse studies

*Shi-xu*

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## Introduction

On the current international scene of discourse studies, the mainstream traditions of research often prize themselves on their joining with one or the other discipline – or with more – say, linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science and/or media studies. This cross- or multi-disciplinarity is held out as the best, if not the only, method of guaranteeing knowledge, because such disciplines are presupposed to share the same universality of rationality and reason: fundamentally, they all represent the human world in some neutral, objective way, and therefore they are simply true and hence applicable across all cultures; culture itself is but an epiphenomenon. There is rarely any reflection over, or passing discussion of, where they come from historically and culturally, or whether there might be culturally other, different systems of theory and methods.

The presumed universality of the multi-disciplinarity is further elevated in certain critical approaches to discourse studies. That is, the values and norms assumed in them, and ultimately by the agents of those approaches, are taken to be universal, too. As the knower of the true, good and right – and, for that matter, of justice, freedom and democracy – the critical practitioner passes muster as a judge of the false, bad, wrong discourses, and so discourses of injustice, human rights abuse, corruption, prejudice and domination, whether it comes to Asian cultures, African cultures or Latin American cultures. Little is thought of the fact that, although many human norms and values – say, human rights – are universal, their understanding and practice are historically and culturally conditioned, hence complex, so that the locally appropriate perspectives need to be taken into consideration as well.

From a broader cultural perspective and on closer inspection, however, it will become clear that the disciplinary discourses mentioned above, including their agents/authors, have all Western European/American origins and orientations, as we shall discuss below. As they become globalized and globally dominant through the powerful Western machinery of international marketing, distribution and circulation, they hardly attend to culturally other philosophies, perspectives and practices of language and communication research, let alone engage in dialogue with them. Indeed the tendency to over-generalize, and consequently to neglect the cultural context, has been identified as one of the central and debilitating problems in contemporary social science (Hollinger, 1994; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Smart, 2003).

It is against this culturally blind attitude of discourse studies that I shall outline, in this chapter, an alternative – multicultural – approach to discourse studies. ‘Multicultural’, as will be described

in detail below, is the overarching principle that is integrated into the formation and use of a discourse research system, or paradigm, of epistemology, theory, methods and questions – which, beyond the ethnocentric monopoly of truths and values, places cultural diversity, co-existence and prosperity at the centre of the research process. The upshot of this multicultural re-orientation of discourse studies is that it overcomes the limits of the cultural imperialism on the one hand and maintains multicultural dynamics on the other hand (Shi-xu, 2005, 2006).

In what follows I shall first examine, through intercultural dialogue and critique, the case of ‘critical discourse studies’. Next I shall canvass an alternative multicultural discourse research system. In conclusion I shall suggest a range of action strategies for accomplishing the envisaged paradigm.

### The cultural nature of discourse studies

Before I present a multicultural approach, I should like to examine the current mainstream mode of discourse research, because this not only is a point of departure and reference for the present proposal, but also constitutes an important motivating reason for it. I shall focus on critical discourse analysis, as this is one of the prominent streams of the discipline (Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak 2005; Fairclough 1997). The discipline in question will be considered as a scholarly *discourse*, which is composed of particular agents, forms and contents, media, consequences, and it will be examined from a historical and intercultural perspective (Shi-xu, 2005). It is hoped that, when analysed and assessed in this holistic and dialectic way, the seen but otherwise obscured properties of the discipline will become highlighted. But, for my present purposes, it will not be necessary to go through all these components and processes; it will suffice to make mention of some of the salient facts.

It should be cautioned and stressed here that the present examination does not presuppose or imply an internally homogeneous, coherent and monolithic discourse within. My purpose is merely to identify certain discursive characteristics and tendencies.

