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The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Processes

Second Edition

Edited by Michael F. Schober, David N. Rapp,
and M. Anne Britt

The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Processes

The second edition of *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Processes* provides a state-of-the-art overview of the field of discourse processes, highlighting the subject's interdisciplinary foundations and bringing together established and emergent scholars to provide a dynamic roadmap of the evolution of work in these areas.

This new edition reflects several of the enormous changes in the world since the publication of the first edition—changes in modes of communication and an increased urgency to understand how people comprehend and trust information. The contents of this volume attempt to address fundamental questions about what we should now be thinking about reading, listening, talking, and writing. The chapters collected here represent a wide range of empirical methods currently available: lab or field experiments, with a range of measures, from quantitative to qualitative; observational studies, including classrooms or organizational communication; corpus analyses; conversation analysis; computational modeling; and linguistic analyses. The chapters also draw attention to the explosion of contextually rich and computationally intensive data analysis tools which have changed the research landscape, along with more contemporary measures of people's discourse use, from eye-tracking to video analysis tools to brain scans. *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Processes, Second edition* is the ideal resource for graduate students, researchers, and practitioners in a variety of disciplines, including discourse analysis, conversation analysis, cognitive psychology, and cognitive science.

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Introduction

Discourse Processes Evolving

Michael F. Schober, David N. Rapp, and M. Anne Britt

Many of us now routinely engage in new modes of discourse that would have been unimaginable in even the relatively recent past: texting on sophisticated mobile devices with emoji and audio attachments—maybe even dictating the text message rather than typing it; posting visual images on social media networks for friends that may well be seen by strangers; providing information to an automated telephone agent on the way to talking to a live human employee; writing a quick response to an online newspaper article that is immediately available to be seen by millions; or chatting with family members across the world via video, from our living rooms or while we are walking on a city street, while also seeing ourselves in a “self view” window. We respond to voice messages with an email, switch to talking face to face in the middle of a text interchange, and forward news items to individuals and groups with breathtaking ease. And we communicate across the globe in unprecedented ways, seeing immediate live news feeds from places we may know little about, posting messages that go viral and cause unanticipated effects in sectors we hadn’t imagined they would. We have access to more and more different kinds of information, and to the means of delivering anything we might be thinking about to others, than have ever been available or might even have been anticipated in the recent past.

At the same time, we continue to talk face to face and on the phone, read novels and newspapers (though perhaps not only on paper), and even occasionally write letters or shopping lists by hand. Traditional spoken and written forms of discourse—the kinds that discourse process researchers have been focusing on for years—have not yet disappeared, and are not going anywhere soon, even among the most enthusiastic adopters of new modes and technologies for interaction. And of course not everyone is part of the communication revolution, whether through lack of access or by choice. For many in the world, the infrastructure supporting access to complex communication technologies has yet to be built (and may never be built), and the expense of adopting new technologies can be prohibitive. And even among those who have access, some people prefer familiar modes—talking face to face rather than talking with an automated system, reading a newspaper in print rather than online, or telling a story in person rather than leaving traces of thoughts and actions online that could have unintended consequences with unimagined audiences.

So we are in a time of intense transition, in which daily discourse continues to be transformed by the introduction of new communication options, some of which will take hold and spread, and some that will fade away. At least in some modes of discourse, the boundaries between reading, listening, writing, and talking have become more porous. Or at least the opportunities to participate and create new streams of discourse have expanded: People can read knowing that as they read, they can make their thoughts immediately available if they want to, and that the author and other readers might respond. Listeners can be aware that a video record of speech that in the past would have been evanescent is now reviewable in a way that can hold speakers newly accountable—and that might change the care with which speakers speak and the longer-term consequences of what they say.

We have also entered a period of intense questioning about the basis of facts and information, struggling with which sources of information can be trusted, and considering how divergent narratives and world views can—or can't—be reconciled. There is a new need to understand how beliefs and understandings proliferate in “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles” of subcommunities of communication, what kinds of communication persuade people, and how communication dynamics and flow, in both old and new media, connect with individual understandings, expectations, and attitudes.

