

Introducing Discourse Analysis in Class

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By

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INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is a broad and fast-developing interdisciplinary field concerned with the study of language use in context. It can also be characterized as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem, since it enables to reveal the hidden motivations behind a text. Discourse analysis promotes the application of critical thought to social situations and the unveiling of strategies within socially dominant discourses. But the study of discourse can be applied to any text, problem or situation; all texts are accessible to analysis by the existing methods of linguistics. Every advertisement, t-shirt slogan, song or dialogue can be the subject of linguistic exploitation and social debate.

Discourse analysis includes somewhat diverse theoretical and methodological approaches from linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, psychology and sociology. Far from being a coherent paradigm of clear-cut practices, there is still an on-going proliferation of theoretical approaches, methodological devices and research topics which in the last years have unveiled, among many others, the potential of discourse analysis as an instrument for teaching languages. Teaching practices can be improved by investigating actual language use both in and out of the classroom. The classroom offers tangible ways of interpreting contemporary culture; it is an excellent forum for teaching discourse analysis and for making students aware that there is a complex world out there to be analysed.

The purpose of this book is to introduce discourse analysis to undergraduates in language-based and linguistics degrees and to demonstrate its utilitarian aspects as an instrument to develop their critical thinking skills. Since discourse analysis is basically interpretative reading, there are no rigid guidelines to follow. Students are encouraged to make use of logical thinking and to be aware of the fact that the best method of analysis is the application of common sense.

This manual is divided into three sections. The first one gives a balanced insight into basic theoretical concepts within discourse analysis. The second part presents a set of tools for analysing texts, especially cohesive devices. The third part offers a wide variety of authentic texts from different fields so that students can put into practice the theoretical notions and the instruments of analysis provided in the previous two

sections. This triple design underlines the idea that theory and practice are both complementary when working with discourse analysis. Each section of the book contains practical activities to help students look into the issues dealt with. They should work individually or in groups to think of a variety of interpretations when answering questions and analysing texts. Ultimately, they are expected to evaluate how the concepts and tools provided in this book help them to analyse real texts for practical purposes.

PART I:
THEORY NOTES

1. INTRODUCTION TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Introduction to discourse analysis (DA)

0. Our purpose
 1. What is DA?
 2. Origins
 3. Basic principles
 4. Discourse and text
 5. Theory and practice in DA
-

0. Our purpose

- To tackle some basic points debated within DA in order to establish the basic principles of a **theoretical and methodological framework**
-

1. What is DA?

- ❑ A field of research that has generated a great activity in the last decades
 - ❑ Tremendous scope of DA:
defined as an umbrella-term for all the issues that have dealt with the linguistic study of text and discourse
-

2. Origins

- ❑ Double perspective
 - 2,000 years ago: classical rhetoric as a main historic origin
 - Middle of the 60s: Chomskyan's distinction between 'competence' and 'performance' is questioned:

All individuals have access to the creative phenomenon of the language through their 'competence', but their 'performance' is subject to the social component

3. Basic principles

- Some works in the 70s and 80s formulate the basic parameters of DA:
 - DA is concerned with language use in social contexts
(**theoretical implications**)
 - DA attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence
(**methodological implications**)
-

Theoretical implications

- Discourse and society are not autonomous entities
- Bidirectionality and interdependence between discourse and society

Discourse is determined by social phenomena. Social phenomena are influenced by discourse structures

Methodological implications

- Viewing discourse as a unit above the sentence does not imply to neglect other linguistic units below sentence level:
 - A working assumption is that any level of organization may be relevant to the analysis of the text
 - DA aims to extend above sentence level those methods of analysis that have been useful for other levels of linguistic description
-

4. Discourse and text

- **Text** as a semantic unit
 - **Discourse** as the corresponding social practice, a form of language use
- Principle of intertextuality:
- Discourses should not be valued as units with precise limits, but as hybrids of other discourses which acquire their full meaning with the background provided by the latter
-

5. Theory and practice in DA

- Although the study of discourse is often termed 'discourse *analysis*', the use of this term should not imply a field that is void of theory

 - Theory and practice are both necessary in DA
-

Theory and practice

- Theory: the failure in the theoretical formulations can lead to a mistaken analysis

 - Practice: it is risky to speculate about language and society without establishing an empirical link
-

Theory: interdisciplinarity

- Theoretical framework of mutual relationship between DA and other neighbour research fields (anthropology, philosophy, sociology, religion...)
-

Analysis: interpretation

- DA is an interpretative enterprise in which processes of **production** and **reception** should be as close as possible
 - To neglect one of both sides in the communicative event can lead to a partial vision of the analytical process
-

Read the following article and answer the questions:

Van Dijk, Teun Adrianus 1985: 'Introduction: Discourse Analysis as a New Cross-Discipline'. Teun Adrianus van Dijk, ed. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis. Vol. 1: Disciplines of Discourse*. London: Academic Press. 1-10.

1. In which way does classical rhetoric anticipate discourse analysis?
2. What do publications in the 60s have in common?
3. Summarise the most important developments that have taken place in the study of language use and discourse since the 70s.

Exam practice (I)

1. What are the basic principles of discourse analysis?
2. What are the origins of discourse analysis?
3. What is the difference between discourse and text?
4. What does the principle of intertextuality mean?
5. Is theory necessary in discourse analysis? Why?
6. What does interdisciplinarity imply in discourse analysis?
7. How is the process of interpretation understood in discourse analysis?

