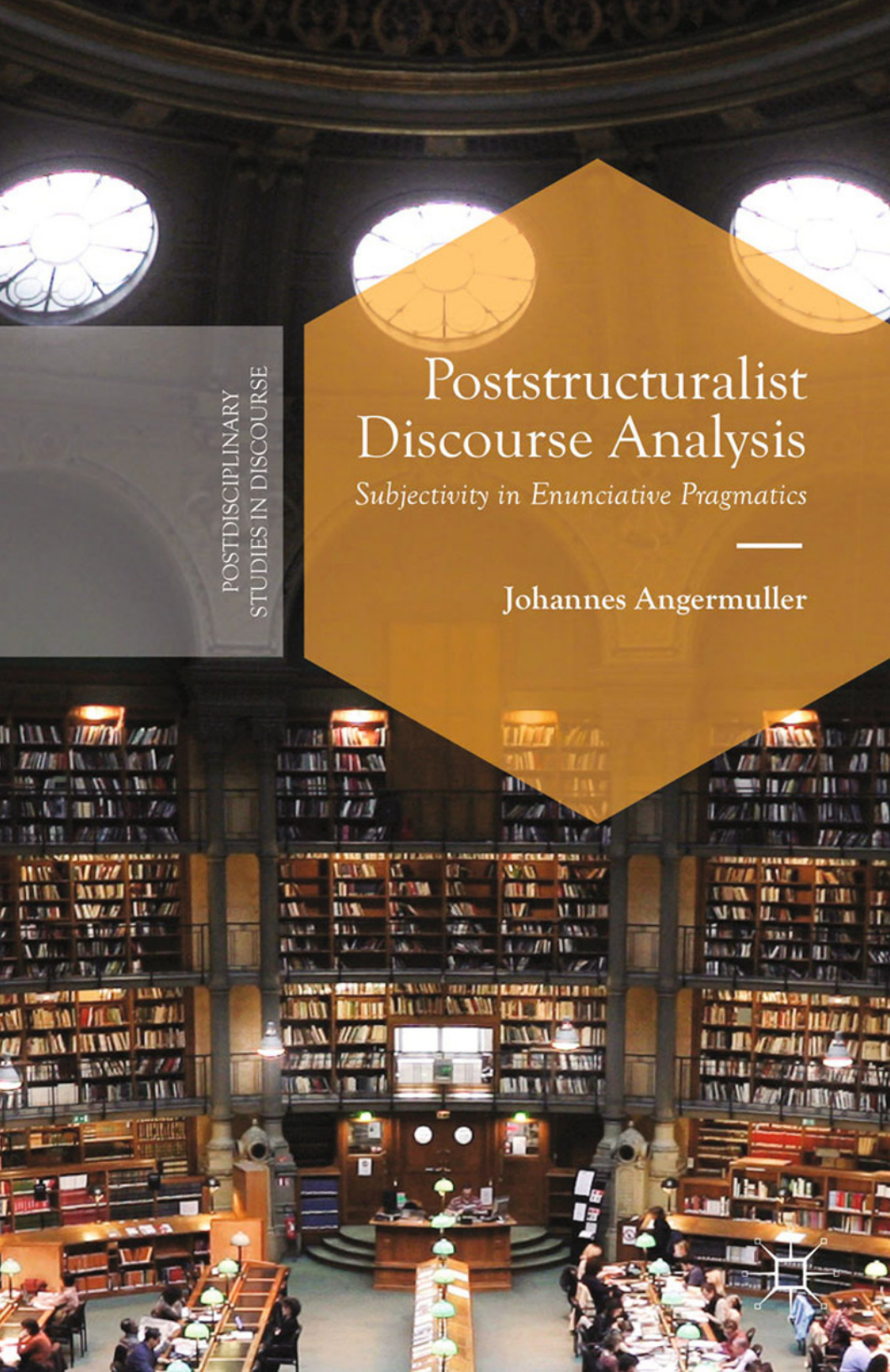
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Johannes Angermuller

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Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis

Subjectivity in Enunciative Pragmatics

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University of Warwick, UK

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The cover picture represents the interior of the old National Library of France (BNF), where a great deal of poststructuralist discourse was produced until the 1980s.

