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Publisher: Routledge

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Journal of Multicultural Discourses

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://tandfonline.com/loi/rmmd20>

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Adriana Bolívar^a

^a Department of Linguistics and Discourse Studies, Universidad Central de Venezuela

Available online: 05 Nov 2010

To cite this article: Adriana Bolívar (2010): A change in focus: from texts in contexts to people in events, *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 5:3, 213-225

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17447141003602312>

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A change in focus: from texts in contexts to people in events

Adriana Bolívar*

Department of Linguistics and Discourse Studies, Universidad Central de Venezuela

(Received 8 October 2009; final version received 3 January 2010)

While it is undeniable that Latin American discourse analysts have received the influence of European theoretical and methodological approaches, I maintain that when the focus changes from texts in contexts to people in events, new research problems arise, different results are obtained and new or slightly different approaches emerge. In order to show this, I first deal with the development of the Latin American Association of Discourse Studies (Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso – ALED) as a multicultural project that involves several countries. Then I present a general view of the interactional approach I have developed, and which I am still developing in my own cultural context. I shall refer in particular to the categories that I have used in my research related to political dialogue. The paper aims at presenting an overview of advances in discourse studies in Latin America from a regional as well as from an individual perspective, with a view to facing our own social, educational, and political realities and contribute to the debate on theories and methods in discourse analysis.

Keywords: discourse analysis; Latin America; dialogue; interaction; change

Introduction

Current Discourse Analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theories, constructed from a European perspective have been most inspiring and have provided many of us with several starting points to explain our culture and society. Latin Americans in general, as graduate students in highly reputed universities and research centers, have had their first encounters with discourse studies in European countries, mainly France, England and Germany, and this has obviously contributed to proposals that combine the European as well as the Latin American views on research in this field. For many years, researchers in our universities concentrated on applying blindly European or American models of analysis (and they still do), particularly in the fields of education, the media and political discourse, but this situation is gradually changing due to the fact that these models have had their origin in other cultures where the social and political circumstances are different and, consequently, they are often insufficient to explain our realities. We cannot forget that when we talk about critical discourse analysis in Latin America we are referring to a region characterised by great differences (geographical, economic, social, educational, political, etc.), with a population of 580 million people of which Brazil has 38.3%, Mexico 21.8%, Colombia 9.8%, Argentina 8.3%, Perú 5.8%, Venezuela

*Email: abolivar_2000@yahoo.com

5.7%, Ecuador 2.9%, Bolivia 2%, Paraguay 1.4% and Uruguay 0.7% (Population Reference Bureau 2009), so it is not surprising that our analysts show special concern for education, poverty and political change.

After applying and assessing current theories and methods in discourse analysis, our researchers in Latin America feel the need to take steps towards different applications and/or new proposals, which emphasise aspects that have been given less relevance in the theoretical frameworks available. For example, some combine French and Anglo-Saxon traditions such as the 'semantic-pragmatic approach' proposed by Molero and Cabeza (2007) which serves them to analyse a wide variety of texts. Some suggest widening the scope of socio-cognitive explanations to include cultural processes as is the case of Pardo Abril (2007, 2008) who, while resorting to categories borrowed from Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, argues for a culture-based perspective to understand our own culture as this is represented by the media. Others take the path of relying more on linguistics, as Pardo (2008) who gives attention to grammar and grammaticalisation as well as discourse semantics in order to understand how the homeless represent their own world and how argumentative they can be. The question of methods is also approached from a critical perspective by Carbó (2001) who discusses 'the intricate relationships between analyst, constitutive frame and object of analysis', and stresses 'the key role of reading as a communicable, structured and formal sense-making activity' (59). In my own view, because I perceive that the major emphasis in discourse studies is on social representations and text-oriented explanations, I feel the need to make precisions in critical theoretical models so that the people and their culture are not taken for granted. I propose a new insight into the dialogical perspective so that we can describe texts better and also explain how people participating in events contribute to the creation of new knowledge and realities (Bolívar 1986, 2001b, 2005, 2008, 2009).

