

Discourse Analysis

1. What is Discourse Analysis?

According to Stubbs (1983), DA refers to attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.

Discourse Analysis is:

- Concerned with whole texts rather than sentences or clauses.
- Divides into:
 1. Spoken Discourse Analysis: study of conversations, dialogues, spoken monologues, etc.
 2. Written Discourse Analysis: study of written texts, such as essays, news, political speeches (?), etc.
- More concerned with naturally occurring data than in made up examples.
- A collection of techniques, rather than a single analysis.

According to Crystal, **discourse** refers to 'a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit, such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative' (1992: 25).

Hence, Discourse can be defined in two ways:

1. A **structural definition** of discourse defines it as a **unit of language above the level of the sentence**. This approach looks for constituents which have particular relationships with each other and that can occur in a restricted number of arrangements. The problem with this approach is that the units in which people speak do not look like sentences and are often not grammatically correct.
2. A functional approach to discourse claims that language has multiple functions. The task of discourse analysis using this approach is to analyse the functions of language, **the way that language is used** (*meaning as use*), what we do with language when we use it. In other words discourse analysis views discourse as a social phenomenon rather than a purely linguistic one.

2. The difference between text and discourse

Nunan asserts that the two terms '**text**' and '**discourse**' are interchangeable. He defines text as *any written record of a communicative event*, while discourse as *the interpretation of the communicative event in context* (Nunan, 1993: 6-7).

In short, discourse as = '**text + situation**'

While '**text = discourse minus situation**'.

3. Types of Discourse Analysis:

➤ **Multimodal Discourse Analysis:**

- Discourse Analysis is not just concerned with the text on the page. MDA explores how multiple modalities (text, image, sound, video) combine to make meaning.

➤ **Critical Discourse Analysis:**

- The use of discourse analysis techniques to reveal ideological bias, hidden power relations, racism, etc. in discourse. • Names: Kress, Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak...

4. Why Study Discourse Analysis?

Why do we study Discourse Analysis?

1. As **linguists**, to find out how language works, to improve our understanding of an important kind of human activity
2. As **educators**, to find out how good texts work, so that we can focus on teaching our students these writing/speaking strategies.
3. As **critical analysts**, to discover meanings in the text which are not obvious on the surface (e.g., analysing a politician's speech to see their preconceptions).

5. Approaches to the study of language+ data used

a) **Internal approach:**

- looking for internal rules that native speakers use to generate grammatically correct sentences
- Isolated sentences
- Grammatically well-formed

- Without context
- Invented or idealised

b) External approach:

- asking how we use language to communicate
- Any stretch of language felt to be unified
- Achieving meaning
- In context
- Observed

6. Theoretical Bases

a. Understanding Communication:

- 1) Form and Function of Language
- 2) Verbal and non-verbal Context of language Use

b. Theoretical Perspectives and Analytical Approaches

- Pragmatics
- Speech Act Theory
- Conversation Analysis
- Interactional Sociolinguistics
- Ethnography of Communication
- **Anthropology**
- **Ethnography**
- **Ethnomethodology** is the study of how people use social interaction to maintain an ongoing sense of reality in a situation. To gather data, ethnomethodologists rely on conversation analysis and a rigorous set of techniques for systematically observing and recording what happens when people interact in natural settings.

7. Contexts for the use of language

a. The verbal contexts:

- Theme
- Rheme
- Deixis
- Cohesion
- Coherence
- word order

b. The non-verbal contexts:

- The types of communicative event (sermon, joke, lecturing, advertising, etc).
- the topic
- the purpose
- the setting
- the participants and their relationship
- The background knowledge and the assumption underlying the communicative event.

8. Identification of some concepts:

a) Theme & Rheme

- **Theme** is a formal grammatical category which refers to the initial element in a clause. It is the element around which the writer wishes to give prominence.
- **Rheme** is everything that follows the theme. The sample below has the same information but thematically different.
 1. The cat ate the rat.
 2. The rat was eaten by the cat.

In the first sentence the theme is *The cat* while in the second sentence, it is *the fate of the rat* that is of primary interest.

- An example:
- Theme Rheme
 - Money is not the only problem
 (structural, analysis)
- Subject Predicate
 - Money is not the only problem

- **Cohesion:** the relation between forms and patterns
- **Coherence:** the way meanings are understood

➤ Deixis

Deictic forms enable the speaker/writer to ANCHOR an utterance in TIME and SPACE so that it is possible to interpret it. Deictic forms include those which relate to the following:

- the speaker/writer – e.g. *I, me, mine, myself, we, ours* etc.
- the listener/reader – e.g. *you, your, yourself*
- previously mentioned individuals – e.g. *he, her, it, them* etc.
- the speaker's physical orientation – e.g. *here, behind me, to my left* etc.
- the time of speaking – e.g. *now, a minute ago, last year* etc.
- proximity to the speaker/character – e.g. *this/that, here/there* etc.
- movement towards or away from the speaker e.g. *come, go, fetch, take, bring*