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1
Introduction: Poststructuralism and Enunciative Pragmatics

The controversy over structuralism reached its peak around 1966–7, when a new generation of French theorists, including Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, came onto the intellectual scene. Inspired by Marxism and psychoanalysis, these intellectuals are today known for their critical epistemologies that point to the symbolic constitution of the subject and insist on the constitutive role of language in society. Yet while these theorists have been greeted as representatives of the linguistic turn in the social sciences and humanities, the linguistic and semiotic traditions themselves, which have so decisively stimulated the imagination of the interdisciplinary theoretical debate, are hardly known outside a rather restricted circle of specialists. Not surprisingly, these thinkers have often been perceived as sweeping theorists of language in society, but of rather limited help when it comes to analyzing linguistic and semiotic texts.

By making key canonical texts from French Theory the object of rigorous linguistic scrutiny, *Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis* attempts to bridge this gap and to present discourse analysis as it has developed in France since the late 1960s, notably enunciative pragmatics, also known as the linguistics of enunciation (*énonciation*). For some linguists, 'enunciation' refers to fundamental operations of language as a grammatical system (for example in Culioli), whereas for others it designates the pragmatic dimension of language use. Generally speaking, enunciative pragmatics asks how utterances (*énoncés*) mobilize sources and voices, speakers and points of view, locutors and enunciators at the moment of enunciation. Following Benveniste's famous definition of enunciation as the 'enactment of language through an act of individual usage' (Benveniste 1974: 80),[1] enunciative pragmatics asks how linguistic expressions, markers, traces and shifters (*marqueurs,*

repères, indices énonciatifs …) reflect those who speak in a the context of enunciation. In line with the pragmatic turn in French linguistics since the late 1970s, the growing interest in the question of enunciation has contributed to a new enunciative strand in pragmatics which has not only helped to direct attention to questions of subjectivity, context and communication but also to the sociohistorical dimensions of discourse more generally, as can be seen in Foucault's project for an 'enunciative discourse analysis' (1969: 143[123])[2] and Maingueneau's enunciative-pragmatic work on genre and scenography (1993). One might also think of the often overlooked theorizations of enunciation in Deleuze/Guattari (1980), Lyotard (1988) and some of Lacan's seminars of the 1960s and 1970s (for example 1973).

As there is no direct English equivalent of *énonciation*, translations have often failed to render the rich tradition of pragmatics that has characterized French linguistics in the post-war period. While in English 'enunciation' usually means the articulation of speech, especially in a clear and distinct way, the linguistic term *énonciation* designates linguistic activity more generally. The correlate of *énonciation* is *énoncé*, that is a specific semiotic realization of a communicative act, which often has the form of a phrase. In English, *énonciation* and *énoncé* are not easily distinguished as both are sometimes interchangeably translated by 'utterance.' In the following, I will use 'utterance' in the sense of *énoncé* and take 'enunciation' to be the equivalent of *énonciation.* Much more could be said about the surprisingly difficult task of translating linguistic terminology from French into English, and vice versa. Suffice it to say that with all these terms—that is *énonciation*: the act or process of using language; *énoncé*: the utterance as a product of this process; *énoncer*: utter, say, voice, speak; *énonciatif:* communicative, pragmatic, discursive, indexical, subjective; *énonciateur*: speaker, voice, source, perspective—all deriving from the common root *énonc-*, a new and distinctive tradition has formed, that is enunciative pragmatics, which accounts for the construction of subjectivity in the many voices of discourse.

