



Intertextuality

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What is it?

Intertextuality highlights that all instances and types of discourse (spoken and written) bear relationships to other instances and/ or types of discourse. There are therefore no “stand-alone” communicative events. One frequent intertextual phenomenon is quoted speech. Narrative is also intertextual, as participants have to connect, embed or laminate two events: the current and the narrated interaction. Similarly, people may indirectly evoke other communicative moments, such as when a political orator adopts a style associated with a different orator.

There is not only intertextuality between individual communicative events, but between types or genres of events. Participants may, for example, embed one genre or way of speaking within another, making school lessons sound like sermons. Broadly conceived, it is through intertextuality that social actors find likenesses and links within and across communicative moments.

Who uses the concept?

Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin are two key literary theorists associated with the term. It has been extensively taken up in ethnography of communication, linguistic anthropology, and interactional sociolinguistics as a way to understand how participants make connections among different moments and types of communicative practice.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

It is fundamental to how people make meaning within and across communicative events. Intertextuality may contribute to a discourse-based

sense of belonging to the same community, such as when people circulate and recognize the “same” story, slogan, or proverb. Differently positioned participants may make different intertextual connections.

What work remains?

There is continued need to show how people make intertextual connections within and between communicative events, as they harken back, across, or forward to other communicative instances and genres. Such a focus takes us beyond a focus on individual speech events, and beyond oversimplifying distinctions between “micro” and “macro” approaches to communication. Scholars should thus continue to investigate the intertextual processes that help to produce the experience that larger social formations (“culture,” “race”) exist. More work is needed on situations where participants do not share processes of interpreting or producing intertextual connections.

Resources

- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, R. (2008). *A world of others' words: Cross-cultural perspectives on intertextuality*. Malden, MA: Wiley.
- Bauman, R., & Briggs, C. (1992). Genre, intertextuality, and social power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 2(2), 131-172.
- Silverstein, M. (2005). Axes of evals: Token versus type interdiscursivity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 15(1), 6-22.