- (1) Critical discourse analysis (CDA henceforth) has still a *structuralist* tendency. That is, modelled upon ‘language’ as conceptualized in structural linguistics, discourse is often, to all practical purposes, treated as a static unit of elements in systematic relations, which is different in kind and separable from the world/context. This is manifested in such common binary conceptions of ‘discourse’ as ‘being influenced by’, ‘reflecting’, ‘constructing’ the world/context. But, historically, this linguistic structuralism comes from the nineteenth-century science-oriented European and American linguistics flowing from Ferdinand de Saussure. In Asian/Chinese culture, by contrast, language is understood as unfolding and evolving in constant and complex interaction with the world, where not two, but many elements being dialectically interconnected, multi-relational and so holistically considered.
- (2) More recently, CDA stresses its inter-, cross- or multi-disciplinary approach to discourse, incorporating the disciplinary knowledge of – for example – sociology, psychology, political science, anthropology or some other science as the foundational apparatus for knowledge. Underlying such multi-disciplinarity is the belief that these disciplines are all grounded in universal rationality. However, little thought is given to the same cultural origin of the European Enlightenment tradition. In Asian/Chinese culture, scholarship has been holistic and, further, is guided morally by concerns of social harmony rather than of ‘pure knowledge’.
- (3) Related to the above credo in multi-disciplinarity, CDA takes its theory and methods to be universal and fails to recognize the culturally different realities and approaches. Discourse is

often assumed to have *the same*, or *similar*, kinds of structures and functions across cultures, such that they can be analysed through uniform methods. Consequently, standard research topics, questions, issues and types of data are replicated and answers rehearsed. Significantly, silence is kept about possible culturally alternative forms of texts and contexts, including local, native concerns and questions and broader historical and contemporary ways of thinking.

- (4) CDA practitioners usually portray themselves, implicitly or explicitly, as being knower and judge of the true (rational and neutral), the right, the good and therefore rarely reflect on their own possible cultural bias. Their identity, position and background as members of, or trained in, some particular historical and cultural – usually Anglo-Saxon – community are presumed to be irrelevant to their academic discourse. Similarly, a particular set of cultural–intellectual – normally white male American/European – scholars are cited as the standard authorities for warranting knowledge and values and for settling arguments. Hardly ever are there non-Western scholars or non-Western academic and philosophical heritages recognized or acknowledged.

This aculturalist discourse has a host of unfortunate, though inadvertent, theoretical and cultural consequences. On the one side, since theories always arise from a particular culture and history and deal with particular relevant problems, the current West-originating and West-oriented discourse analysis begs the question of how it comes to have access to universality. Moreover, as such, it may fail to reflect local, particular and perhaps mutually incommensurable discourses from the non-Western world, including their particular issues, concerns, rules, histories, circumstances, power positions etc. Further, since contemporary culture has become increasingly globalized and hence interconnected, diversified yet alienated (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998), the received approach may fail to represent the new, complex, hybridized, polyglossic, multicultural and contested processes of human discourses. More seriously, as the current mainstream discourse analysis has rested on culturally exclusive intellectual traditions with the result of their being recreated as the standard and norm, opportunities are missed not only for learning from other different cultural-intellectual heritages, but also for intercultural critique and ultimately for genuine theoretical innovation. Think of the large and rich scholarly and intellectual heritages in language and communication from non-Western and Third-World cultures (e.g. Kincaid, 1987; Dissanayake, 1988; Gumperz and Levinson, 1996; Silverstein and Urban, 1996; Asante, 1998; Heisey, 2000; Shen, 2001).

On the side of the wider cultural impact, it may be suggested that, when the West-turned aculturalist discourse reigns over the international discourse scholarship, one of the obvious consequences is that the intellectual traditions embodied in other languages, in other cultures, in other parts of the world, become marginalized or ignored, excluded and denigrated. It has already been registered that certain intellectual communities have become academically and intellectually ‘aphasic’ (e.g. Wang, 2002, 2003). The practice of the aculturalist theoretical discourse has critical scholarly effects on non-Western discourses, too. It is now a common occurrence in the field that Western standard frameworks are applied to discourses from non-Western cultures. This may perhaps reveal some interesting features, but it will fail to see many other important properties at the same time and arrive very likely at a negative evaluation. Finally, just as the predominance of the British/American English language overshadows other multilingual and multicultural experiences and realities (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Pennycook, 1998), so the monocultural scholarship of discourse analysis will become a monopoly on truths, legitimating and re-producing the existing hegemonic scientific disorder. Consequently, as science becomes impoverished, academic dialogue is replaced by scientific war.