Current European models of critical discourse analysis have contributed greatly in their attempts at bringing together linguistic theory and social theory (Fairclough 1992), and have provided insights into the strategic uses of discourse to express ideologies within a socio-cognitive perspective (Van Dijk 1998). They have not neglected the historical dimension as we find historical approaches that are strongly based on linguistics (Wodak 2001). However, what I find missing or less emphasised, in the analysis that the authors themselves present, is the reference to the people and culture as a component of the theoretical framework. The attention often goes first to texts (as in Text Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA), the text-oriented analysis offered by Fairclough 1992) and so texts provide evidence for the social and cultural changes observed at a global level (which is a very good thing to do), but we lose sight of what happens in the smaller communities, how they contribute to changes and how they feel from their own cultural perspectives. Also, Fairclough's notion of change focuses upon conflict in the Marxist tradition (see Meyer 2001, 22) and while he unveils in texts processes of domination, difference and resistance, he makes little room for dialogue and cooperation. Similarly, when Van Dijk (1998, 2007) proposes the US and THEM distinction to explain antagonism or ideological confrontation, I have the feeling that somehow this leaves out how meanings are constructed in societies where the I and YOU relation is very important (as in authoritarian regimes or dictatorships not uncommon in our region). Also, the notion of history leaves me unhappy as it seems to refer mainly to the historical context and past events that have left marks of injustice and discrimination that still remain, but there is less attention

to the people's need to become aware of a notion of history that will empower them or make them feel responsible for their actions in social events in the present. For these reasons, I claim that we need a change in focus, from texts in contexts to people participating in events. This has implications for the theory and the methods to be chosen because the questions to be asked and data collection will be affected by the focus of the analysis. In fact, it is a problem of directionality, of whether one thinks first of texts as objects of study or of the people who create them, and the circumstances that lead to their production and circulation. Both directions are equally important, but I start from the assumption that it is the people interacting in the social dynamics that need to be approached first (or at least discussed first), because texts are created in interaction and it is at this level that decisions are made about meanings, about what to say, to whom and how to say it.

Most of the theories that we worked with as graduate students abroad (in England, France or another European country) derived from the study of cultures different from our own. It might be argued that researchers in Latin America analyse their own 'cultural contexts' because texts in Spanish or Portuguese are described, but this is not always the case, as we recurrently find a big emphasis on applications of approaches to types of texts and text processes rather than to actual problems in the social dynamics. It seems to me that when the focus is entirely on the texts, one gets trapped in their frontiers and can make statements of meaning only about aspects of a particular text or situation. This is the case in my own experience with the description of newspaper editorials in English (Bolívar 1986, 1994) and later in Spanish, which allowed me to propose a model to describe their structure and discourse function, but did not give me enough tools to describe them as part of the social dynamics in social or political events, although this first step did open a path to follow. So problems arise, for example, in the field of education when teachers insist on imposing generic patterns or demanding particular argumentative styles that the students themselves reject. This also applies to the analysis of political discourse, which in Latin America is one of the major concerns, given that populism, dictatorships and very vulnerable democracies have shaped the style of power relations between the people and their governments. In addition, we cannot leave out scientific research itself, as this is also another important aspect because, although in Latin America we share the research practices coming from Europe or the USA, we have different ways of participating in the academic dialogue. We are constantly faced with cultural dependency regarding the production of knowledge, as was shown in a study I carried out in my own Faculty on the references used by authors of articles from various disciplines in the humanities. It was discouraging to find out that, in general, only 4.8% of the references belonged to the author of the article; 13.7% referred to the work of national researchers, while 81.3% was devoted to authors from Spain, other countries in Latin America, the USA, and Europe (Bolívar 2004, 14). So in this paper I will concentrate on two things: first the development of the Latin American Association of Discourse Studies (ALED),¹ viewed as a multicultural project that started in Caracas in 1995, and second the discourse analysis I have developed, which focuses on the participants in the interaction and, particularly, on the people responsible for introducing changes in the social and political dynamics.

