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# Annelie Ädel and Jan-Ola Östman (eds) Risk Discourse and Responsibility. Amsterdam & Philadelphia, John Benjamins: 2023, 270 pp. ISBN: 978 90 272 1389 1 doi 10.1075/pbns.336 Reviewed by Anaïs Augé (Université Catholique de Louvain)

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**Reviewed by Anaïs Augé (Université Catholique de Louvain)**

Annelie Ädel and Jan-Ola Östman's *Risk Discourse and Responsibility* is the 336th volume in John Benjamins' *Pragmatics and Beyond* book series. In this eleven-chapter volume, Annelie Ädel and Jan-Ola Östman provide an interdisciplinary perspective on a large variety of risk and responsibility issues. The approaches adopted by contributors range from pragmatics, frame semantics, semiotics, systemic-functional grammar, to non-linguistic disciplines such as sociology. The volume is divided into four main parts that respectively address different characteristics of risk discourse and responsibility: part 1 focuses on interactions between experts and lay people, part 2 presents an overview of emerging genres associated with risk discourse, part 3 addresses perspectives on new technologies, and part 4 discusses risk management. Thus, in this volume, risk is simultaneously analysed in association to immediate threats (e.g., the Covid-19 pandemic), it is also viewed as a consequence of past events (e.g., the 9/11 terrorist attack), and it is apprehended through the scopes of future threats (e.g., the development of new technologies).

In the introductory chapter, Annelie Ädel, Jan-Ola Östman, and Catharina Nyström Höög discuss the lack of coherence in discourse approaches to risk. This leads them to bring together contributions that refer to different aspects of risk and risk discourse. Consequently, they can propose a more coherent approach to risk that can be adopted by researchers in social sciences and humanities (p.3). They thus call for the establishment of risk discourse studies as a field (p.4). Importantly, they generate an overarching definition of risk discourse, which, they suggest, needs to consider responsibility as an analytical tool (pp.7-9). Their definition reads as follow:

> Risk discourse refers to information, advice and opinions that, explicitly or implicitly, deal with text types, topics and issues concerned with matters of risk and related concepts (such as security and safety), whether synchronously or asynchronously communicated, and involving both experts and lay people. (…) Since the concept of risk involves adversity and potentiality, it refers to something unwanted which may, but need not, happen (p.15)

This definition, along with the four-axis matrix (pp.26-27), are consistently referred to in each chapter included in the volume.

In chapter 2, entitled "Combining governmentality and discourse analysis: An application on focus groups discussing radioactive decontamination", Joel Rasmussen combines Foucault's definition of governmentality (Foucault 2008) and Appraisal Theory (Hunston and Thompson 2000) to analyse people's evaluation of risk and responsibility. He presents the results of an experiment where focus group participants assess a scenario where people are called upon to return to their home area that has undergone clean-up after a nuclear accident. Results show that participants perceived the alternative of moving away from the contamination-affected area in a positive way, while the government was not assigned responsibility to facilitate such a solution.

In chapter 3, entitled "Framing risk metaphorically: Changes in metaphors of Covid-19 over time in Japanese", Tetsuta Komatsubara investigates diachronic changes in metaphors of Covid-19 in Japanese newspapers. This study identifies the contextual factors that influence one's use of metaphor and recipients' understanding of risk. Results show that changes in metaphors over time reflect changes in the framing of the social situation (e.g., from the "covid-19 war" to the "covid-19 journey").

In chapter 4, entitled "Shouldering responsibility: An autoethnographic perspective on informed consent and exoneration in a clinical trial", Peter Grundy analyses the Participant Information Sheet delivered as part of the vaccine trial against Covid-19. Results highlight the experts' self-exoneration strategies, their awareness of their professional status, and the asymmetrical power relationship in which the participants' role is constructed before they become participants.

In chapter 5, entitled "Formulations of risk and responsibility in Covid-19 contact tracing telephone interactions in Flanders, Belgium", Romeo De Timmerman et al. consider telephone contact tracing as a new discursive genre. They investigate the interactions produced during 220 conversations. They observe that formulations of risk and responsibility (through the combination of empathy and moralisation) intersect with the accomplishment of communicative functions.

In chapter 6, entitled "Your health is in your hands: The linguistic construction of responsibility in Covid-19 storefront signage in New York City", Kylie Lance et al. analyse the construction of responsibility and risk evidenced by the linguistic landscape (Scolon and Scolon, 2003) across four New York City boroughs. Results show that representation of risk and responsibility echoes North Americans' individualist culture.