2. SOCIAL DIMENSION OF DISCOURSE

Social dimension of discourse

1. Relationship discourse-society
 2. Components of the social dimension of discourse
 - Social members
 - Institution
 - Ideology
-

1. Relationship discourse-society

- Any theoretical framework develops from the social perspective that backgrounds the concept of discourse
 - And, above all, from the perspective of a **mutual relationship between discourse and society**
-

Discourse

- Discourse as contextualised text
 - **CONTEXT:** all those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production and reception of discourse
 - Contextual factors affecting the structure of discourse:
 - Social members
 - Institutions
 - Ideology
-

Relationship discourse-society

- Discourse and society are not autonomous entities
- Bidirectionality and interdependence between discourse and society

Discourse is determined by social phenomena. Social phenomena are influenced by discourse structures

Relationship discourse-society

- Discourse plays an active role in society:
 - discourse enacts social relationships and patterns of behaviour
 - “Society is indeed performed through discourse” (Bowers & Iwi 1993: 387)
 - Social order and relationships sustain the construction of discourse
-

Literary texts

Literary works, far from being airless aesthetic heterocosms, are complexly consubstantial with ongoing processes of discourse in society as a whole

(Sell 1991: xxi)

- The social side of language is also inherent to literary texts
 - Literary communication can be described in social terms and not strictly in linguistic terms
-

2. Components of the social dimension of discourse

- Several contextual factors affect the structure of discourse:
 - Social members
 - Institutions
 - Ideology
-

Social members

- Valued as social agents placed in a network of relationships with other individuals
 - The **text** is constructed through the interaction of linguistic agents having a certain position in the social structure
- The socio-cultural condition of individuals leads them to take a certain position within their linguistic code:

“To use language is always, inevitably, to enter into particular positions” (Kress 1990: 90)

Institutions

- Social entities and influential linguistic organisms that articulate their values and meanings in a systematic way
 - Double perspective:
 - institutions facilitate the social actions of their members providing them with a framework to act
 - but they also limit their actions within that framework
-

Ideology

- Assuming the concept of discourse as a social reality implies assuming the role of ideology as a moulding factor in discourse
 - Ideology as a systematic body of ideas organized from a particular point of view
 - Discourse as a field of ideological conflict
-

Network of elements

- Interrelationship between social members, institutions, ideology and discourse

 - Discourse as a network in which all these elements are included in such a way that by drawing one of them, we obtain information about the others
-

Exam practice (II)

1. How does the relationship between discourse and society work?
2. Which contextual factors affect the structure of discourse?
3. Comment the following quotations:

“Society is indeed performed through discourse” (Bowers & Iwi 1993: 387)

“To use language is always, inevitably, to enter into particular positions” (Kress 1990: 90)

“Literary works, far from being airless aesthetic heterocosms, are complexly consubstantial with ongoing processes of discourse in society as a whole” (Sell 1991: xxi)

4. What is the role of the institutions within the social dimension of discourse?
5. Why is discourse described as a field of ideological conflict?

References

- Bowers, John and Kate Iwi 1993: 'The Discursive Construction of Society'. *Discourse & Society* 4.3: 357-393.
- Kress, Gunther 1990: 'Critical Discourse Analysis'. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 11: 84-99.
- Sell, Roger D., ed. 1991: *Literary Pragmatics*. London: Routledge.

3. TEXT STRUCTURE AND TEXT TYPES

Text structure and text types

1. Levels of analysis
 2. Cohesion
 3. Text types and discourse types
-

1. Levels of analysis

- Units of English grammar:
 - Sentence, clause, group, word, morpheme (sentence level and below sentence level)
 - DA aims to:
 - extend those methods of analysis that have been useful for other levels of linguistic description
 - rely upon linguistic characteristics of clauses as clues to textual structures (above sentence level)
-

Rank scale in grammar

- Sentence**
orthographic unit
 - Clause**
grammatical unit
 - clause complex**
clauses linked together grammatically
 - Group (phrase)**
constituents of a clause
 - Word**
constituents of a group
 - Morpheme**
constituents of a word
-

2. Cohesion

- Text:** semantic unit
 - Texture:** the property of 'being a text'
 - Cohesion:** semantic concept that refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as a text
 - **Cohesive devices** hold different parts of the text together
-

Lexical cohesion

- Repetition
 - Synonyms
 - Superordinates
 - Opposites
 - Collocation
-

Grammatical cohesion

- Connectives
 - Ellipsis
 - Reference words
 - Substitutes
-

3. Text types and discourse types

- Textual surface structures display a wide spectrum of forms that vary with the respective type of discourse

 - Linguists have had to develop a great number of concepts to account for variety in language use
 - Different classifications which open up more questions than they answer
-

Text types

- Descriptive:** based on perception in space
 - Narrative:** based on perception of time
 - Expository:** based on explanation
 - Argumentative:** based on the evaluation and the subsequent subjective judgement in answer to a problem
 - Literature**
-

More examples of typology

- Kinneavy (*A Theory of Discourse*)
 - Expressive, referential, literary and persuasive

- Werlich (*A Text Grammar of English*)
 - Description, narration, exposition, argumentation and instruction

BUT real texts combine a number of discourse aims with a variety of realizations

Text typologies

Drawbacks persist in all models

e.g. descriptions are a regular constituent of most texts (in narrative, argumentative texts...), but exclusively descriptive texts do not occur with great frequency