Having emerged from structuralist linguistics and semiotics, enunciative pragmatics connects to various disciplinary fields and traditions at the crossroads of language and society (Angermuller et al. 2014). One can cite the philosophy of language as seen in the later work of Wittgenstein (1997), who criticizes the idea of pure language and points out that we cannot use language without engaging in some sort of creative action. With an interest in the question of how, in what modalities and under what circumstances utterances are produced, enunciative pragmatics follows

Austin's idea (1962) that utterances, whether oral or written, reflect speech acts produced by somebody with a specific illocutionary force. Moreover, for qualitative social scientists, enunciative pragmatics adheres to the idea that language is always tied up with practices in which social identities, relationships and subjectivities are constituted. Thus, one can ask how individuals are constructed by means of 'membership categorization devices' and defined as social beings in turn-taking sequences (Sacks 1986) or how polyphonic instances such as animator, principal and author are orchestrated in the interactive situation (Goffman 1981). Yet, unlike actor-centered strands in social research, which place emphasis on observable social practices in their setting, enunciative pragmatics does not claim to have immediate access to the practice of using language. Enunciative pragmatics deals with written or spoken utterances circulating in a discursive community rather than with meaning-producing subjects and situated practices.

Enunciative pragmatics belongs to the universe of linguistic pragmatics. As a subfield of linguistics, pragmatics catalogues linguistic expressions that reflect the use of utterances by somebody 'here' and 'now'. A range of linguistic phenomena, such as deixis, presupposition, argumentation, implicatures and negation, testify to how this activity is linguistically encoded. Here, language serves to construct relationships, as has been argued by politeness theorists who point to the desire in any communicative action to save or improve one's face (Brown and Levinson 1987), like the research on expressing stance, style and identity. In a systematic way, the pragmatic idea of language as social action was theorized in the Systemic-Functional Linguistics of Halliday (1978) which, crucially, has contributed to social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988; Leeuwen 2005), appraisal theory (Martin and White 2005) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1992). From this perspective, the individual needs to make certain linguistic choices, given the communicative functions to be fulfilled in a social situation (see also the functional pragmatics of Ehlich 2007).

The major features of enunciative pragmatics vis-à-vis these other strands in linguistic pragmatics may be summarized as follows: (1) an emphasis on the opaque materiality of (mostly written) texts whose meaning cannot be read from the surface; (2) the break with meaningful experience and subjective interpretation through an analytical practice which highlights the formal linguistic markers of enunciation (for example *I, but, not* …); (3) a preference for the non-subjectivist study of discursive subjectivity over more semantic, hermeneutic or content-related approaches.

Enunciative pragmatics prolongs the anti-humanist intellectual heritage of structuralism and poststructuralism and breaks with subjectivist conceptions of meaning-making. The subject is not a source of meaning; rather, as Bakhtin (1963) argues, it is a product of the many voices staged by the utterances of a discourse. At the same time, enunciative pragmatics offers a wealth of analytical tools to account for the positions subjects occupy in discourse. Therefore, the methodology of enunciative pragmatics allows us to analyze how, in the act of reading and writing, utterances are contextualized with respect to who speaks, when and where. Inspired by the critique of the sovereign subject in Foucault (1969), it shows how subjectivity is constructed in a multitude of voices, sources and speakers and tied to the linguistic forms and formal markers which organize the enunciation.

It should now be clear that the title of this book—*Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis*—refers not only to a theoretical discourse which is sometimes labeled 'poststructuralist' (even though this label is hardly known in France, see my sociohistorical account of French intellectuals in France, Angermuller 2015). Following the critical constructivist spirit that has come to pervade sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (Baxter's Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis can be cited as an example, 2003), it also outlines enunciative pragmatics as a poststructralist framework which breaks with the static, homogenizing and abstract approaches to language one commonly associates with structuralism. Yet, while both French Theory and enunciative pragmatics have emerged as a reaction to structuralism, there has been little exchange between them, the first having its base in the literary and cultural field and the interpretive social sciences, the latter in French linguistics.