All this makes it an exciting time for researchers interested in understanding the mental and interactive processes underlying discourse empirically—for seasoned researchers and for those entering the multidisciplinary study of discourse processes. This second edition of the *Handbook of Discourse Processes* is intended as an update to the earlier 2003 edition that presents new reviews of the scientific state of the art in various domains of discourse processing. It also reflects at least some of the enormous changes in the world since the publication of the first edition—changes in modes of communication and an increased urgency to understand how people comprehend and trust information. The contents of this volume attempt to address fundamental questions about how differently—if at all—we should now be thinking about reading, listening, talking, and writing. Have the mental processes involved in reading (for example) changed in an important way, for some or all readers? Or is the difference really in *what* we are reading, and in what way we are engaging with content, and with what kind of interactivity and multi-modal task-switching? Are the mental processes required for planning spoken discourse that considers potential unintended audiences new ones that need to be documented and catalogued, or can current theories and accounts accommodate new kinds of speaking?

As in the first edition, the chapters collected here represent a wide range of empirical methods currently available: lab or field experiments (with a range of measures, from quantitative to qualitative), observational studies (e.g., of classrooms or organizational communication), corpus analyses, conversation analysis, computational modeling, and linguistic analyses. The chapters also draw attention to the explosion of contextually rich and computationally intensive data analysis tools which have changed the research landscape, along with more contemporary measures of people's discourse use, from eye-tracking to video analysis tools to brain scans.

Organizing Strategy

This edition of the handbook differs from the first in a few ways that are designed to address how the world and how discourse research have changed since the first edition. First, a number of the chapters were commissioned from pairs or teams of researchers who represent different strands of expertise within a topic area (sometimes even holding contradictory views), and who

in several cases had never written together before. Our intention was for these contributions to represent a greater breadth of perspectives and background knowledge than the individual researchers would be likely to incorporate, and we hoped that this interaction between researchers might articulate new and useful framings and understandings. Many thanks to the contributors who were willing to take a chance on working in this way; we think the results bring new insights that demonstrate how important cross-field fertilization is in addressing the complexity of discourse.

Second, the opening chapters that present overviews of theories and challenges that cross many areas of discourse processing include not only chapters about reading (Kendeou and O'Brien) and interactive conversation (Horton), but also a chapter that articulates and adds into the theoretical mix an additional set of approaches from organizational communication (Bangerter and Cornelissen). As we see it, contextualizing where and how different streams of research that don't always connect as communities of practice might fit together is particularly important as modes and forms of discourse change. These chapters present useful syntheses from perspectives that have been central to the empirical study of discourse but that haven't always connected with each other.

Third, this edition includes a set of chapters that focus specifically on methods of empirical discourse research. Given the proliferation of available methods and the range of approaches, it seemed important—and, we hope, useful—for a handbook to highlight methodological advances, catalog their successes and challenges, and clarify which kinds of questions can be addressed through which different methods. As a multidisciplinary enterprise that examines complex phenomena, the study of discourse processes requires a willingness to attend to and make use of multiple methods, and these chapters in the handbook make this explicit.

The chapters that make up the remainder of the handbook encompass a set of problem areas of practical significance that also represent critical areas of research focus in the scientific study of discourse processing. The range of topics by necessity covers only a sampling of possible areas, but it ranges widely, from sourcing in discourse comprehension (Bråten, Stadler, and Salmerón) to acquiring and revising knowledge through discourse (Richter and Singer), discourse processing in technology-mediated environments (Gergle), mutual understanding between experts and laypeople (Bromme and Jucks), discourse development through the adult lifespan (Stine-Morrow and Radvansky), the cognitive neuroscience of discourse (Zacks, Mar, and Calarco), beliefs and discourse processing (Wolfe and Griffin), classroom discourse (O'Connor and Snow), how modern reading should or shouldn't change our theoretical accounts (Magliano, McCrudden, Rouet, and Sabatini), and writing as a discourse process (McNamara and Allen).

Finally, the handbook includes an Afterword by the editors of the first edition (Graesser, Gernsbacher, and Goldman). We are grateful that they approached us about the project of creating an updated handbook, and we believe their take on the changes in the field since that edition and on the material in this edition should be invaluable to the reader.

Many questions not addressed in this handbook, of course, remain. There is a need for critical work on, for example, multilingual and cross-community discourse in a globalizing world, and cultural influences on different kinds of discourse. Much remains to be explored about the interplay between individual-level mental processes and larger networked social processes, and about the specific cumulative effects of individual moments of learning and interaction. We hope that the material in this handbook—the syntheses of research and theorizing, the presentation of methods, and the framing of new questions—encourages current and next generations of researchers to build on what is known thus far to investigate the continuing evolution of discourse and the processes underlying it.