Of course I do not mean that there has been no reflexive, self-critical and constructive effort on the cultural issue of theoretical discourse (see e.g. Newmeyer, 1986; Sherzer, 1987; Urban, 1991; Cameron, 1992; Carey, 1992; Bazerman, 1998; Milhouse *et al.*, 2001; Blommaert, 2005 as well as the journal *Discourse and Society*). Nor do I suggest that there has been no theoretical attempt to take note of non-Western, non-white or Third-World discourses (see e.g. Ngũgĩ, 1986; Young, 1994; Gumperz and Levinson, 1996; Silverstein and Urban, 1996). But I do want to stress that endeavours such as these are few and far between and often come from the margins (e.g. Asian communication studies, area studies), or have origins from outside the discipline. Indeed, given the current international cultural imbalance and disorder in the social sciences and humanities, the struggle against cultural hegemony in general and theoretical imperialism in particular will be a gradual, long and arduous process and much more effort is needed.

### Towards a multicultural mode of research

The important lessons from the above critique should become clear now. We must refrain from (a) knowing from culturally exclusive perspectives and (b) producing universalistic knowledge from ethnocentric vantage points. To avoid such pitfalls, we must then try to find a different cultural attitude and, more specifically, an alternative conceptual strategy. Such a strategy, as I shall argue in this section, should be characterized by a *multicultural* stance on knowledge and knowledge reproduction. This refers to the strategy of knowing and knowledge reproduction that, other than from just one cultural tradition, one draws eclectically, critically and creatively upon culturally diverse – especially Western *and* Eastern (see below) – perspectives. This implies that one will need to locate oneself between the Eastern and Western traditions of knowledge-seeking and to form a non-oppressive, synthetic and holistic viewpoint. To put it more broadly, the present epistemological attitude may be said to be oriented towards ‘outward’ learning, ‘helpful’ innovation and reaching out to the hitherto unexplored, unfamiliar or marginalized ways of seeing, understanding and meaning-making.

Firstly, such a multicultural–epistemological stance is necessary because human culture is possessed of not just one, but different and possibly mutually complementary ways of looking at and understanding the world. The Western pattern of thinking has been heavily influenced by the Cartesian tradition, the Enlightenment philosophy and individualism and is consequently largely analytic, individualistic and instrumental. The world is then often divided up into fragments and dimensions and social science then compartmentalized into separate departments or disciplines. People, action or events are accordingly analysed, isolated and abstracted from context into smaller, ‘controllable’ units, components or levels and explained in terms of individualistic purposes. The Eastern way of thinking, in contrast, being penetrated by Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism and so on is more intuitive, synthetic, holistic and dialectic, social–relational and collectivist, where man and nature, self and other, subject and object, language and context, and all other things are seen as interconnected, interpenetrated and interdependent.

If we appropriately combine culturally diverse ways of knowledge-seeking, we might be able to see things that we would otherwise fail to see. The awareness of the diversity of cultural ways of knowledge-seeking and making will also encourage us to learn not just from the mainstream, established, dominant Western systems of knowledge, but more widely and more inclusively, from culturally different ways of thinking and knowing, and, especially now, from the non-Western, non-white and Third-World heritages. In this way, we may reach more widely informed, sophisticated and innovative understanding. In addition, we may become more reflexive on and critical of our own cultural ways of knowing as well as of those of others. This kind of multicultural stance will allow us an opportunity to intervene personally upon culturally

shared systems of knowledge, Eastern and Western. For we must make a personal choice from more than one cultural way of knowing.

Secondly, a multicultural stance is much needed now also because, historically, the Eastern and Western different worldviews and value systems have not enjoyed an equal relation to each other. Rather, knowledge, history and power are intermeshed and bound up specifically with the historically situated colonialism and continued cultural imperialism (Habermas, 1972; Said, 1978, 1993; Foucault, 1980; Young, 2001). Our earlier analysis of the discipline of discourse studies is a case in point. To offset the current cultural asymmetry in knowledge-seeking and knowledge-making and to redress the resultant cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) in norms, values and standards involved in international scientific research, a culturally more balanced and pluralist strategy, mindful especially of non-Western ways of knowing is therefore called for.

