

How to Analyse Texts

A toolkit for students of English



RONALD CARTER AND ANGELA GODDARD



How to Analyse Texts

How to Analyse Texts is the essential introductory textbook and toolkit for language analysis. This book shows the reader how to undertake detailed, language-focused, contextually sensitive analyses of a wide range of texts – spoken, written and multimodal. The book constitutes a flexible resource which can be used in different ways across a range of courses and at different levels.

This textbook includes:

- three parts covering research and study skills, language structure and use, and how texts operate in sociocultural contexts
- a wide range of international real-life texts, including items from *South China Morning Post*, art'otel Berlin and *Metro* Sweden, which cover digital and print media, advertising, recipes and much more
- objectives and skill review for each section, activities, commentaries, suggestions for independent assignments, and an analysis checklist for students to follow
- a combined glossary and index and a comprehensive further reading section
- a companion website at www.routledge.com/cw/goddard with further links and exercises for students.

Written by two experienced teachers of English language, *How to Analyse Texts* is key reading for all students of English language and linguistics.

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'Without a doubt the most practical and innovative textbook on text analysis on the market. Not only do Carter and Goddard provide clear explanations of theoretical concepts, but they also provide concrete advice about how to go about the practical work of collecting and analysing a range of different texts. A superb introduction to text analysis for beginning students and a useful resource book for more advanced students and researchers.'

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Rajend Mesthrie, *University of Cape Town, South Africa*

'This impressive introductory textbook guides students step by step through the intricate processes of understanding and interpreting texts.'

Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard, *Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil, and University of Birmingham, UK*

How to Analyse Texts

A toolkit for
students of English

Ronald Carter and Angela Goddard

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To Jane and Adrian

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Texts

The texts for analysis and exploration in this book are taken from a wide range of sources and from different parts of the world. These include, for example, advertisements; travel writing; poetry; novels; newspaper reviews and articles; instructions; menus and recipes; everyday signs, symbols, and notices; informal conversations; new – and older – forms of digital communication; political speeches; letters; computer generated corpus concordances and frequency lists; and many more. A full list of texts is given at the back of the book, with page numbers for ease of reference.

Introduction

MAKING THIS BOOK WORK FOR YOU

This book aims to be, as its title suggests, a toolkit for active enquiry into language use in the many texts that surround us. It will provide a range of starting points for you to think about language patterns, both in terms of how texts work internally and also how they construct and reveal the wider culture that produces them.

Because there is much more to say about texts in different parts of the world than a single book can ever describe, the working method for this book is to provide you with useful frameworks and approaches and give you plenty of texts to practice on. You can then go further by replacing the texts and using the toolkit for the analysis of texts from different **World Englishes** and from contexts where you live, study and work.

Applying the ideas in this book will mean being active in collecting texts for yourself and analysing them. A toolkit is something to be used, not just described. The belief running through this book is that while learners need to be given tools and shown how to use them, real skills are only developed in practical applications and activities.

Being active about learning is easy to say – it's something we would all want to be – but this idea needs breaking down further. **Part I** of this book will take you through a series of careful steps in order to help you set up some good learning routines. It will help you to have some resources to hand and some confidence when you are asked to branch out on your own and do some independent work.

Parts II and III are more about explicit frameworks for analysis, and ideas for how to put the material you will be constantly collecting to good use. **Part II** has a more text-internal perspective, with explanations of some of the structural aspects of language that frequently need to be understood in order to describe how a text works. **Part III** is more text-external, focusing on some of the more contextual aspects of interpretation. Both of these perspectives are essential to a good analysis. Each Part and Section has a set of aims at the start and a learning review at the end. As well as frequent activities, there are many ideas for assignments, where suggestions are made for longer term and more sustained investigations.

The book offers models for how to write about the language perspectives covered, both in the main part of the text and in the form of commentaries

2 INTRODUCTION

at the end. When key terms are first used in the book, they are emboldened and defined in the glossary at the end. At the end you will also find a summary checklist, which will act as a set of prompts for analysis, helping you to recall the different aspects you have worked on during the course of the book.

New methodological approaches to text analysis are being developed all the time by academic researchers. A relatively recent phenomenon is the development of language **corpora** (singular – **corpus**), which are digital, searchable collections of millions of words. There are explanations of these new resources as the book progresses. There is also a special section at the back of the book where different corpora are listed and a range of projects and activities are suggested.

