Action, discourse and knowledge in online discussion forums

Linnea Hanell

Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism, Stockholm University, Sweden

Research on entextualized knowledge has traditionally been designed in ways that construe text consumers as collectives of passive receivers to whom information ought to be directed. However, with the present modes of digital communication, it is becoming increasingly meaningful to rather look into the complex ways in which people actively find, evaluate, produce and reproduce knowledge with different kinds of resources. This approach challenges sociolinguistics to pose questions about action and agency in relation to the concept of knowledge. Following the tradition of mediated discourse analysis (e.g. Scollon & Scollon 2004; Norris & Jones 2005), I argue that these questions call for a closer inquiry into the intersection of action and discourse. This talk draws on empirical data from online discussion forums oriented to particular themes of knowledge, namely parenting and home improvement. These themes are themselves entangled in wider societal discourses. I frame the discussion forums as nexuses of discourse in circulation, illustrating some processes in which discourse on these themes is entextualized, and thereby recentered as knowledge. Such knowledge is in turn often negated when juxtaposed with officialized discourse of, for example, health care and engineering, in which knowledge attained from discussion forums more often than not is considered low value or possibly harmful. A better understanding for such cycles of discourse is vital in the pursuit of anchoring knowledge as a sociolinguistic object.

References


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