

Review of Sorina Chiper’s Book “Discourse Studies In Practice”

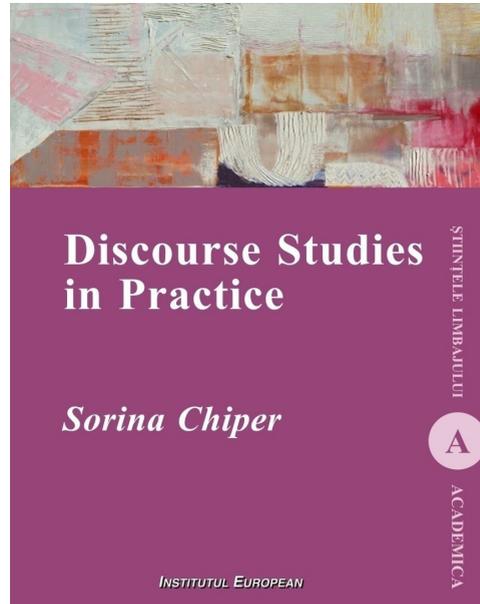
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Discourse has been an extensively analysed, multidimensional concept in recent decades. Steen Schousboe from the University of Copenhagen writes in the preface of *Discourse Studies in Practice* (2020) by Sorina Chiper “discourse does not only serve specific goals, but plays an active role in framing our very understanding of life and reality”. S. Chiper’s book is a significant analysis of different dimensions of life, such as institutional, political, corporate, intercultural, etc.

S. Chiper is a lecturer of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi, Romania. She participated in national research projects on the language of participatory democracy and corporate social responsibility. S. Chiper’s scientific interests are 20th-century American autobiography, sociolinguistics, translation studies, intercultural communication, professional communication in English and academic writing.

The book is a compilation of articles on discourse, written by S. Chiper over fifteen years and published in Romania and abroad. The research of different topics has been done in the methodological framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This book



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aims at discourse researchers and students, and anyone interested in discourse and intercultural studies.

The first chapter, “The Discourse of Romanian Universities”, discusses “the discourse of Romanian universities as a mirror of the reformation process in the national higher educational system” (p. 13). S. Chiper expresses a personal interest in this topic because she works at a university; thus, she is familiar with education institutions. Moreover, S. Chiper believes that the reformation of universities plays a very significant role in the “renewal” of values, perception and behaviour patterns of a society.

Firstly, the author of the book studies the impact of EU integration on national education and emphasizes its positive effect, which is related to “increased access to training and the improvement of educational standards” (p. 15). Later, S. Chiper focuses on the management principles, their role and significance in university discourse. In the subchapters on intertextuality in university discourse and institutional identity, the scholar writes about the transition discourse, based on the comparison between the Communist period (before 1989) and the democratic present (after 1989). The key concepts identified in this type of discourse include *change*, *transition* and *reform*. S. Chiper analyses institutional identity within the framework of professed, experienced, projected, manifested and attributed identities, classified and defined by B. Moingeon and G. Soenen in the article “The Five Facets of Collective Identities: Integrating Corporate and Organizational Identity” (2002).

The author of the book also emphasizes the impact of Romanian national culture on university discourse. Generally, different types of discourses are related to different ideologies; therefore, university discourse is not an exception. S. Chiper states that “the basic ideology of higher education is neoliberalism“, which, in parallel, with “the ideology of autonomy, flexibility and competition and texts issued by universities” leads to positive reforms in education institutions. The introduction of new terminology, the influence of local variations and values are the consequences of these reforms.

In “The Discourse of Romanian Universities”, S. Chiper points out that the recent trends in external university discourse are “the marketization and commoditization of public discourse, the colonization of university discourse by the discourse of corporate management, reform and transition, the discourse of quality and of EU institutions” (p. 27). However, a lack of internal communication, motivation schemes and institutional culture is indicated as one of the most significant “pitfalls of internal communication”.

S. Chiper concludes that university management is similar to enterprise management, and universities have already started paying more attention to their public discourse than before. Furthermore, university discourse in Romania intertextualizes the discourse of EU documents and encompasses the following overlapping dimensions: “the neoliberal discourse system, the transition discourse system, the strategy and quality discourse system, with local variations in the promises offered to prospective students” (p. 31).