How you use this book is obviously up to you. The book is divided into its three different parts specifically because we are aware that language courses vary tremendously from place to place in their emphasis, even within one community, and also that your own starting points are likely to be different from those of a fellow student. But however you use the book, we believe that as a whole it offers something distinctively different from many other textbooks. Acting as a flexible support to active enquiry, and approaching language as a creative resource for human communication, this book views texts of all kinds – from Shakespearean sonnets to public bathroom notices – as complex pieces of communication and therefore worth analysing.

TEXTS AND DISCOURSES: DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES

The terms 'text' and '**discourse**' are increasingly used interchangeably, but there are subtle differences between them and they have very different origins and histories. 'Text' has been used more in arts and humanities subjects, while 'discourse', and its plural 'discourses', have their origins in the social sciences.

The terms have had a different scale of reference, reflecting the preoccupations of their different subject bases. While a 'text' has been seen more as a single artefact, 'discourse' has tended to refer to more extensive communication – a cluster of repeated representations, or interactions of some length and substance. The term 'discourses' as used in social science refers to whole patterns of thinking, knowing and behaving that are built up within a society from repeated occurrences of viewpoints expressed in particular ways.

The different orientations suggested by the terms can be exemplified with reference to SMS usage. We talk about 'text messages' (or 'txt messages', where people are at pains to distinguish SMS from other kinds of text), referring to the digital artefacts we compose on phone keyboards. But we can also talk about 'the discourse of SMS', in which case our focus moves away from individual compositions towards a larger-scale view of the nature

of this form of communication. Such a shift moves us beyond the finer details of the language features towards a greater understanding of who might use the communication, and where, when and why they might do so, as well as the longer-term social implications of its use. It is the aim of this book to bridge these different areas of focus, emphasising not just how texts work internally but how they are connected with the wider world that produced them. In other words, our theoretical approach is discourse-analytic: we will be taking a discourse perspective on the texts that we analyse.

'Text' has also traditionally referred primarily to written communication, whereas 'discourse' has focused more on spoken language. Older textbooks on 'discourse analysis', at least within language studies, are likely to be looking primarily at conversations, speeches and other types of talk. However, in more recent times the two terms have moved closer together, with both 'text' and 'discourse' encompassing more than simply written or spoken communication. New forms of digital communication have aided this broadening of focus, encouraging ideas about the inter-connectedness of speech and writing rather than seeing them as different, discrete systems. For example, Twitter users produce 'tweets', communication symbolised as birdsong (endorsed by Twitter's bird logo) – but tweets are messages that, like SMS, are keyboard products. The increasingly **multimodal** nature of our modern communication systems takes us beyond any easy or narrow conceptualisations of speech (or sound) and writing (or symbol).

In keeping with this broader view of communication as multimodal, this book will cover aspects of spoken and written language, but will not divide its coverage into sections on that basis. Of particular interest throughout the book is the intertwined nature of speech and writing, so that aspects that have historically been associated with particular types of communication are brought into view more generally. For example, the dimensions of space and time, which form the focus for some of the work in [Part III](#), are seen as significant for texts of all kinds, and links are made not only between spoken and written texts but also between literary texts and many other kinds of communication.

While we certainly do not ignore important visual elements, such as images, that form an integral part of many messages, the central concern of this book is with language in the verbal sense. [Part II](#) explores aspects of language patterning that recur across many different texts, helping to form the basis for an analytical toolkit. [Part III](#) situates language in broader dimensions of context, enabling the different tools in the kit to be selected for particular purposes.

Although the different parts of the book do prioritise different aspects of analysis, the approach of the whole book is to see texts not as isolated artefacts, but as part of the social texture of any community. There are many texts for you to work on, and equally many suggestions for activities that will enable you to look around your own community and understand more about its textual output. This will help you to take a broad, discourse-oriented view of the texts that are part of your daily life and that both reflect and construct its realities.

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Part I

Foundations

Researching texts

Aim: **Part I** will help you develop the research skills that are fundamental to the academic work of text analysis.

CONTENTS: PART I

- 1 Your materials**
 - 2 Gathering more materials**
 - 3 Sizing up the job: questions, scope and focus**
 - 4 The right tools for the job: research methods**
 - 5 Preparing the ground: reading and note-making skills**
 - 6 Analysing**
 - 7 Reporting: writing about texts**
- Review your skills**
- Commentaries for Part I**

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CHAPTER 1

Your materials

Developing a spirit of enquiry starts in your own location. Research is not necessarily about leaving familiar territory – some of the best work is done on home soil. At the core of all good research is the ability to stand back from what is known and see it afresh. This can be done in any context, familiar or not.