The focus on dialogue: people participating in events

In a recent paper, Shi-xu (2009) acknowledges that ‘the discipline of discourse studies, in spite of its international professional success, is by and large culturally monological, rather than dialogical and diversified’ (30) and so he suggests a major change in the following terms:

it is not only urgently needed but also rationally possible for culturally critical students of discourse everywhere, but specially those based in underdeveloped and developing Asian, African and Latin societies, to transform this monological and Westcentric international scholarship by making concerted and informed efforts to reconstruct Eastern paradigms in co-existence and dialogue with the dominant Western counterparts. (31)

Shi-xu makes clear that it is not a matter of substituting one paradigm for another and warns that the notions Eastern and Western paradigms are only ‘rhetorical ploys’ (32) because the aim is not to homogenize or dichotomize but to develop ‘locally grounded and globally minded’ paradigms in the broadest sense. His proposal underlines four principles, three of which focus on the shared realities of Asian, African and Latinoamerican discourses, and one of which looks at the co-existence with western paradigms. So he maintains that (1) the new paradigms ‘should be locally grounded and globally minded, historically conscious and contemporary helpful, and above all culturally inclusive and pluralistic, at all levels of discourse research’ (41); (2) they ‘should bear their own cultural-intellectual identities’; (3) the paradigms ‘should not be content with mere description or explanation, but equipped with tools that may help transform the repressive and stereotypic discourses and create new discourses useful to the eastern communities and to the humanity as a whole’ (41); and (4) they ‘must be capable of conversing with the Western paradigms (...) for example, they might as well use the same terminology regarding the fundamental concepts from the Western paradigmatic discourse’ (41).

I believe Shi-xu’s proposal is worth considering for the implications it has for discourse studies in general. We need equilibrium and more dialogue in order to advance the theory and apply it to our particular circumstances. But we also need to learn more about Asian, African and Latin American cultures because, although we may share realities in many respects, the differences are also great. So, as a first approximation from the Latin American dimension, centered in Venezuelan discourse, I shall explain my own line of thought.

Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso (ALED): a multicultural project

Ever since discourse studies began to develop, particularly around the 1980s, Latin Americans were aware of their impact and relevance for language learning and teaching, as well as for a better understanding of social and political problems in the region. However, it was not until 1995 that researchers from different countries of Latin America got together to start what can be considered a multicultural project because, although the participants shared mainly the Spanish language and Spanish cultural traditions, there was an important representation from Brazil, the largest country in Latin America. And so it was agreed that the official languages of the Association would be Spanish and Portuguese, without discarding the possibility of including other languages but making it clear that the topics and problems to be dealt with in our meetings would concentrate on our region rather than on other

parts of the world. We could not ignore at that moment that many of the countries that started the Association shared a history of domination and liberation from Spain and that Brazil had been under the realm of Portugal. Also, there are indigenous minorities whose languages are disappearing and whose speakers are often subject to discrimination². This decision was ideological in that its aim was clearly identified as to reinforce and preserve our cultural identities and to focus on the people of our own region. This led to taking steps towards the creation and reinforcement of graduate courses in discourse studies as well as the development of research groups and networks that are now dealing with major problems such as illiteracy, poverty, populism, racism, discourse acquisition, identity, discrimination of indigenous and Afro-American population, gender inequalities, academic discourse and others.

The evidence of the progress made can be found in the growing amount of books published in the region. The record of our experience as researchers has been kept in several ways: first, books that show what has been done in each country either as a result of local conferences or the results of research groups. We can mention, among others, parliamentary discourse (Carbó 1996), reading and writing processes (Martínez 1997), the discourse of school-textbooks (Moss et al. 1998), multi-disciplinary research on political discourse (Bolívar and Kohn 1999), recent research developments in Colombia (Ramírez Peña and Acosta Valencia 2006), Venezuela (Bolívar 2007), Chile (Parodi 2008), Argentina (Vallejos Llobet 2008), and Brazil (Dionisio, Hoffnagel, and Barros 2009); second, books and articles on selected topics such as education (Buenfil Burgos 1993), orality and writing (Marcuschi 2000), critical discourse analysis (Berardi 2003; Raiter and Zullo 2006; Pini 2009), dialogue analysis (Bolívar and Erlich 2007), academic and professional discourses (Parodi 2008), disciplinary discourse (Beke 2005, 2008; Beke and Bolívar 2009), international conflicts (Bolívar 2008; Fonte Zarabozo 2008), discourse acquisition (Shiro 2003, 2007), poverty as represented by the media (Pardo Abril 2007) or the communicative and cognitive effects of poverty (Pardo and Buscaglia 2008).³