In responding to the demand for this long overdue encounter, this book delineates the contours of a poststructuralist discourse analysis. In this view, discourse presents itself as an open and dynamic terrain of protean perspectives and nested voices in which the discourse participants are confronted with the difficult practical task of defining their place in discourse. Discourse is considered to be a linguistically encoded practice of positioning oneself and others and creating discursive relationships with others within a play of polyphonic voices. As opposed to a structuralist vision of a grand discourse from above, we will zoom in to the level of small textual passages and discover the complex polyphonic play of voices staged by the utterances of discourse. The objective is to account for the traces the subject leaves in its utterances—a subject which must not be confounded with a

constituted origin or source of meaning (that is an 'author' or 'actor') but which should rather be seen as a set of shifting and unstable places and positions which the discourse participants process as they enter discourse. Yet even though this monograph deals with texts, one must not forget that intellectual discourse as a positioning practice is not only linguistically but also socially constrained. If it catalogues the linguistic resources through which the discourse participants negotiate their positions in intellectual discourse, the social, institutional and political resources mobilized in the positioning practices of their field have been accounted for elsewhere (Angermuller 2015).

With the discourse analysis techniques of enunciative pragmatics, it aims to reveal the gaps and fissures, the bugs and glitches, the conflicts and antagonisms in discourse. Thus, *Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis* can be said to be directed against three theoretical adversaries: the humanist, who believes in autonomous subjects as the source and origin of social and linguistic activity; the realist, who believes in objective realities that exist independently of discourse; and the hermeneuticist, who believes in a world of transparent and homogeneous meaning. It is critical of silencing the voice of the Other, of policing resistant practices and controlling disobedient knowledge, of homogenizing the social through representations of 'the' society, 'the' culture or 'the' discourse.

This book consists of four parts. To map the evolution of discourse analysis in France, Chapter 2 will conduct a detailed discussion of the enunciative-pragmatic turn in French linguistics. Then, in Chapter 3, I will sketch out a poststructuralist methodology in discourse research which investigates the ways in which a written text refers to its context. In Chapter 4, I will apply the discourse analytical instruments to a sample of key theoretical texts from around 1966 (Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Sollers), which will reveal the subtle play of voices and references via which these theorists negotiate their positions in discourse. In the conclusion, I will plead for ongoing critical reflection on the subject by taking into consideration our own symbolic practices when we read, speak and write.

In bridging pragmatics and poststructuralism, this monograph addresses all those who are interested in reconciling discourse theory with discourse analysis. By radicalizing the critical constructivist tendencies in sociolinguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, it responds to a need of rigorous analytical instruments for analyzing language in its social dimensions. Even though the book is firmly rooted in linguistics, one does not have to be a linguist to adopt its frame of analysis. Philosophers of language may be interested to see how to account for

discourse by departing from utterances as the smallest units of analysis. Literary critics can find inspiration in an approach that accounts for the question of auctoriality and intertextuality. Cultural analysts will observe the creative appropriation of subject positions in a polyphonic play of voices. And social scientists will discover how social order and agency are constructed and represented through the textual markers of polyphony. Yet, just as with any other text, the meaning of this text, too, needs to be constructed by readers coming from a discursive community whose background is more or less out of reach, at least for the originator of this text.

2
A History of Discourse Analysis in France

From discursive formation to enunciative heterogeneity

The field of discourse analysis comprises a variety of traditions and approaches. As their smallest common denominator, we can consider the assumption that signs, sentences, and texts do not have any inherent meaning, but that meaning presupposes a context and that linguistic activity is not limited to the level of signs and sentences. In the Anglo-American debate, influenced by pragmatism and analytical philosophy, *discourse* is in many cases understood as organized turn taking, for example as conversations and interactions. By contrast, the tradition that has emerged since the 1960s in France tends to associate *discours* with written texts circulating in larger social communities (Maingueneau 1987; Détrie et al. 2001; Charaudeau and Maingueneau 2002; Mazière 2005; Münchow 2010).