However, standing back from language is never easy, because it seems so natural to us. The activities that follow are designed to get you looking at yourself anew – as the source of some good language materials.

A LANGUAGE INVENTORY

Answer the questions below, making an inventory as you go. At the end of this process, you will have a profile of yourself as a resource for ongoing text analysis.

Activity 1.1

1.1 YOUR OWN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Make a list of any material you have, or have access to, that relates to your younger self. For example:

Early reading books	Teachers' reports	Diaries
Old comics and magazines	School exercise books	Games
Greetings cards	Collections, eg football cards, cards about toys	
Recordings of yourself	Letters, eg to a penpal	

Examples of your digital communication, eg emails, SMSs, social media posts.

8 YOUR MATERIALS

1.2 YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Make a list of any people in your immediate social circle who are interesting or intriguing from a language point of view. For example:

- Do you have younger relatives or friends who are themselves using or producing any of the material above?
- Do you have any relatives or friends in occupations that use a specific type of language?
- Do you have any older relatives or friends who have kept material from years ago – for example, sports articles, greetings cards etc.?
- Do you have friends from different communities who use language in distinctive ways?

1.3 YOU NOW...

- Do you belong to any groups or take part in any activities that have their own forms of language?
- Do you do any work that involves you in using language in a certain way?
- Do you collect, read and/or write particular sorts of material?
- Individuals are said to have their own 'idiolect', or set of linguistic fingerprints that are uniquely their own. Give some examples of language habits or expressions that characterise your idiolect.

1.4 ...AND YOUR ATTITUDES

Everyone has an attitude to some aspect of language or another. What are some of your pet loves and hates about language? What are some of the things that make you laugh, think, feel confused, cry? Read the list below, and add any further items that you feel strongly about:

- The way people speak on mobile phones
- Shop names
- Gravestone inscriptions
- Family conversations
- Sign language
- Advertising language
- Language and stereotyping
- Political speeches
- Occupational language – e.g. legal language, scientific language
- Children's expressions
- SMS
- The way people communicate online – e.g. in blogs, on Twitter, on social media

- Language and 'political correctness'
- Terms of address – e.g. words used to women
- Swearing
- Song lyrics
- Personal ads – e.g. the language of internet dating sites
- The language of some rituals – e.g. weddings, funerals
- Language use in some specific contexts – e.g. at the hairdresser's, at the dentist's
- Communication with animals – e.g. the way people speak to their dogs
- Graffiti
- Conversations between strangers at bus stops or on trains
- Greetings
- The language of junk mail
- Bias in newspapers
- The language of some magazines
- Certain types of literature
- Road signs
- Greetings cards
- The language of birth announcements or obituaries
- Some new words and expressions
- Particular **accents**, dialects or languages

When you feel you have exhausted all the topics here, write a summary for yourself of all the different language resources you could tap into, and all the different language areas that provoke a reaction in you.

Your summary is, in effect, a description of you as a language resource. It shows some possible sources of texts, and it also shows some areas where doing research could be rewarding for you. Research questions that arise from something you find personally affecting – whether that's pleasurable, or annoying – can be powerful because you care.

This completes the first layer of your toolkit.

CHAPTER 2

Gathering more materials

Simply sticking with your existing resources will not give you a way to develop further. You need to plan for how you will go about collecting new sources of language use.

Here are some ways you can add to your raw materials:

2.1 RECORDING

Keep a note of interesting examples of language use that you see and/or hear as you go about your everyday life. There are times when we all wish we had had a way to record a conversation that unfolds near us, perhaps on a bus or in the street. However, even if the conversation itself proves elusive, it is still possible to record some elements of it in a notebook or notemaking tool on a phone or other device. Try to make a note of what it was that you found so interesting.

Of course, recording sound and/or video has become far easier with mobile digital technologies, and there are many examples of undercover recordings that are made by investigative journalists attempting to expose what they see as corruption or bad behaviour of some kind. However, academic research ethics also warn us against doing anything which causes harm to individuals during the process of research, particularly if those individuals are vulnerable – for example, if they are very young, elderly and infirm, mentally ill, or powerless in some way. Ideally, if you want to record people in conversation, you should ask the permission of the speakers. However, researchers recognise that the very act of doing this can alter what would otherwise occur naturally, for example by people saying what they think you want to hear, or by being on their best behaviour. This idea of the researcher affecting the results of their own research is called the **observer's paradox**. Sometimes, a compromise position is reached where recording is covert (if it really has to be) and then permission is asked afterwards – and may be refused. In any case, whatever is transcribed for public view must not reveal any details about the participants' lives, such as their names, where they live, where they work, and so on.