There is still a third type of publications that serves as evidence of the cooperation between colleagues from Europe and Latin America such as the book that resulted from an international project on racism and discourse in Latin America, originally published in Spanish (Van Dijk 2007) and then translated into Portuguese and English.⁴ Apart from all the above-mentioned publications, the *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso* (*Latin American Journal of Discourse Studies*), which has given access to many voices for over eight years, has contributed to calling attention to our local problems and interests. The great number of books and articles in ALED and other journals in the world is a good demonstration that when the focus is on the people and their interests and motivations, new meanings are created in dialogues that are fed with our voices (in national and international conferences, through academic exchange, through emails, etc.). Also, we value more the production of new written texts, that is, books whose circulation we control, and articles whose topics are closer to our local interests. So the problems studied by ALED members keep growing and range in focus from fundamental problems such as poverty, illiteracy, injustice, discrimination, to the descriptive and critical study of the texts and processes involved in conversation, narration, argumentation, together with explanations of our cultural differences as seen through (im)politeness studies in various contexts. All these new advances try not to ignore the distinctive features of our history and development of political systems as well as our own artistic production.

The first decisions: where to start?

In order to feed the theories of discourse, I think we ought to start by discussing what we mean by a dialogical perspective. The diagram that follows below, from Bolívar (2007, 250), gathers in a few words the choices our researchers have to make when they decide to practice discourse analysis. The column on the left indicates that the student is thinking of selecting texts to discover their ‘mysteries’. The column on the right shows that the person is thinking of a problem in the world of events and wants to say something about them, and s/he needs discourse analysis to do so.⁵ In real practice this works as a continuum between description and various degrees of critical analysis.

Descriptive	Critical
Focus on the texts	Focus on people in events
Text production (written, spoken, multimodal)	Social and political processes
Descriptive analysis	Explanatory and critical analysis
Text structures and processes	Production and circulation of texts
Patterns of text/functions/genres	Moments in social events
Production and understanding	Patterns of social interaction
Interpretation in contexts	Control of interaction
Cognitive patterns	Ideologies
Interactional patterns	Actions for change

While it is true that no research in discourse starts without attention to texts, the decision about where to start has important implications because the research questions will differ and so will the methods to be chosen. For example, if the focus is on the study of presidential speeches, it will be necessary to collect the texts and decide on the method of analysis. The extent of the analysis will be determined by how far the researcher wants to go in the description and if a critical perspective is adopted or not. But if the focus is on how the political dialogue manifests itself at a particular moment, the presidential speeches become part of a chain of texts in particular events, so the methods will lead towards the critical side and the corpus will be heterogeneous and complex as other types of texts will form part of the corpus, for example, the speech itself, the news about it, the comments on TV and newspaper, reactions in the street, texts in internet, etc. As an analyst, one can focus on any of these moments but cannot ignore the whole process because in its dynamics there are people who make decisions that affect other people. It has been my assumption that in order to explain both, the texts and the events, the fundamental notions of *dialogue* and *evaluation* are needed. In what follows, I shall briefly list the notions that I have used in my analysis and will illustrate by making reference to political dialogue in Venezuela.