In chapter 7, entitled "Risk and responsibility in human-robot interaction: An interactional approach", Kerstin Fischer's analysis focuses on the interview of Sophia the Robot and its developers, and the interview of iCub and its developers. Interactions are approached through conversation analysis (Sacks et al. 1974) and face theory (Brown and Levinson 1987). Results show a display of many human-like conversational behaviours, which still require the developer's high-level of engagement in the interaction.

In chapter 8, entitled "The effects of using machine translation on perceptions of source credibility", Tomas Lehecka reports the results of an experiment where participants (native speakers of Finnish) were asked to follow route directions in a foreign country (Czechia) to reach an emergency room. This aimed at assessing the social psychological effects of using machine translation: some participants received directions in their native language, while others received identical instructions that were translated in real-time from Czech to Finnish. The results demonstrate that all participants rated the credibility of the source of information very positively. This evaluation was thus not impacted by the manner in which they received the directions.

In chapter 9, entitled "Risk discourse in the linguistic landscape Safety information signage onboard metro carriages in Stockholm and Helsinki", Väinö Syrjälä analyses 17 safety signs in Stockholm and 11 signs in Helsinki. Results show that emplacement of pictograms makes the information readily available to a larger audience. Yet the semantic content of signs requires some degree of contextual understanding to identify the underlying risk.

In chapter 10, entitled "On security and safety Governing terrorism and security through risk", Sissel Haugdal Jore proposes a sociological approach to terrorism. This study shows that social understanding of terrorism varies over time and space. Notably, the author considers the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attack on public perception of safety and security. The author concludes that terrorism has become linked to the responsibility of organizations and to the management of risk (p.240).

Chapter 11, entitled "From risk and responsibility to complicity – and back" by Jef Verschueren, concludes the volume. The author considers the role of ethics in the identification of risk and responsibility, which leads him to question different degrees of complicity. This chapter discusses how risk may be discursively maximised – resulting in a culture of fear – or minimised – resulting in a culture of doubt.

Overall, this volume proposes a thorough review of different perceptions of risk and responsibility which are approached through four main perspectives: lived experiences of risky situations (covid-19), considerations of future threats (development of future technologies),

ideological views on risk and responsibility (terrorism), and the evolution of risk discourse (safety regulations). Contributions involve a large range of discursive genres and modalities: telephone interactions, experts' communication, media discourse, pictograms, human-robot conversations. The consistent application of the editors' initial definition of risk discourse (p.15) eventually supports the establishment of risk discourse studies as a discipline.

The volume is intended to present an interdisciplinary perspective on risk discourse, yet its linguistic contributions are often downplayed: most linguistic theories are cited but not thoroughly explained (as acknowledged in chapter 2, by Joel Rasmussen). This volume is thus not intended to undergraduate students, but rather addresses experienced linguistic scholars.

Another reservation relates to the volume's exclusive focus on discourses from the Global North. As Jef Verschueren acknowledges in the concluding chapter:

> whatever we say and however we say it, we always carry along a world view, but we cannot protect our words from being inserted into other world views as well. (p.249).

Accordingly, the contributors' views on risk and responsibility may not apply to countries that suffer from continuous threats (e.g., countries at war). For example, perceptions of risk and responsibility regarding covid-19 may differ in a region like Guiana whose population's health has long been impacted by pandemics caused by heavy metal pollution (Agence Régionale Santé 2021). Such cultural insights (mentioned in chapter 6 by Kylie Lance et al.) into risk discourse go beyond the scopes of the volume, which presents risk and responsibility as discursive concepts, but not sociocultural concepts.

My last reservation concerns the focus on past, future, and envisaged threats, which overshadows the significance of on-going crises. While the climate crisis is briefly mentioned in each chapter, the volume may lack contributions regarding long-term evolution of risk discourse in accordance with the long-term evolution of risk that is yet to be averted.

To conclude, Annelie Ädel and Jan-Ola Östman's *Risk Discourse and Responsibility* proposes a large diversity of linguistic and discursive approaches to risk and responsibility, with considerations of lived experiences, ideologies, and future projections. The volume distinguishes itself by its coherence through consistent references to the editors' theoretical framework. This volume is thus a must-read as it can guide researchers into the analysis of risk discourse and the attribution of responsibility. It offers pertinent and timely contributions that help to dissect modern discourse produced in societies impacted by past, on-going, and foreseeable crises.

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Dr. Anaïs Augé is a research fellow and a lecturer at the Catholic University of Louvain, in the Institute of Political Sciences and Institute of Language and Communication. She is the author of a monograph entitled *Metaphor and Argumentation in Climate Crisis Discourse* (Routledge, 2023), and of several research articles published in international journals and edited volumes. Her fields of research include political discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics. She is interested in the public understanding of political discourse in intercultural contexts and the argumentation produced by politicians and activists in the context of the climate crisis.