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Memory, Discourse and Interaction: Remembering in Context and History

Abstract

This thesis proposes an integrated social and cognitive approach to discourse processes of autobiographical and collective remembering. This new perspective integrates discursive, cognitive and social approaches in order to examine how acts of situated remembering unfold in everyday settings. In this thesis, processes of cognitive and discursive remembering are viewed as actions aimed at the accomplishment of interactional goals that go far beyond the retrieval and communication of memories. That is, the reconstruction and communication of autobiographical and collective memories are considered as interactive, embodied and sociocognitive acts which are not determined by mere transmission of narratives of the past, but also by context-sensitive and goal oriented reconstructions of those experiences in the present. Previous studies on autobiographical and collective remembering have paid little attention to the key role that context plays in guiding such processes. One of the purposes of this thesis is to fill this conceptual gap in memory studies.

In this thesis, I examine cognitive and discourse processes of remembering related to periods of political violence in Argentina, in general, and to the 1976-1983 military dictatorship in particular. Previous investigations on memories about periods of political violence in Argentina have not dealt with the cognitive nature of these socially situated acts of memory-making. The empirical studies presented in this thesis examine acts of discursive remembering occurring in public and private settings, and seek to explore the intersection of public and private discourses about Argentina's traumatic past. Autobiographical and collective memories about the Argentina's troubled past is an excellent topic for exploring the interpenetration of the social, cultural, historical and cognitive mechanisms involved in acts of socially-situated remembering.