While recording or photographing individuals always requires some thinking about ethical behaviour, capturing images of inanimate objects is more straightforward. It may get you some puzzled looks, but there's nothing

to stop you photographing signs, notices and objects that are on public display. However, items in galleries, museums and private collections have their own rules and you need to abide by whatever terms are in operation.

SWEDISH TRAIN SEAT

An example of a picture taken spontaneously. These Swedish train seats are covered with faux graffiti – the fabric has the handwritten names of the Swedish royal family (for example, Kristina, Viktoria, Sofia). Would it be ok to sit on the names of your country's rulers?

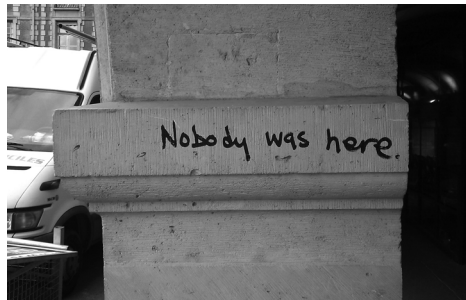


Text 2.1



NOBODY WAS HERE

Here is another example of something seen in passing, this time a piece of real graffiti photographed in a public square in Paris. The writer seems to be playing with the traditional tag of 'X was here'. They claim to be nobody, and in so doing they are creating a paradox because somebody must have written the language.



Text 2.2

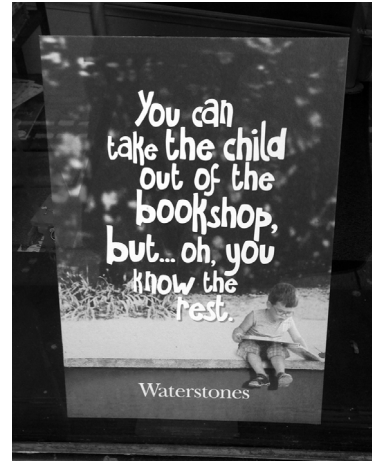




Text 2.3

WATERSTONES

Here is an example of a text that has been professionally produced. This poster, from a UK bookshop, is interesting from a language perspective because it assumes that readers know a particular type of saying ('You can take the X out of the Y, but you can't take the Y out of the X'). This expression means that you can physically remove someone, but the context you've removed them from stays in their hearts and minds. An example could be 'You can take a girl out of school but you can't take school out of the girl', to mean that you can make a girl leave school but she will always be interested in learning.



Encouraging readers to interact with a text is a well known strategy used by advertisers to draw attention to a message. However, this text uses the routine pattern in a clever way, by suggesting that not only is the saying so well known that it doesn't need repeating, but so is the idea that books represent a lifelong enrichment for children.



Text 2.4

GONE TANNING

Here are two further texts from different parts of the world that use references to other texts (termed **intertextuality**) as a starting point for their own creative language use. The first text, right, is from a shop selling beachwear in Lisbon, Portugal. The sign announces that the shop is closed by referring intertextually to the phrase 'Gone fishing', implying that the writer is enjoying himself elsewhere. In using the phrase 'Gone tanning', the suggestion is that the author is on a beach somewhere.



CI GUSTA

The second text, right, is from a food outlet specialising in ice cream and light lunches in Chennai, India. The shop is called 'ci gusta', part of a **global** company whose headquarters are in Italy. The carrier bag uses an intertextual reference to the phrase 'Have a good day' – originally American English but now used in many other countries too. 'Have a food day' is ci gusta's international slogan, used on their website as well as on their packaging.



Text 2.5



2.2 ARCHIVING

Having established the idea that you need to look around constantly for interesting texts, the next issue is how to store them. You may well end up with a variety of text types – paper notebooks, cuttings from newspapers and magazines, junk mail, digital notes on a phone, tablet or computer, sound files, video clips, photographs, screen grabs, saved internet chats and web links, to name but a few. How you organise your collection is up to you, but you will need a system that is searchable and logical. For example, you could store particular text types all together, so you have all your photographs in one digital file, speech transcripts in another; and scanned paper cuttings in a third. Or you could file your texts by theme and put texts of different types under particular headings. As an example of the latter, see below, taken from a real researcher's archive. This collection could be entitled 'interesting shop names: men's clothes', with details of the names, sources, dates, and places, as well as the questions raised by each example.