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Dr Joe Bennett on postgraduate supervision in English Language

Title: **Dr Joe Bennett on postgraduate supervision in English Language (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCA0UX4Fii0)**

Duration: 3.24 minutes

I've got three main areas of interest, three main research areas and they overlap and they very closely relate to each other.

The first one is what's called social semiotics. This is a field of linguistics that began with the work of Michael Halliday in the seventies really.

It's about looking at language as a functional thing, something that people use in particular social circumstances, particular social conditions, particular contexts.

Halliday's Functional Grammar was designed and that's something I'm interested in. But I'm also interested in new developments in social semiotics which say that not only is language something that we use to make meaning, something that exists, a resource for us making meaning in social circumstances, but we also make the resource of language in these social circumstances ourselves.

We not only use language as it exists to create meaning but create the meanings of language ourselves.

Another development in social semiotics is the move away from just language to looking at other aspects of communication and this is what's called multimodality and this is another area of interest.

A lot of the things that linguists have been looking at, the kind of texts that linguists have looked at, it's become increasingly clear that you can't understand them as communication just by looking at them as a language.

These things that linguists have been looking at, such as newspapers, people are starting to look at these in terms of the other modes of communication. The visual, things like colour, things like in speech how people use gesture. These kinds of things and trying to integrate that with the linguistic description.

This is an interesting area because it's growing. There's all sorts of practical and theoretical problems about how integrated this description can be.

Can we really talk about photographs as if they're like a language? Can we really talk about sounds? If you look at an advert and it uses various non-linguistics sounds, can you talk about them as if they're like a language or not? In what ways are the meanings similar? In what ways are they different?

Criticial discourse has this aim to take a critical view of the making of meanings in society.

To look at how communication and meaning in whatever mode works in the service of power or domination or exploitation, whatever you want to call it.

This has sort of taken two forms, both of which I think are interesting forms.

One is looking at dominated groups in society and understanding how language continues that domination.

Another one is to look at how the actions of powerful people are mitigated through the use of language. Or the powerful institution.

These linguistic things are interesting to look at. This relates back to the writing of George Orwell and it's a strong seam in critical discourse analysis.

So, those three areas - social semiotics, multimodality and critical discourse analysis - are really the areas in which I work and the areas in which I'd be interested in taking on students.

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