In terms of theoretical benefit, then, the multicultural stance may compel us to seek the co-existence of, and cohesion between, different and competing cultural-intellectual traditions. The multicultural position renders it possible for them to transcend cultural boundaries and break out of cultural confinements. Consequently, theoretical self-reflection, dialogue and negotiation will be facilitated and the space for transforming existing theory and creating genuinely new frameworks opened up.

Thirdly, still another consideration behind the present proposal is that contemporary culture is becoming increasingly globalized. This means that cultures are being interconnected, hybridized and diversified. Cultural ways of thinking, speaking and acting are becoming more complex, pluralist, varied and dynamic. Traditional, singular and closed ways of knowing are no longer adequate for theorizing about the new globalized condition of discourse. It will be important then to seek all the culturally relevant ways of knowing and to apply them to the understanding of particular cultural settings.

When we take a multicultural stance in discourse theorizing, we become more sensitive to the new complexities and dynamic changes taking place in globalized contemporary culture and discourse. In particular, we may be able to observe how local culture/discourse responds to global influences.

It should be stressed that the present references to Eastern and Western cultures, their ways of thinking and the relevant power relations must not be misunderstood as ways of reifying and homogenize human cultures. Rather these distinctions are meant as a heuristic, for one to try to go beyond one's familiar scholarly traditions and learn from other cultural ways of knowing and the historically situated relations of power between them, especially those between East and West (e.g. overlapping, complimenting or excluding each other). Therefore, the understanding that cultures are not pre-given, homogeneous or static must not be (ab)used as rhetoric or as an excuse not to pay attention to cultures outside the West, not to learn from intellectual heritages from the non-Western world and not to recognize the continued repression and subjugation of Third/Fourth-World cultures.

The multicultural stance on knowledge construction is designed specifically for the transformation of current aculturalist theoretical practice and for the reconstruction of new and alternative forms of discourse theory. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall accordingly turn to drawing out the implications of this multicultural stance for practical theory-building. By doing this I hope to show how the conceptual strategy works in practice. The implications I shall discuss involve the theorist in terms of his/her principles of action on the one hand and of the characteristics of the resultant theory on the other hand. The two sides of the theoretical activity are interrelated, but for the sake of exposition I shall treat them separately.

## The multicultural researcher

In line with the historically conscious, culturally pluralist stance outlined above, the theorist should first of all decide on some particular, culturally specific discourse as a starting point and focus for theory reconstruction. This will help to overcome the general universalizing tendency and to avoid its negative consequences, which we saw earlier. For the features, functions, relations and so on of a discourse are inextricably bound up with context, and context is always defined by particular culture and history, including the whole way of life of the relevant group of people. Therefore the chosen object has to be grounded in some particular, historically concrete context. Thus, for example, one can theorize the discourse of Great Britain, of Europe, of the West, or of the non-Western world, or of somewhere in-between. Of course such a decision also depends on one's intended research objective and scope. To theorize Asian discourse or Chinese discourse are intellectually equal choices and matters of research aims. At the same time, practically speaking, the decision must be made in proportion to one's breadth of knowledge and experience with regard to the discourse in question.

Immediately I must add that I am fully aware of the diversities, hybridities and other dynamics within such particular categories of discourse. And I am all for attempts at genuinely inclusive understandings of all human discourse. But these must not become the reasons (or excuses) for not paying attention to particular, locally relevant and context-specific concepts, practices and theoretical legacies, which at the present stage have continued to be marginalized from the 'centre' (Kincaid, 1987; Asante, 1998; Dissanayak, 2003; Shi-xu *et al.*, 2005). Attention to these traditions has not been too much but too little, and if we continue to (re)produce general theory with no regard to such particularities we do it at our own peril. The general and the particular, the global and the local, the universal and the individual are dialectic opposites of holistic unities. More importantly, there may be – and many would claim there are – rich intellectual heritages, notions and actual activities from which new and useful theories may be derived or reconstructed, in Asia, Africa and Latin America, for example.

