

Writing Conclusions

The guidelines we have provided, state that a good conclusion will contain many or all of the following features:

1. Making clear links back to the essay question.
2. Reminding the reader of the main steps of the argument.
3. Summarising the findings.
4. Discussing the implications of what has been discovered/decided.
5. Indicating the place of the research in the wider field of knowledge.
6. Admitting what has not been done and explaining the reasons for this.
7. Looking ahead and/or recommending profitable further research.

Task

Can you identify these features in the following examples of conclusions? Would you suggest changes/improvements to the conclusions?

Example 1

A critical discourse analysis of an internal council letter: new public management and 'team spirit'

5. Conclusion

I have shown how the order of discourses in the text has a number of tensions between the boundaries. One of these sets of tensions is to do with the shift in discourses from political to economic, constituting the shift between these two areas of social life in New Public Management. This tension and area of potential conflict is framed and dealt with in terms of another set of tensions. These are to do with an appropriation of personal discourses into the discourse of the workplace. These tensions are realised in the semiosis in terms of the relation between grammatical processes and their agents and the actions and social identities within the organisation. They very much constitute an act of bringing a part of the lifeworld, concerning personal relationships, into the public domain (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

I have argued that an appropriation of personal discourses in an inappropriate method of evoking the desired effects in the readers of the letter; smoothing over potential conflict by creating a false sense of team spirit and therefore obligation to co-operate.

However, I do not believe that it is inherently wrong for members of management to employ a more supportive attitude to their employees, or that 'team spirit' in an organisation is necessarily a bad thing. But it cannot be a good thing unless it is sincere and not just an attempt to disguise the actual power imbalances in an organisation. I have taken a cynical attitude to the letter; although I am not suggesting that Councillor Harris is consciously trying to manipulate the staff, I believe this to be the underlying intention. This can never be a good thing. Staff must not be made to feel disloyal for expressing concerns and objections to the operations of an organisation.

Example 2

A comparative analysis of the representation of women in two diverse discourses

8. Conclusion

8.1 The Texts

The articles I have analysed provide two contradictory ways of representing social actors, particularly women, in the situational context of the provision of contraception and in the wider social context which concerns women's right to control their fertility.

In the 'Christmas Party Girls' text from the Daily Express, the 'problem' of teenage pregnancies is associated with women while men are for the most part excluded from the text altogether. Women are passivated over three times as much as they are activated and when they are activated it tends to be in connection with their irresponsibility. When passivated, women become the beneficiaries of processes over which they have no control; the government is the provider and women are passive, powerless recipients. Moreover, whether they be women, young women, teenagers or schoolgirls, all are portrayed as promiscuous 'party girls' who are after 'casual sex'.

In the 'Morning After Pill' text from The Guardian, men are again excluded from the text but for the purpose of giving women sole control over their fertility. When women are activated they are at the centre of processes which represent them as 'doers', 'thinkers' and 'sayers'. When they are passivated, only twice are they beneficiary to processes to do with the provision of the pill. Other times they are removed from the beneficiary position altogether which backgrounds their role as recipients. Although never nominated, in several cases they are specified and the overall impression the reader is left with is that women are responsible social actors, capable of making decisions regarding their fertility.

8.2 van Leeuwen's Framework

Van Leeuwen's framework provides an effective and thorough way of analysing the representation of social action and social actors by combining sociological and linguistic categories to create a sociological 'grammar'.

The real advantage of the framework is that it allows us concrete ways in which to identify and classify social actors. The disadvantage is that once we categorise them van Leeuwen does not offer much advice regarding how each category should be interpreted. Thus, a large part of the analysis is based on intuition. The danger of relying on intuition is that the analyst can lose objectivity and subsequently neglect those cases that do not fit with his/her schemata. I have tried not to do this in my analysis, however, due to the spatial restrictions of this assignment, I have had to focus on certain categories at the expense of others. If I were to take the analysis further I would no doubt unveil other revelations worthy of inclusion in this assignment.

The other problem with the framework is that the categories are not as clear-cut as they appear to be. However, van Leeuwen himself concedes this point (1996: 67). Most categories, I feel, are better thought of as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, with representations falling somewhere in between the poles. Although I tried to work within the constraints of van Leeuwen's categories, and when necessary sought justification for my choices through grammar, it was necessary at times to create new categories for special cases, e.g. semi-nominated. Nevertheless, analysing social actors in this way has proven to be a highly insightful and rewarding exercise. Not only is it useful for seeing how one social practice is recontextualised in another, it helps to unveil the underlying ideology of texts. It has certainly made me more critical of texts, especially those like newspaper articles that appear to be neutral upon summary inspection.