

Research Space
Conference paper

Critical discourse studies and hegemony – A gramscian approach

Castaldi, J.

*Critical Discourse Studies and Hegemony:
A Gramscian Approach*

Jacopo Castaldi
Canterbury Christ Church University

Overview of the presentation

- *Hegemony* in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)
- Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*
 - *Hegemony* as a neutral concept
 - Political vs. civil society
- A *Gramscian approach* to CDS
 - Theoretical rationale
 - Focus on civil discourses
 - A multidisciplinary approach

Hegemony in CDS

- Hegemony as a *process*: “being hegemonic is never more than a relative and more or less precarious position” (Fairclough 1992: 49)
- Hegemony as natural and commonsensical (van Dijk 1998: 274)
- Hegemony as *dominant ideology* (Machin and Mayr 2012: 24; Wodak and Meyer 2016: 9)

Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*

Some definitions from the Prison Notebooks:

“‘Hegemony’ means a determinate system of moral life [conception of life, etc.] [...] Has there ever been a state without “hegemony”? [...] There is struggle between two hegemonies - always. Why does one of them triumph? Because of its intrinsic ‘logical’ qualities?” (Gramsci Q8, §227 in Buttigieg 2007: 373)

Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*

Some definitions from the Prison Notebooks:

"Hegemony and democracy. Among the many meanings of democracy, the most realistic and concrete one, in my view, is that which can be brought into relief through the connection between democracy and the concept of hegemony. In the hegemonic system, there is democracy between the leading group and the groups that are led to the extent that [the development of the economy and thus] the legislation [which is an expression of that development] favors the [molecular] transition from the groups that are led to the leading groups" (Gramsci Q8, §191 in Buttigieg 2007: 345)

Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*

- Hegemony vs. coercion (Filippini 2017: 18)

"For Gentile, history is entirely history of the state, while, for Croce, it is "ethico-political". In other words, Croce wants to maintain a distinction between civil society and political society, between hegemony and dictatorship" (Gramsci Q6, §10 in Buttigieg 2007: 9)

Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*

- Hegemony as cultural leadership: “leadership based on the consent of the led” (Bates 1975: 352).

“the great intellectuals exercise hegemony, which presupposes a certain collaboration, that is, an active and voluntary (free) consent, in other words, a liberal-democratic regime” (Gramsci Q6, §10 in Buttigieg 2007: 9)

Hegemony as a neutral concept

- Hegemony as an *instrument* in the social struggle

“‘hegemony’ becomes the key concept in understanding the very unity existing in a concrete social formation” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 7)

- Importance of a normative standpoint (Sayer 2009)

Political vs. civil society

"Encyclopedic notions. Civil society. One must distinguish civil society as Hegel understands it and in this sense it is often used in these notes (that is, in the sense of the political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the whole of society; as the ethical content of the state)" (Gramsci Q6, §24 in Buttigieg 2007: 20)

Political vs. civil discourse

- Political discourse: the discourse produced by “the political institutions of the state [...] parties and professional politicians [...] interest groups, social movements (Chilton 2004: 3-4)
- Civil discourse: the discourse produced by “those ‘private organisms’ - schools, churches, clubs, journals, and parties - which contribute in molecular fashion to the formation of social and political consciousness” (Bates 1975: 353).

A Gramscian approach to CDS

Theoretical rationale:

- Chilton and the *Machiavellian Intelligence* argument (2005: 27)
- Mass-mediated popular genres as the most effective way for hegemonic discourse to be spread: *reach* and *cognitive / genre expectations*

A Gramscian approach to CDS

civil discourses

Genres:

films and TV series,
animated films and TV
series,
reality TV shows,
documentaries,
sport programs and sport
coverage,
music songs and videos

Media:

TV and cinema,
social media,
games and videogames,
comic strips,
fashion and leisure
magazines,
literature,
the visual arts,
radio

A Gramscian approach to CDS

A multidisciplinary approach:

- Socio-cognitive approaches to CDS (van Dijk 1998, Hart 2010)
- Evolutionary psychology (Cosmides and Tooby 2000)
- Multimodal social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Kress 2010)
- Media Studies (Ott and Mack 2010)

Conclusion

Theoretical implications and issues:

- Focus on civil, mass-mediated discourse
- Importance of insights from cognitive linguistics and evolutionary psychology
- Stress on cultural concepts as the basis of “leadership based on the consent of the led” (Bates 1975: 352).

Conclusion

- Methodological implications and issues:
 - Vast range of mass-mediated cultural discourses, genres and texts
 - Importance of reception studies as part of this approach
 - Difficult to find out to what extent and how hegemonic discourses affects the perception of reality in the viewers

Thank you

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