

# New Perspectives in Discourse: An interview with Robert de Beaugrande

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*El catedrático de la Universidad de Viena, Dr. Robert de Beaugrande fue recientemente invitado por la Facultad de Traductores e Intérpretes de la ULPGC. En ella ha disertado de manera amplia sobre el desarrollo de la lingüística en las dos últimas décadas, su influencia en el campo de la lingüística aplicada de la traducción, etc. En esta entrevista se recogen algunas ideas que, quizás, tuvieron un tratamiento más largo y mejor estudiado en sus conferencias.*

- Q.** Dr. Beaugrande, first of all I wish to thank you in the name of the Faculty of Translators and Interpreters, the Department of Modern Philology and the Department of Spanish, Classical and Arabic Philology for having given us such a rich and intensive program over the last two weeks. Your lecture series "Discourse and Translation" plus your special course for doctoral students on "New Perspectives in Discourse and Text Analysis" and your lecture on "Lingüística del Texto y Análisis Literario" have given fresh impulses for numerous staff and students to intensify their concern for Text Linguistics and the disciplines along its borders.
- A.** It has been a great pleasure for me as well to work here in such pleasant surroundings. I believe your Institute has an important potential to work in the interest of international communication in general, and of communication for specific purposes in particular. I am also pleased to contribute to the cordial interaction between your Institute and the Departments of Philology, and I would be honored if my visit could be interpreted as a signal for intensifying that interaction in the future. By visiting such Institutes as yours and consulting with the staff and the students, I become much better able to assess the concrete needs for theoretical research and practical models of language and discourse than I could possibly be if I merely stayed at home at my desk in Vienna. I would also cite in this connection the conference on Translation in Irbid,

Jordan, where I had the honor of meeting you personally and laying the groundwork for my current visit. The visible presence of Spanish researchers in Translation and Terminology on the international stage shows a commendable interest and appreciation for the role of the Spanish language and sets a laudable example for other European nations.

- Q. Do you think you could perhaps mention the main points you have brought up during your various presentations here?
- A. First of all, I have tried to create a sense of excitement at the new opportunities for theoretical and practical projects opened up by a science of text and discourse. These include a more intense and productive interaction between theory and practice than we have often seen in the past. Similarly, the interaction between the various domains of a language program, such as the conventional sections of literary studies on the one hand and linguistics on the other, can now be fundamentally reassessed to accommodate their diverging interests: in literary studies, the unique literary text and its author as a historical person; in linguistics the totality of language as an abstract system and the speaker as an anonymous representative of a language community. Finally, I have essayed to sketch a representative cross-section of the latest research trends, such as your staff and students might have a lively motivation to pursue.
- Q. In what ways do you believe that your own model for a science of text and discourse can resolve the problems that have accumulated in the domain of language research?
- A. Whether those problems can in fact be resolved remains to be seen over the next ten or twenty years. My own model accentuates the dual agenda of diversifying our theories and methods to accommodate more specific issues, such as the research of Carmen Acuña on the discourse of biology textbooks, and at the same time of integrating our perspectives in ways that can support a consolidated and coherent program both in theoretical research and in methodological practice within modern language programs such as that offered by the Universidad de Las Palmas.

**Q.** What pedagogical implications does your model have for language instruction?

**A.** The most pressing need is for a unified approach covering instruction in the native language, instruction in non-native languages, and the various areas of the curriculum where language is prominently involved, such as literary studies, linguistics, and translation. The effectivity of language instruction has been severely restricted by the lack of a unified metadiscourse or metalanguage for describing and discussing discourse of language. Such a metadiscourse would make it feasible for teachers of Spanish as well as teachers of foreign languages to communicate reliably and consistently among themselves and with the language learners. Such a metadiscourse should be genuinely clear and accessible, free both of the latinate technical jargon inherited from traditional grammar and the metaphysical baggage of folk-wisdom and commonsense. I have designed one course in basic writing for native speakers of English along these lines, but I have not yet done anything similar for courses in English as a second language. I hope to become considerably more active in that area in the coming years.

The theory and practice of translation has been similarly held back. In absence of a shared metadiscourse, the discipline of translation has had to face some disadvantageous forced traces, such as whether it is to draw more upon linguistics or upon literary studies. In point of fact, translation is the most complex language activity and widespread practice, so that a translation theory would be also the most comprehensive and general theory wherein theories of monolingual discourse or discourse for special purposes would be assigned specific positions. The same comprehensive design is urgently required for the institutions relating to language, such as the language academies entrusted with developing and standardizing terminologies for translators to use in international communication. Here too, Spain is taking a leading position on the world stage. In view of the vast importance of Spanish as a world language, the decision of the Spanish government to include terminology as an integral part of a University course is to be enthusiastically saluted.

- Q.** So far none of your books has been translated into Spanish. Do you have some plans in this direction?
- A.** So far my work has been available in Spanish only in some articles and book chapters, however, when my latest book is finally completed, *New Foundations for a Science of Text and Discourse*, we do plan to prepare a Spanish version which is not merely a translation, but a reapplication of the discussion to the specific qualities of contemporary Spanish discourse. I am afraid I can't give you an exact date for the time when this project will be completed. In the meantime, I am highly flattered by the attention my work has received in Spain, notwithstanding that most of it is not available in Spanish. My visits not merely to your own University but to the Universities in La Laguna, Madrid, Granada and Alicante have been most enjoyable, and I look forward to returning to Spain in the years ahead.
- Q.** As a last question, what is your own impression about our University here in Las Palmas?
- A.** I've been quite impressed that you have been able to put together a high quality program in a few short years since your University was founded, and I hope I shall have the opportunity again to participate in it. A relatively young University has particularly good chances of taking the lead in progressive and innovative approaches to the academic experience, unimpeded by the cumbersome bureaucracies one often finds in older universities.