Secondly, in theorizing a particular cultural discourse, the theorist should not be constrained by local perspectives, but must try to seek dialogue and cross-fertilization between different, relevant cultural theories, whether they are Eastern and Western, Asian and European, Chinese and German and so on. Traditions of language studies from different cultures may contain insights that will help one to ask new questions, beyond one's familiar cultural pattern of thinking, or to shed light on aspects of language and communication that would otherwise go unheeded. Notions and theories of language and communication from such other cultures may also give one inspirations and resources for genuine theoretical innovation (Shi-xu, 2005). Indo-European languages are inflexional; partly due to this fact, theory tends to be formal, analytic and low-context, for example – whereas the Chinese language relies on meaning agreement and is characterized by high context; consequently theory tends to be culture-specific and holistic (Shen, 2001). It would be a form of strength and resourcefulness to learn from culturally different theories such as these through comparison and contrast, and, on that basis, to create new and more sophisticated theories, suitable for local use. This leads to my next point.

Thirdly, the multicultural theorists should constantly monitor and reflect on their own theoretical discourse in order to produce innovative and effective theoretical ideas. Just as they should be critical of the object of their enquiry, they must be continuously critical of themselves. For one thing, they have a social role to play in the theoretical production, and they have cultural responsibility for the international scholarly community. For another, the context of discourse and its theorizing are not static but changing; the changes have been accelerated at the threshold of the twenty-first century. Therefore the theorist ought to try to keep his/her theory relevant and

useful. If notions of discourse are themselves products of scholarly construction, the theorist must refrain from totalizing them. Instead, s/he should pay attention to other cultural intellectual traditions, even if they may be unfamiliar ones. In this respect the theorist must take seriously 'race', ethnicity and cultural imperialism in discourse. For the same reason, s/he must also attend especially to hitherto silenced, repressed or otherwise marginalized forms of discourses.

### A multicultural paradigm

Given the complexities of human discourses and the diversities of cultural scholarly heritages – and, above all, perhaps, the innovativeness of intellectual individuals – a multicultural theory, as now may become apparent, can and will take a variety of forms. However, following from the principles of theoretical articulation laid out above, the new theories may also share some starting points and objectives. In this section I shall then try to sketch them out. To show clearly the concrete effects of the multicultural theoretical orientation, I shall make use of the case of Chinese discourse for illustration.

Firstly, a culturally pluralist theory should represent the distinctiveness and identity of particular, local discourses, thereby contributing to the understanding of the heterogeneity and equality of human discourses. For, on the one hand, the world cultures have different histories, conditions, problems, issues, aspirations and so on, and consequently would have not only different objects of construction or topics, but also different concepts and categories, perspectives, norms and values and so on. On the other hand, the corresponding cultural discourses embody different symbols, rules and strategies for constructing meaning. In Western cultures, for instance, people often use language as an expression of valued individual reason and self-identity (Bellah *et al.*, 1985; Carey, 1992; Carbaugh, 1993). But in Eastern cultures people generally hold speech communication as a tool for maintaining social relationships (Young, 1994; Liu, 1996; Chen, 2005). Similarly, women and men may be said to possess and use different discourses (Tannen, 1990). In fact, it has long been recognized that human discourses are not unified or universal; they consist in a diversity of language-games, voices, intertextualities and so on (Bakhtin, 1981; Kristeva, quoted in Moi, 1986; Wittgenstein, 1968). Concepts, theories and methods will no longer be assumed as universal and applied dogmatically across all cultures; rather they will have to be re-oriented to local, concrete and particular situations. In such a multicultural perspective, discourses from non-Western, non-white or Third-World cultures and communities cannot be 'contained' in a general, comprehensive and integrated theory, but must first be treated in their own right and as different orders of things from Western discourses (in terms of language philosophy, power relations, communities of speakers, issues and concerns, etc.) and as requiring a culturally nuanced and historically conscious perspective. Regarding apparently the 'same' issue, Chinese media, for example, can have very different notions, topics, values and strategies of communication from those of its Anglo-American counterpart. If a discourse framework originating from a Western tradition were dogmatically applied to the analysis of this article, not only would important aspects and characteristics be missed, but also a necessarily negative evaluation would result.