An analytical framework and the case of political dialogue

The first category is *dialogue* because it is the primary condition of discourse and human existence. We need at least two to communicate and we need to recognise the existence of the other to survive as humans. We assume that all texts are dialogical (oral, written, multimodal) in the sense that Bakhtin (1982) introduced the term. However, although we can trace in Bakhtin’s work most of the categories that

discourse analysis developed, dialogue in this perspective emphasises the voices in the texts but not the people whose voices are identified in monologic or heteroglossic relations. With this, I mean that we need to expand the notion to focus on the people as beings who are responsible for their own existence and for introducing changes, we need to think of dialogue from a more embracing perspective that explains society and culture. One way of doing it is by examining the theories of the Brazilian pedagogue and philosopher Paulo Freire, one of the most influential Latin American critical thinkers in the twentieth century. Freire conceives education as a liberating practice (Freire 1967) and maintains that people can change their existence by themselves. His ideas, mainly his 'Pedagogy of the oppressed' (Freire 1970) have influenced democratic processes all over the world because he started by giving attention to the poor people in Brazil and developed a method for teaching them how to read not just words but 'the world'. In his perspective, dialogue is a human phenomenon because 'dialogue means a meeting of men (*sic*) for the transformation of the world, so it becomes a human need (...) and we must act upon the world to humanise it, transform it, and free it' (Martínez-Salanova Sánchez 2009, my translation). Freire provides us with inspiration in many respects because his pedagogy is based on the assumption that education is a political act of knowledge that relies on four important principles: man's creative and transforming capacity, man's capacity of astonishment, the social nature of the act of knowing and man's historical dimension. In his view, hope is an ontological need (Freire 1992) and so the relation between dominating and dominated, associated with the economic production systems, can be changed because through dialogue, action and reflection, the people can develop critical thinking and set up their own agenda. What is important is that only in dialogue 'with' others can we reach autonomy and freedom (Freire 1996).

Dialogue, in turn, provides us with the category of *participants*, which is a basic category in most definitions of context (see, for example, Hymes 1972). However, we follow the notion proposed by Firth (1968) because he made a distinction between *persons* and *personalities* participating in events. It is important to have in mind that, from a grammatical perspective, the notion can also refer to the participants in the clause, that is, to the entities linguistically represented in texts (Halliday 2004). In the study of political dialogue, the challenge is to find out the characteristics of this dialogue from a historical perspective as well as to interpret the present conditions, mainly to discover how the present maintains features of the past and is itself the start for the future. In our political culture, the presence of strong leaders (personalities) is an important regular feature and so is personalism and authoritarianism. Therefore, it is often the case that the presidential figure receives much attention in political discourse analysis in Latin America. It is for this reason that the dialogue that calls our attention is the one between the president and the people, and the forces that give this dialogue its shape (see Bolívar 1999, 2001a, 2004).

The next category is *social interaction* because in order to keep dialogue going we need to speak and talk *with* others in situations and moments where meanings are negotiated, jointly constructed or rejected. Because we are dealing with groups, we shall find asymmetries and heterogeneity that will express themselves in a wide variety of genres and texts in the private and public sphere. In political discourse, this implies taking account of mainly public spaces and the media that represent the interactions and take sides and participate as well. In Venezuela the media have been particularly important to help presidents reach power, and have often assigned

themselves the roles of political parties that feed the confrontation, particularly in moments of intense polarisation (see Bolívar 2001c, 2004, 2008, 2009). In order to explain social interaction, we need the category of *change* because it allows us to study the dynamics of the interaction, either internally in a text in a particular moment in a *micro-dialogue*, or across texts in time in a *macro-dialogue* (Bolívar 2008). The concept of change I use is very close to Freire's idea of constant transformation as I believe that change can be internal, that is, it may originate in the individual, when s/he feels the need to redirect the course of action or thought, and external, that is, it may be caused or imposed by forces that are out of our control (such as the world's economy). Change can be self-generated when an individual or group of individuals more or less consciously decide that they do not want to accept the circumstances in which they find themselves. They can choose another way without need of permanent conflict (a change of attitude or style). The application of Freire's philosophy and methods has shown that when the people in Latin America, and other countries, learn how to read and write, they simultaneously discover that they also have knowledge of the world, and that they form part of a culture but had not been aware of it because they lived in 'silence'. Therefore, if we assume that dialogue means both cooperation and conflict, we can also assume that change can be seen as a continuum between cooperation and conflict, with varying degrees of conflict along the continuum. Thus, we must distinguish between cooperative change and conflictive change, depending on the motivations for change.

