

○ **G. MYERS, *THE DISCOURSE OF BLOGS AND WIKIS***

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Greg Myers' book *The Discourse of Blogs and Wikis* makes a valuable contribution to the burgeoning literature that has been produced over the last few years on social web technologies. It is particularly useful for both students and teachers of language studies, who are interested in the study of the newly emerging communicative forms that are occurring in the interactions that blogs and wikis are enabling.

Myers emphasizes from the beginning of the book that his focus is on the discourse of blogs and wikis, on language as a form of social practice, not on the affordances *per se* that these technologies facilitate. He is also keen to ensure that the book is accessible and readable for his intended audience. To this end, Myers presents a summarizing sentence at the beginning of each chapter, uses direct questions to engage the reader in dialogue about the key ideas presented in the book, employs bullet points and numbered sub-sections with headings, and positions all methodological information and references at the end of each chapter, to further enhance the book's readability.

As an educator, Myers is mindful of the needs of potential teachers wanting to develop programs of their own about the language of blogs and wikis. The notes at the end of the book offer a brief discussion about issues concerning copyright, ownership and curriculum development. Additional resources, a glossary, as well as a Companion Website to the book, all provide valuable scaffolding material for future curriculum planners.

Chapter one provides a rationale for studying the language of blogs and wikis in an academic context. For example, Myers argues that as linguists, we need to know how the language of blogs and wikis works because it is being used in important areas of political, social and economic life for the purpose of persuasion, just like many other means of communication such as political speeches and advertisements. As Myers claims, 'blogs and wikis lead out from linguistic issues to wider issues about the use of language in society ... the ways we use language to locate ourselves, to state facts, to argue and to define ourselves in relation to other people' (p. 4). Towards the end of the chapter, Myers asks the reader to reflect on one of the book's key questions: How does the collective authority that is harnessed through *Wikipedia* relate to the traditional authority that academic experts are presumed to possess?

In chapter two, Myers enters into the realm of definitions, suggesting that blogs and wikis should be viewed as genres of texts that are defined firstly, more in terms of the ways in which they are used, rather than by their content; secondly, that blogs and wikis create communities of users with particular social identities. Myers then provides a history of blogs and wikis and raises the thorny question of authorship and ownership of the texts that these social web technologies enable. One of the ways in which Myers attempts to address this question is through his discussion of *intertextuality* in Chapter three. In this chapter he takes the reader through a number of different examples of the ways in which links are used for specific purposes; these may be rhetorical in function for example, to highlight the blogger's own viewpoint, or they may be employed for visual or aesthetic effect, as with the use of multiple images to create 'a mosaic of contributions' (p.36).

Considering the use of blogs from the perspectives of place and time are the foci of chapters four and five. Myers presents an interesting analysis of the corpus of data that form the basis of his book in terms of the different ways in which bloggers use deixis (expressions such as *here* and *there*) and pronouns. As Myers shows, knowing where a blogger locates themselves in time and space is of critical importance in constructing a blogger's identity, from the perspective of both blogger and commenter. Myers also demonstrates how markers of time and space can be used to denote in- and out-group membership. For instance, he explains how the specific naming of places may resonate differently depending on whether the audience is local or global. Myers' research suggests that bloggers tend to invoke local places in ways that only locals will recognise, as for example in the use of *Hammersmith*, *Market square* and *Mizner Park* (see p. 52). Myers' discussion at this point is important because it highlights one of the defining features of all blogs (and wikis), namely the tensions that are inherent in the kind of *glocalised* contexts of practice within which all bloggers operate.

As Myers also notes, the choice of possessive pronouns such as *we* and *our*, and the choice of a particular language or languages, determines which contributors will be included or excluded: bloggers, just like users of other communication media, have the potential to act as powerful gatekeepers.

Using various approaches to discourse analysis including *frame analysis* (Goffman, 1974), *footing* (Goffman, 1981), *conversational interaction* (Hoey, 2001) and *politeness* (e.g. Watts, 2003), Myers, in chapter six, analyses the ways in which bloggers engage their readers through the use of various linguistic devices. Drawing on the work of Biber et al. (1999) in chapter seven, Myers codes his corpus of blogs according to three aspects of stance-taking: *epistemic* (relating to facts), *attitudinal* (concerning personal perspectives) and *stylistic* (focussing on the grammatical and lexical features of blogs). In chapter eight, Myers

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discusses how bloggers mark the evidence they use to support their claims on the basis of *induction*, *deduction*, *hearsay* and *belief*. Traditionally, determining a writer's authority rested on the credibility of the evidence and source materials they may have used. The *blogosphere*, claims Myers, is flattening out traditional hierarchies of credibility associated with institutions such as the media, academia, medicine and law. 'What counts is attention: the links of other bloggers, hits, track-backs, mentions in one of the top blogs' (p. 126).

In the final two chapters of the book, Myers turns his attention to *Wikipedia*. He explores how contributors to this wiki engage in complex processes of collaboration that are based less on explicit procedures and principles than on an implicit understanding of how they should interact when they engage with other contributors in acts of textual (re)production.

In sum, Myers succeeds in engaging his own readers in a thought-provoking exploration of the discourse of blogs and wikis. The format of the book is reader-friendly and its methodological approach clearly explained. The list of resources and Companion Website are very useful. Myers' linguistic analysis of these comparatively new interactive textual genres highlights how blogs and wikis are changing the ways in which textual resources are valued. He encourages us to reflect on the nature of knowledge, how it may be created, or represented, and by whom: questions that lie at the heart of all reader-writer interactions, especially in educational settings.

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