The second chapter, “Unpacking Local Council Meetings: a Sociolinguistic Approach and Its Lessons for Participatory Democracy”, focuses on the research into local council meetings as ritualized social actions. S. Chiper concludes that a “rather utopic model of

participatory democracy" prevails in Romania because the representatives of local councils do not "hear" their electorate.

The scholar describes a transition from representative to participatory democracy in Romania, which aims to actively encourage citizens to participate in political life and eliminate threats of "state interventionism and control" posed by the central government. S. Chipper tries to identify the potential, limits, conditions of possibility and optimization methods of participatory democracy in her research.

S. Chipper states that the lack of education of citizens is more significant issue than the lack of communication channels. She points out that the lack of education is bi-dimensional because it is based on the assumption that citizens are not aware of their rights, duties, public property, service, etc. Their representatives in the local councils do not work and behave following the principles of ethical and constructive communication. Thus, S. Chipper introduces the idea that universities can contribute to solving this issue by organizing various training and seminars for different levels of their society.

Two appendices, including "Fragment from Treaty of Lisbon" and "Fragment from Law 215/2001", are provided at the end of the chapter and contribute to a better perception of the issues and concepts discussed in the research.

The third chapter, "Roșia Montană and Its Publics: Governance and Participatory Democracy at Community and Corporate Level", aims "to investigate the discursive frames and discursive actions through which various publics, a mining company and Romanian politicians have been constructing arguments to legitimize and to oppose, respectively, a major transnational development project" (p. 85).

This gold mining project will be more beneficial for the Canadian mining company than Romania because the latter is supposed to get only less than a quarter of gold and other metals. It will also be financially responsible for preventing environmental hazards and for managing waste. Moreover, the oldest settlement of Romania, the village of Roșia Montană may be destroyed. One part of the society supports the project, while another is against it, which serves as a basis for the conflict as a clash of interests.

The significance of language as a tool of legitimizing interests, expressing counter-arguments and the role of CDA are discussed in this research. S. Chipper draws a conclusion that discourse may be tooled for strategic purposes to achieve the intended aim. Biased information in media is aimed at the same result. The scholar argues that the Roșia Montană case presents an overlapping of globalization and overlapping "weak" and "strong" publics.

In the chapter, "The Discourse of Corporate Social Responsibility in a Critical Perspective: Corporate Identity in the Mining Industry", S. Chipper tries to answer the question "whether sustainability and business ethics are actual practices or discursive effects" (p. 127). Within the framework of CDA, the researcher analyses the discourse of different mining companies, the formation of their corporate identity and "stylistic strategies used in corporate communications" (p. 24).

S. Chipper defines the term "corporate discourse" and discusses the forms of linguistic control in this chapter of the book. Three mining companies –Roșia Montană Gold Corporation, Gabriel Resources, AngloGold Ashanti serve as the basis for the analysis of discursive construction of legitimation.

After an in-depth analysis, the researcher concludes that “the discourse of corporate social responsibility performs several pragmatic functions: it attempts to legitimize and to persuade, to advertise and to construct corporate identity, to garner support and ensure the goodwill and cooperation of the communities in which corporations operate” (p. 138).

Although the mining companies position themselves as “heroes” who can protect the environment, care for their employees and communities, save the local heritage or improve the standards of living, CDA is not only aimed at the direct linguistic expression of these companies but also at the information they tend to hide. This leads to the conclusion that despite the attempts to imply their beneficial performance and a positive image, the main goal of these corporations is merely to make more profit.

The case of Roșia Montană is further analysed in the third, subsequent chapter “Roșia Montană – Heritage as Defense Strategy”. This chapter focuses on the discourse of the protection of cultural heritage. The mining company and its opponents are treated as the subjects of this discourse.

