

MODULE 2: CRITICAL TEXT STUDY. PAPER 1: CROSS-EXAMINING THE TEXT

(BAAL News Autumn 2006)

Read the following text and answer the questions.

Our cognitive processes are ultimately embodied in our physical nature; hence our most basic linguistic tokens are derived from and expressive of our awareness of ourselves as individuals located and moving in three-dimensional physical space. At the same time, however, language and thought are not the property of individuals, but are distributed among the members of a community. They are therefore defined by and in turn define the underlying discursive formations of that community: the social group's self-constructed reality and the power relations, both intra- and inter-community, in which the group's members are enmeshed. All uses of language are thus doubly metaphorical (and what is conventionally called 'metaphor' would be more appropriately labelled 'meta-metaphor'). A text has meaning not because of its inherent objective linguistic make-up, but because it is a product of these multi-metaphorical awarenesses and multi-level discursive formations. Every text is therefore a political and ideological statement, since every discursive formation is political and ideological in nature. Analysing a text is essentially a matter of identifying, analysing and accounting for the operative discursive formations and their ways of assigning power. No text – indeed, no word – is innocent.

(from Katzenjammer and Sauwetter: Putting the Text on Trial. Didcot Academic Press 2005)

1. Analyse the political and ideological content of the following texts:
 - A. The square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.
 - B. Sunrise is at 5.26 tomorrow morning.
 - C. Your next service is due at 20,000 miles.
 - D. English has ten central modal verbs.
 - E. Read the following text and answer the questions.
 - F. Bullshit Rules, OK?
2. Do you feel the inherent objective linguistic features make a small contribution to the meaning of any of Texts A–F, or can they be ignored entirely?
3. Since no text is innocent, what sentence would you recommend for each of Texts A–F after identifying and rounding up the discursive formations lurking in the shadows behind it, stripping the text of its power, putting it on trial and finding it guilty?
4. Does the text by Katzenjammer and Sauwetter quoted above have any inherent objective meaning, or can it only be understood as an expression of a certain ideology and its ways of assigning power?
5. Would a description of this ideology have any objective meaning, or would it only be an expression of a certain meta-ideology and its meta-ways of assigning power?

6. What are the meta-metaphorical implications of:
“Montezuma
Met a puma
Coming through the rye”?

7. How much do you care?

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