French discourse analysis begins to develop under the auspices of two formalist tendencies in linguistics: distributionalism, inspired by the North American linguist Zellig Harris, and structuralism, which goes back to Ferdinand de Saussure. Discourse analysis receives its name from Harris, close to the behaviorist language theory of Leonard Bloomfield and still known as teacher of Noam Chomsky's.

In his *Discourse analysis* (Harris 1963), first published in 1952, Harris examines the organization of linguistic phenomena beyond the level of individual sentences (in French: *énoncé*) and thus defines discourse as the transphrastic organization of texts. Like Bloomfield, Harris insists on the role of linguistic forms, whose regularities are determined by procedures of comparison and exchange. Harris traces the syntactic and transformative rules which allow the formation of a discourse from individual sentences. His question is how formal elements extend beyond the

sentence and form a syntactic order. The meanings that are marshaled by discourse, however, play no role for him. This meaning-free discourse analysis, which is to give important impulses for Chomsky's transformative grammar, was propagated in the 1960s by Sumpf and Dubois (1969). It will also influence Michel Pêcheux's *Automatic Discourse Analysis* (Pêcheux 1969) and inspire certain lexicometric instruments from the 1970s on, such as the text-statistical software *Alceste* by Max Reinert. Indeed, the quantifying instruments of corpus linguistics traditionally play an important role in French discourse analysis (cf. Lebart and Salem 1994). Thus, lexicometric methods have been developed since the 1960s, for example in the research laboratory of Saint Cloud, where the various contexts and uses of 'key words' (*mots-pivots*) were inventoried until the 1980s (Tournier et al. 1975; Bonnafous and Tournier 1995; Lebart et al. 1998). In the empirical applications of Harris' method, the syntactic and transformative relations between the graphic forms of a corpus are often of lesser importance than the lexicometric determination of its distributions and co-occurrences (cf. Robin 1973).

While Harris' distributionist method focuses on the syntactic linkages between the sentences of a corpus, the semiotic approaches deriving from Saussure's theory aim at the semantic values of signs. Saussurian linguistics, which describes language (*langue*) as a system of difference without a positive term, is a second impetus for the emergence of discourse analysis in France (Saussure 1962). Saussure shows how the variety of linguistic phenomena can be traced back to a limited number of distinctive elements and grammatical rules. In the transition from the linguistic system (*langue*), that is the entirety of grammatically possible sentences, to the actualized *parole*, the speaker needs to select and combine the smallest constitutive elements of a language in order to form sentences. Their meaning depends on the difference of these elements vis-à-vis all possible elements of a language. Meaning is thus not inherent in the individual sign, but results from its position in a system, which consists of nothing but differences. In contrast to Harris, Saussure is interested in the meaning of signs. If signs exhibit a dual structure: signified (*signifié*) and the signifier (*signifiant*), Saussure insists on the arbitrary nature of their association. Saussure knows neither the notion of discourse nor the term discourse analysis. Yet he underscores the more general relevance of the formal-linguistic model for the social sciences and humanities by pointing out the role linguistics plays in a more general science of social life—semiology. Among his most important successors in France, we can cite Émile Benveniste. Benveniste was to compare a great number of languages with the method of difference

and exchange. Following the Danish Saussurian Louis Hjelsmlev, A.J. Greimas developed a general semiotics which conceived the meaning of signs as a product of semiotic operations. Furthermore, a number of cultural semioticians of the 1960s used Saussure's differentialist model to decode the cultural logic of modern and postmodern societies (Barthes 1967; Baudrillard 1968; Bourdieu 1972).

The field of discourse analysis in France was established at the end of the 1960s. In the light of intellectual paradigms of the time such as structuralism, psychoanalysis and Marxism, two philosophers discovered linguistic and social theory (Pêcheux 1969; Foucault 1969): Michel Pêcheux, taking up Althusser's and Lacan's theoretical investigations of the symbolic, the social and the subject, became the theoretical head of a school which influenced numerous linguists of the 1970s. Michel Foucault, the discourse theorist with great international renown, also turned to the problem of discourse in the 1960s (Foucault 1966). However, even though Foucault reaches out to a broader intellectual public, his influence on the French field of discourse analysis remains rather diffuse (cf. Maingueneau and Angermuller 2007).

