Book review: Angela Zottola, Transgender Identities in the Press: A Corpus-based Discourse Analysis

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Angela Zottola, *Transgender Identities in the Press: A Corpus-based Discourse Analysis*
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In recent years, the importance of using inclusive, non-discriminatory language has been widely discussed in various media. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, for example, now offer the option of adding one's pronouns into their user profiles. While the representation of the LGBTIQ+ community has increased in news reporting as well, particularly in the case of transgender and nonbinary people, journalists seem to lack cohesive guidelines for reporting on gender and identity. This is illustrated by the findings of Angela Zottola's book *Transgender Identities in the Press: A Corpus-based Discourse Analysis*.

Zottola focuses on the representation of transgender people in English newspaper articles published in the United Kingdom and Canada utilizing methods of corpus-based discourse analysis. As one of her starting points, she names the fact that the topic of transgender issues first seemed completely absent in the press, but then suddenly appeared, partly as a result of popular culture representation, such as the presence of transgender characters in mainstream films and TV shows. In her analysis, Zottola uses two corpora and two distinct corpus-linguistic tools (AntConc and CQPweb) in order to "explore different ways of carrying out the analysis as the two pieces of software offer different types of distribution and statistical tools" (p. 54). The use of corpora together with critical discourse analysis also helps her avoid problems typically associated with qualitative data sampling in CDA (cf. Stubbs, 1997).

Zottola begins with an in-depth literature review that traces previous research on language, gender and sexuality. Baker's (2014) work on the representation of transgender people in the British press is of particular significance to Zottola, as her research expands on the topic with the addition of a longer time span and the comparison with news articles from another English-speaking country (Canada). Another important theoretical framework for Zottola's work is the concept of semantic prosody, as she considers the search terms under investigation "in relation to the ones with which they consistently co-occur in the corpus" (p. 92), examining how the lexical choices made in the newspapers relate to positive or negative representations of transgender people.

The detailed collocation analysis presented by Zottola focuses on three search terms – *transgender**, *transsexual**, and *trans** – and it is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the ways in which transgender people are described as *individuals* through the semantic categories of *personal details* and *implying verbs*. In the second part of the analysis, the categories discussed include the representation of trans people as a *collective*, representation in the context of *crime stories*, as well as in the context of *awareness* and *transgender rights*. Throughout the analysis, the author compares and contrasts data from the UK and Canada. Due to the specific nature of the British press, within the UK corpus, a distinction is also made between news articles from the popular press and the quality press. These comparisons, accompanied with numerous textual examples from the two corpora, prove useful in illustrating the variety in the discourses surrounding transgender people.

Zottola's work on transgender identities in the press contributes to the field of discourse studies particularly through its innovative use of the corpus-based discourse analysis method.

The methodological approach is presented in detail and the choices made in the research process are described in an audience-friendly way, which makes the book a useful resource for graduate students as well as researchers who have an interest in corpus-based methods of studying discourse but are perhaps less familiar with their practical application.

Even more important, however, is the book's contribution to researchers and journalists who write about issues regarding transgender people. Zottola's results demonstrate that while there are certainly attempts to use non-discriminatory and inclusive language in the press, these attempts sometimes fail and result in mixing inclusive language practices with terms and phrases transgender people may find offensive. Although the author stresses that we should be careful of generalizing identity labels and categories, the newspaper data reveals practices that can clearly be identified as problematic, such as deadnaming and the use of *transgender* and *transsexual* as synonyms. Against this background, the findings presented in the book also have important practical applications, particularly when it comes to training journalists and communication professionals.

References

Baker, Paul. (2014), 'Bad Wigs and Screaming Mimis: Using Corpus-assisted Techniques to Carry out Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Trans People in the British Press', in Christopher Hart and Piotr Cap (eds), *Contemporary Critical Discourse Studies*, 211–235, London: Bloomsbury.

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