Secondly, a multicultural theory should feature the internal discursive complexities, hybridities and even conflicts or contradictions of an otherwise unified cultural discourse, and consequently the porosity and openness of its boundary. Human discourses are not univocal but polyglossic. There may be internal variations, or even contradictions (Sherzer, 1987). In the age of globalization, facilitated by transnationalism, digital media and human migration (Appiah, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998), different discourses meet and mix, so that different elements of discourse co-exist and new discourses take shape (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).



A language as ‘uniform’ as Chinese has been multilingual and multicultural since its inception (Shen, 2001; Li, 2003). Contemporary Chinese, too, especially since the opening up and reform in the 1980s, also contains discursive elements from the West, but puts them to different uses. So my point here is that contemporary Chinese is not entirely different from, or opposed to, non-Chinese discourses; it has connections and hybridities with Western discourse.

Thirdly, a multicultural discourse theory should take note of the historicity of human discourses, especially the more recent particular world histories of colonialism, global capitalism and neo-expansionism. Any discourse has a particular past; cultural traditions provide context, resources and reasons for change. The predominance of English as a world language, together with its peculiar traits, concepts, categories and evaluations, has everything to do with the erstwhile imperialist aggression of Britain and its contemporary cultural hegemony (Pennycook, 1998). The consequential repression, marginalization or even extinction of other (aboriginal) languages (along with their relevant concerns, issues and aspirations) can be understood only in terms of this historical context, too. Contemporary Chinese discourse on nationalism, similarly, cannot be properly understood without recourse to the particular context of Old China as a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society and to the related Western imperialist history.

It is easy but mistaken to degrade, from an imperialist point of view, such non-Western discourse of nationalism as sheer Nazism, or to brand it with the label ‘communist ideology against the Western world’. For Western culture and its media have always demeaned and tried to repress nationalism from the non-Western world. But in this Western action and representation there is no regard for the *historical* oppression of European/American/Japanese imperialism, nor for *contemporary* unilateralism, neo-conservatism and neo-colonialism. As a matter of fact, for the past hundreds of years, China has been the victim of foreign aggression and exploitation. Now, when it is gaining breathtaking ascendancy in economy, it is clouded by ‘anxieties’ and ‘concerns’ about its ‘future expansion’ from countries far and near. Taking a historical perspective, then, we shall realize that this discourse of nationalism is a product and process of this particular local and global history.

Fourthly and importantly, closely related to the historicity of discourse, a culturally pluralist theory should pay attention to cultural power relations and practices involved in and through discourse (as text and context) – tensions, domination, exclusion, resistance and so on between and upon different cultures, East and West. Different cultural groups or communities have not enjoyed the same access to voice and communication (Van Dijk, 1993; McQuail, 2000) and discourses of different cultures have not treated one another with tolerance and forbearance (e.g. Said, 1978, 1993; Spivak, 1988; Hall, 1990, 1997; Bhabha, 1994). Such cultural inequality in discourse, as may be pointed out, typically occurs along the borders of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, class and nation. Thus, through demeaning metaphors, narratives, arguments on the one hand and ethnocentric norms and values on the other, dominant Western discourses often discredit, ignore and exclude non-Western and Third-World discourses (and consequently their experiences and realities). As a result, the discourses of non-Western and Third World communities are suppressed, dismissed, discredited or silenced, but at the same time their discourses of resistance are growing as well. Just as Western discourse has always opposed the nationalist discourse from the non-Western and Third World, as I said above, so there is also a discourse to resist it, which should also be taken into account.

Finally, a multicultural theory of discourse should attempt to illuminate what might be called the ‘self-critical consciousness’ of discourse – the intrinsic ability of a discourse community to re-create and transform its own discourse and so its own culture. Discourse, i.e. texts and their contexts, do not stay the same through time. Nor will a dominant communal discourse continue to repress alternative discourses unopposed and unchanged. Each speaking community, hence its

discourse, has the internal spirit to reflect upon itself critically in order to create a historically better discourse. The rise and spread of feminist discourse, anti-racist discourse and anti-imperialist discourse within Western society are a case in point. A multicultural theory should then be able to reveal such historically conscious change in discourse.

