

BEGOÑA BELLÉS-FORTUÑO

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***Deborah
S. Schiffrin
(1951-2017)***

In Memoriam

Professor Emerita Deborah Sue Schiffrin passed away early on the morning of Thursday July 20, 2017 at the age of 66. It was indeed a sad day for academia and researchers in the field of linguistics and discourse analysis.

I can still remember how I discovered Deborah Schiffrin and her work, I was a quite novel researcher at that time getting immersed in the field of discourse analysis and the study of discourse markers. I was determined to analyse spoken discourse for my PhD thesis and my options were not many. Professor Schiffrin's masterpiece *Discourse Markers*, published in 1987 by Cambridge University Press and based on her dissertation, soon began to be my work of reference par excellence. -I am holding the yellowish book in my hands while writing these words. No one involved in the field of discourse analysis nowadays can deny that Schiffrin's seminal book *Discourse Markers* opened a new dimension to the analysis of discourse and communication in academia; she coined a term that soon became used by the academic community and, at the same time, discourse analysis became a subfield of study within linguistics that gained place and interest among researchers. Soon after *Discourse Markers*, in 1994, she launched a second book that also became a benchmark in the academic community, this was *Approaches to Discourse*, where she approached the study of conversation unveiling the fascinating problems of the analyses of everyday real language in context. Another valuable contribution to the field of discourse analysis and already in the 21st century is *Schiffrin's Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2001), co-edited with her colleagues Heide Hamilton and Deborah Tannen.

She was a member of the Georgetown University in Washington DC, (USA) for over 30 years where she lectured countless on sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, language interaction, narrative analysis, grammar in interaction, language and identity, and discourse and history. As she herself showed her students, her aim was to teach "the study of language in text and context". Her firm intention was to teach students the eight different approaches to discourse analysis developed from disciplines as varied as Linguistics, Sociology, Anthropology, Critical Theory, and Philosophy. She initiated the Masters in Language and Communication while being the department chair at Georgetown University (2003-2009), where her interests for communication gave path to courses on data gathering methodologies to analyse spoken discourse. She sharply defined the scientific

methods to produce valid scientific results in linguistics. She taught her students the importance of participant observation in speech acts, the possible problems encountered for data gathering, the correct/incorrect use of surveys, data coding, the identification of variables or the production of quantitative analysis, establishing a school and leaving a splendid legacy for future researchers in the field of discourse analysis.

Along the years she devoted an increasing attention to Narrative Analysis and became interested in life stories and oral histories; she pointed out the importance of narratives about major historical events to convey evaluative and referential information unveiling discourse identities. Specifically, she analysed personal narratives told by survivors of the Holocaust, while working on her project *Multiple Interviews with Holocaust Survivors*, and Japanese American survivors of the United States' internment camps. After this, she became a very caring fellow at the Centre for Advanced Holocaust Studies. Relevant publications related to this period are many, however, we could highlight here the articles "Language, experience and history: What happened in World War II" (2001) published in *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, "Language and public memorial: 'America's concentration camps'" (2001) published in *Discourse and Society* and a later work included in *Discourse Studies* with the title "Retelling the turning point of a narrative of danger" (2004).

She admired and closely followed the work of William Labov and Erving Goffman. In fact, Labov supervised a young Deborah Schiffrin when she was writing her PhD thesis at the University of Pennsylvania (1982). She even stated at some point that Labov and Goffman as well as Noam Chomsky had deeply influenced her academic career.

Throughout her career, Deborah Schiffrin wrote innumerable articles and very appreciated monographies. She supervised many fruitful dissertations and participated in a large number of academic boards. She also acted as an editorial member of prestigious academic journals such as *Language in Society*, *Journal of Pragmatics* or *Language and Communication*, among others. She lectured her students at university intensively and with enthusiasm. Thanks to her intense and valuable work she gained a relevant international position in the field of discourse analysis. Fortunately for us, her legacy on *Discourse Markers* and *Narrative Analysis* is still alive thanks to the many publications that continue to be written nowadays.



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