The objective of this research is “to discuss how Alburnus Minor and Roșia Montană Gold Corporation have contextualized the notion of “cultural heritage” (p. 148). S. Chiper identifies passivisation and the lack of an explicit agent as the markers of “neoliberal power discourse” in Gabriel Resources’ press release on its file for arbitration. The scholar claims that these markers, including generalization, enable the corporation to convey the idea that cultural heritage is one of the most important concerns for them and that they are going to preserve it. However, the reality is different as the company has already destroyed 150 historical buildings. Therefore, S. Chiper draws the conclusion that the concept of cultural heritage is vague and “in its discursive uses on the websites of RMGC and Alburnus Minor, polarizes arguments and is part of semantic structures of positive connotations: responsibility, for RMGC, and love, for Alburnus Minor” (p. 152).

S. Chiper concludes this chapter of the book with a significant insight that the “heritage” concept in such collocations as “cultural heritage” or “natural heritage” is a popular and beneficial concept “in the ideology and discourse of transnational neoliberalism” (p. 154).

In the following chapter, “Destination Rural Romania: A Textual and Visual Analysis of Promotional Material”, the author investigates the visual and textual discourse of Bukovina and the Danube Delta, promoting rural Romania for tourists. In her research, S. Chiper employs a post-structuralist approach to reality as an effect or result of discourse. Furthermore, she writes that her perception of place and promotion is also influenced by Sociosemiotics, where culture is an inseparable part of “social production, representation and interpretation of meanings” (p. 160).

S. Chiper concludes that the term “rural” is highly successful and beneficial in advertising discourse because it implies the idea of “an idyllic countryside” evokes nostalgic feelings and attracts more tourists to rural parts of Romania.

The next chapter, “Grice’s Conversational Maxims in Intercultural Communication: from a Discourse-Based Approach to Communication Ethics”, focuses on intercultural

communication, intercultural competence, conversational maxims, trust and ethics. Here, the author discusses her personal experience "as a teacher of Intercultural Communication and as a foreigner in a country at war (Israel), and draws on Grice's model of conversational maxims, to suggest the need to include the teaching of ethical issues in the Intercultural Communication class" (p. 171).

S. Chiper gives some very relevant advice for the readers that it is not enough to teach students about cultural differences, but it is more important to teach them how to avoid conflicts related to sensitive topics while communicating with the representatives of other cultures. Furthermore, the scholar claims that Grice's model of developing discourse competence may enable the communicators to make the world "a better place", to solve or avoid different conflicts within the frame of intercultural communication.

S. Chiper starts her book from the discourse of Romanian universities and finishes it with a chapter dedicated to a similar issue. The last chapter, "Translation as Institutional Branding: Internationalizing Romanian Universities", is based on the author's experience as a translator. Here, S. Chiper tries to find the answers to the questions about the university management team's perception of translation, translation's contribution to the formation of institutional identity, the social actors of the translation process and the definition of their practice. Moreover, the author again focuses on the concept of internationalizing Romanian universities.

The investigation of twenty websites of different Romanian universities identified some translation-related issues, such as a combination of British and American English on the website of the same university, cases of missing information in translation and word for word rendition from Romanian. In the following sub-chapters, the scholar focuses on the thorough analysis of the responses to the questionnaires provided at the end of the article and in-depth interviews. S. Chiper draws conclusions that the managers perceive translation as one of the key elements of internationalization and creating an image of a strong brand; however, they do not allocate enough financial resources for professional translation services and oblige university staff to do this mostly unpaid work. Thus, this leads to issues related to the quality of translation and the invisibility of a translator. Moreover, it forms a distorted perception that any amateur can be a translator.

The book "Discourse Studies in Practice" by Sorina Chiper provides a unique opportunity to be acquainted with different dimensions of local Romanian discourse. The readers will not only find out about Romanian institutional, corporate and intercultural discourse, and they will also have a great chance to immerse themselves into the culture and history of Romania and to experience an unforgettable trip across this marvellous and interesting country in the pages of the book.

Source

Chiper, S., 2020. *Discourse Studies in Practice*. Institutul European Iași, România.

Reference

Guillaume, S., Moingeon, B., 2002. The five facets of collective identities. Integrating corporate and organizational identity. In: B. Moingeon, & G. Soenen, (eds.). *Corporate and Organizational Identities. Integrating strategy, marketing, communication and organizational perspectives*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 13–34. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289714437_The_five_facets_of_collective_identities_Integrating_corporate_and_organizational_identity> [Accessed 8 July 2021]. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361726>.