Change is important from a linguistic and discursive perspective because, in the same way that we are able to identify the sequence of changes in turns in a conversation and see how speakers take up roles and choose topics, we can observe how a writer controls the internal changes in the text by deciding what information goes first, follows or closes a segment. The writer is also responsible for the decisions about whose voices have access or not in his/her discourse but, above all, is a person who communicates with others for some reason. From a linguistic perspective, the notion of change is crucial to understand how texts are structured and how writers position themselves by making linguistic choices. From a social perspective, change is fundamental to understand how events take shape through a sequence of different moments as they develop. In each of these moments, some persons take up the role of initiators of changes and this is something very important to have in mind.

In order to study change, we need *evaluation*, which has been given a great importance in discourse studies in connection with how we construct the authorial stance in texts (Hunston and Thompson 2000). This notion is fundamental to understand how we represent the world, how we establish relations with others and how texts take their shape (Bolívar 2001b). Hunston and Thompson summarise the research carried out in this field and present their own view that conflates modality and evaluation, but give evaluation a major role. I agree with them in this respect but, in my view, I extend the notion beyond texts. From my perspective, evaluation is the central category of discourse because it allows us to explain changes in the texts as well as changes in the social dynamics (Bolívar 1986, 2001b, 2008). For years we have been so concerned with the contents of the texts that we have tended to forget that when people interact they cannot do so without evaluating the world, evaluating others and evaluating themselves. So we must give attention not only to evaluative language in the sense that there are undoubtedly words that are more evaluative than others, but also in how words acquire and change their value in interactions, particularly conflictive interactions where ideologies confront. Above all, we must

give attention to its structural role in the creation of texts and texts patterns in various genres. Also, if we extend the notion to the social level, we shall find a criterion for identifying patterns of interaction in events because, by paying attention to the role of persons as initiators, followers or controllers of events, we shall read social and political events as well. In conflictive events, there is always someone who initiates the conflict (admittedly or not) and then come reactions to the initiation, either to support or to reject the actions and words. When the initiator is a president who imposes a new style, there are followers who react positively and adversaries who react negatively. But then someone decides and these are the evaluations that remain in the discourse and in the minds of people. In political systems where the tradition allows more tolerance to authoritarianism, as in Venezuela, the one who closes the cycles is the president, so the dominant evaluations are his (there have been no women presidents in our history). The one who opens and closes these cycles is the person who concentrates more power in that it is his/her evaluations that are imposed. In this manner, the possibilities of alternation and equal access to the dialogue become more difficult.⁶ As a manner of illustration, I would like to explain the meaning of Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows part of the results of an investigation (see Bolívar 2009), which concentrated on the discursive struggle around the meanings allocated to *democracy* and *revolution*. We examined the president's language, in his dialogue with the people in the program *Aló Presidente* (Hello Mr. President), which he himself conducts. What Figure 1 tells us is how, in the president's words (72.3% in the corpus), the use of the word *revolution* dominated over *democracy* (84.6% versus 15.4%) from the beginnings of his government in 1999 until 2006 (the last year we included for the study). We discovered that the changes in frequencies occurred before and after conflictive events (a coup attempt, a long national strike, the collection of signatures asking for his resignation, elections, a referendum). His use of *revolution* went up before conflicts and down after them, while *democracy* went up after the conflicts. A purely quantitative analysis would lead us to the wrong conclusion that the president has adjusted his discourse to please his adversaries. However, the qualitative analysis along the lines of corpus-driven linguistics indicated that *democracy* collocated mainly with *revolutionary* and *Bolivarian*, two words that are

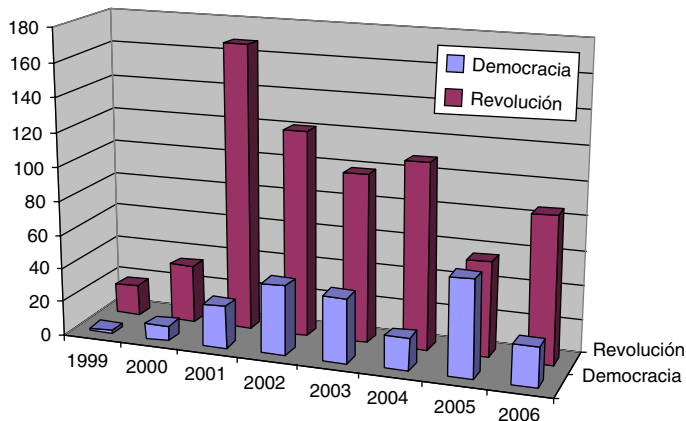


Figure 1. Differences between democracy and revolution by year.