If Foucault did not found a school, this was not only due to his aversion to long-term disciplinary and theoretical commitments, but also to the fact that he no longer published any works on discourse analysis after the *Order of Discourse* (1971). While Pêcheux and Foucault offer only few methodological instruments for empirical research, their accomplishments are more theoretical, for they situate discourse analysis in the broader intellectual debate on subjectivity and ideology. In the spirit of Saussure's vision of an overall semiology of social life, they search for the rules organizing the production and linkage of the utterances of discourse. From Althusser and Lacan, they take the idea that discourse has an institutional place (Foucault) and that the subject has a symbolic position in discourse (Pêcheux). Against this theoretical background, the field of discourse in France develops and receives its major impulses from linguists interested in social and political questions (Maingueneau 1976; Henry 1977; Marandin 1979; Courtine 1981; Charaudeau 1997), linguistically informed historians (Robin 1973; Guilhaumou et al. 1994) and sociologists (Leimdorfer 1992; Achard 1993; Jenny 1997; Chateauraynaud 2003).

In the course of the 1970s, the field of discourse analysis consolidated itself and turned its attention to empirical research. Especially from political discourse analysis, several larger studies emerge, drawing on a growing repertoire of text-analytical and corpus-linguistic instruments (Robin 1973; Seriot 1985). There were further developments on the

theoretical front, as well. We can mention, for instance, an increasing problematization of discourse as closed structure and the internal analysis in the manner of Harris and Saussure. According to Pêcheux's scheme of periodization, discourse analysis passes through three major phases. For DA 1 (discourse analysis around 1970) discourse was a closed machine, operating in a completely autonomous manner. DA 2 (around 1975) discovered the dimensions of the overarching before and elsewhere of discourse. DA 3 (around 1980) questioned container-models of discourse while abrogating the inside/outside distinction. Now discourse analysis has entered its 'deconstructive' phase, as its inner or absent borders receive theoretical attention (Pêcheux 1990). Calling into question the container-model of discourse does not remain without consequences for the analytical procedure. DA 1 was concerned with the question concerning how elements of discourse are assembled to form a complete whole. Its objects of analysis were autonomous texts, whose transphrastic organization must be examined (cf. for example Harris or Saussure). DA 2 directed its sights to what happened elsewhere and strayed into the text from outside (see the problem of discursive formation, interdiscourse and preconstruct in Pêcheux). The assumption of a discourse with stable boundaries was to finally become problematic by DA 3. Now it is no longer possible to compile 'natural' text corpora or to delimit the precise units of discourse. It becomes necessary to reflect on the heterogeneity of the utterances of a discourse whose external borders must be constantly negotiated anew. And only now must one differentiate systematically between texts and discourse: whereas DA 1 had understood discourses as the transphrastic organization of autonomous texts, DA 2 had discovered the institutional places where texts were equipped with specific meanings and preconstructed knowledge mobilized. Finally, DA 3 conceived of texts as material surfaces in which discursive practices were inscribed.

While the gradual de-limiting of discourse grows apace with the crisis of the structural model, the pragmatic dimension of discursive activity becomes increasingly important. The pragmatic turn that linguistics has seen since the 1970s is supported by the reception of Anglo-American currents, such as Wittgenstein's philosophy of language or Austin's speech-act theory. Récanati (1979a) and Berrendonner (1981), for example, enquire into the rules underlying the production of linguistic events and how their performativity, reflexivity and opacity can be accounted for. This pragmatic turn involves a fundamental change of perspective—from the analysis of formal structures ('texts'), to the analysis of language use in the specific contexts of enunciation ('discourse'). The distinction