SOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Digging Beneath Text

Communication underpins social change

When we talk about social problems and develop ideas and agendas to change, we do this based on — often subconscious — assumptions about how the world works. This goes for academics, policy makers, interest groups and members of the general population, too.

These assumptions are often so normal to us that they remain hidden, "unspoken" and "untouched" but they influence and constrain the ways in which agendas to tackle social problems are built and implemented.

Exposing limitations to change

Sociological discourse analysis allows deep insights on the ways in which we understand the world around us — the aspects we give relevance, the things we take for granted and the range of possibilities we consider.

It operates like an anteater foraging through termite mounds and anthills. It pokes into visible, raised themes to extract and digest large amounts of text which shape these themes. Texts are "dug up" to interrogate, contextualise and understand their inner working. In this way, established ways of seeing the world are exposed as being assumptions rather than facts.

Just like ants and termites shape the land of the anteater, text shapes how we see the world. With sociological discourse analysis, similarly to the anteater's foraging, the key elements that shape, evolve and solidify the visible landscape are accessed, extracted and processed — uncovering the "inner working" of what we say and do.

Enabling different ways of "seeing" and "doing"

Anteaters churn up the land as they forage. They can use their claws to tear into anthills, but they never destroy them. Similarly, sociological discourse analysis interferes with the discursive and socio-political landscape in a gentle way. It does not change the landscape, but it opens up new pathways in areas which were assumed to be solid ground.

Studying texts such as speeches, conversations, newspaper articles and policy reports, sociological discourse analysis reveals limitations in the ways we approach social issues. It exposes constraints in our ways of seeing the world in a particular way, and the range and extent of action for change that we consider possible.

It prompts us to reflect upon how we argue and reason, and the evidence we draw upon to do so. As such, it can encourage us to go beyond what we take for granted to develop and apply different ways of "seeing" and "doing".

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Aspect