not found in the definition of democracy in the Venezuelan Constitution. The people who voted for a representative democracy in 1998 find themselves in a revolution that they resist and have shown this in linguistic and non-linguistic terms. Thus, a great contradiction is unveiled. Hugo Chávez is one of the Latin American leaders who most passionately fights against capitalism and imperialism, but he is trapped in the paradox that, in his defence of the people, the revolution legitimates violence and death, as evidenced by the government's slogan '*patria, socialismo o muerte*' (motherland, socialism or death).

Conclusions

In this paper I have presented a very brief view of how research in discourse analysis can be approached from a dialogical perspective in order to (a) promote research itself in a multicultural context, and (b) present general categories of analysis to explain how our particular social and political dynamics is shaped by people interacting in events. I have referred to the creation of ALED as a major event in Latin America since this brought together many researchers who were working in isolation and often unknown by their own academic communities. This association has given us all the possibility of interacting towards similar aims from a multicultural perspective, above all to develop critical language awareness and propose actions for change. I have used the categories suggested here in the study of dialogue in various contexts, but I chose to illustrate with political dialogue because of all types of discourse this is the one that affects our lives the most. It makes us happy or unhappy, it forces us to take sides, and it makes us think of our role as researchers. The notions I use are all found in the literature on discourse. The difference is that, as many other colleagues, I go beyond the texts in contexts and try to read my society in order to explain how the people, leaders, citizens and the media, contribute to shaping the social and political dynamics in my country. In doing so, I discover categories that help me enrich the theoretical framework as well as my view of what belonging to a Latin American culture means. So, my suggestion is that those of us who look at discourse from an 'eastern' perspective should make more efforts to share our views on how our realities are represented and constructed in the discursive struggle for power and, above all, we should promote dialogue and cooperation in order to reach autonomy and freedom.

Notes

1. ALED is the acronym of *Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso*, founded in Caracas in 1995 as a result of the First Latin American Colloquium of Discourse Analysis, which was sponsored by Universidad Central de Venezuela and coordinated by Adriana Bolívar and her colleagues from the Faculty of Humanities.
2. Just to mention the situation in Venezuela, only 30 indigenous languages remain out of approximately 100 that existed in the fifteenth century when the Spaniards arrived (Mosonyi, Barbella, and Caula 2003).
3. More information about ALED can be found in <http://www.portalaled.com>
4. The Portuguese version was published in 2008 in São Paulo by Contexto, and the English one in 2009 by Lexington Books in New York.
5. I am sure that having to answer the question 'where do I start?' is something we share as discourse analysts in many parts of the world.
6. Hugo Chávez took office in 1999 when he was democratically elected by vote. The Constitution allowed terms of five years for the presidency in that moment. He is still in power as leader of the 'Bolivarian revolution', for which the people did not originally vote.

Since 1999, he has changed the constitution to allow for longer periods in office and has made all efforts to guarantee that he will stay in power as a leader of the revolution in Venezuela and other Latin American countries (see Bolívar 2008, 2009).

Notes on contributor

Adriana Bolívar is Professor of English and Spanish linguistics at Universidad Central de Venezuela. She received her Ph.D. from Birmingham University, UK. She has published and edited or co-edited several books on written interaction, dialogue, critical discourse analysis, political discourse and academic discourse. She has also published many articles related to these fields and also racism, impoliteness, intercultural communication, reading and writing, and others. She is founder of the Latin American Association of Discourse Studies (ALED) and editor of the *ALED Journal*. She forms part of the editorial board of several international journals such as *Pragmatics, Discourse and Society, Journal of Intercultural Communication, Oralia* (Spain) and many in Latin America.

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