### Strategies for constructing and practising multicultural paradigms

Below I will go on suggesting some interrelated principles for the construction, choice and utilization of theory and methods for discourse research. Culturally irrelevant or inappropriate frameworks of research may lead to not just misleading conclusions but also counter-productive to what social scientific work is supposed to achieve. These would share certain aspects with the existing paradigms, but also bear characteristics of their own. On the whole, they favour a cultural-critical attitude towards theory and methodology for the sake of human cultural knowledge innovation and common cultural prosperity.

Our first proposed principle is to be culturally conscious and in particular *multicultural* in the formation, selection and application of theory and methods, which of course also implies the same attitude with regard to the underlying ontological and epistemological stances. This means, specifically, that we stress cultural pluralism, diversity and egalitarianism and oppose cultural imperialism. So, in examining the discourse of any culture, we must not be contented with culturally singular or exclusive or even imperialist theoretical lens and methodological apparatus, but perforce attempt to draw on diverse cultural resources.

Secondly, we should strive to be *holistic* in conceptualizing and theorizing discourses of human cultures. This means, in particular, that we take into account not only the present, but also the past and the future, and further that we also consider the intercultural connections. For human cultural discourses are neither historically unrelated nor culturally separable. In other words, the historical and intercultural dialectics of discourses must be recognized. In addition, the interpenetration of the researched discourse and discourse researcher must be reckoned with, too.

Thirdly, given the multicultural and holistic nature of human cultural discourses, we should, methodologically, make use of historical and cross-cultural examination, comparison and contrast, as necessary and effective tools for the understanding and critique of human cultural discourses. Only in this way can we have a comprehensive, penetrating and sympathetic understanding and critique of the differences, similarities, changes, agencies, creativity, and so on of the peoples and cultures that we attempt to study, and indeed of their discourses.

Last but not least, we need also to be reflexive throughout the research process. Because we cannot be separated from the object we study or from the cultural milieu we are in, and because our research results can be consequential for the people or the phenomena we choose to study, we should be conscious of our own roles in the research process and the outcomes on the one hand and on the other hand attempt to render our research useful and helpful to the groups of people under investigation.

In this essay I have argued for a multicultural approach to the theoretical articulation of discourse. That means, in sum, that the multicultural theorist, on the one side, must try first and foremost to integrate culturally diverse intellectual traditions of language, communication and discourse, secondly ground his/her theory in a concrete, particular cultural setting whilst maintaining a global vision and, last but not least, through personal critical and reflexive mediation, create a relevant, novel and helpful understanding of the discourse in question. The resultant multicultural theory itself, on the other side, must represent the basic properties of the local discourse of interest and, given the current theoretical imbalance and bias, pay special attention to

cultural particularity, internal complexity, cultural historicity, cultural inequality and critical consciousness.

The multicultural approach has a number of advantages. Firstly, the practising theorist becomes culturally more widely informed and as a result his/her chances of achieving genuine theoretical innovation are increased. Seen from another perspective, as a result of the required reflection on and integration from divergent cultural–intellectual heritages, there arises an opportunity for the individual theorist to intervene personally in culturally shared traditions, thereby transforming intellectual culture. Secondly, the resultant culturally pluralist and therefore more sophisticated theory might help to reveal properties that might otherwise go unheeded. Thirdly, the less familiar and marginalized discourses, especially from the non–Western and Third/Fourth–World communities, including their concerns, issues, questions and aspirations, may be given more attention and legitimacy in their own right. Finally, the positivist, essentialist, universalist tendencies, which have been impoverishing discourse studies, may become neutralized or curbed.

There is a formidable difficulty facing the theorist, however. Namely, the requirement and expectation of the practitioner to be abreast of not merely one's own intellectual tradition, but also of culturally other, unfamiliar, paradigms, to develop a global perspective beyond one's comfortable sphere of vision, and, inevitably, to be versed in other relevant foreign languages and cultures (cultural discourses) in addition to one's own are all very challenging demands. Theoretical multiculturalism will be a matter of degree, and for individuals this means that it will be a life-long process. There is no other way of getting over this, than by mustering the willpower to continue to learn.

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