**DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

1. **What is Discourse?**

* Discourse has so many descriptions, and the major reason for this is that different disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, sociology and linguistics among others engage in the study of discourse and, thus, scholars perceive and describe the phenomenon differently based on their analytical approach.
* **Discourse** is a unit of language that is the most complete, it is higher than a sentence or a clause with high cohesion and coherence continuously, that has a beginning and an ending, and it is delivered in oral or written form. We must however point out that a piece of discourse could be made up of one ***sentence***. Nonetheless, arguments are in favor of connected successive sentences, which are viewed as offering a rich soil for the study of the relative distribution of elements of a stretch of speech or writing.
* There are three ways in which we can describe discourse; each of which are of equal importance:

1. ***Language behaviors linked to a social practice***: this suggests that a discourse is a type of language. For example, the discourse of law, whereby legal documents are written in as much depth as possible to avoid any vagueness and ambiguity. This style of writing is unique to the legal profession, meaning it is a **specific kind of discourse**.
2. ***A system of thought***: this is by far the most scientific description of the three, as it disagrees with the notion that knowledge and truth are either universal or objective. Conversely, it suggests that the ideas about knowledge and truth emerge from particular social and historical situations.
3. ***Language beyond the level of the sentence***: by this, we mean that it is a type of language that extends past features such as sounds (phonetics), structures (syntax) and the parts that make up words (morphology).

* What interests us is the definition “***language above or beyond the sentence”***.
* **Some definitions of discourse:**

1. Brown and Yule define discourse simply as ‘***language in use***’.
2. ***Language as meaning in interaction.***
3. ***Language in situational and cultural context.***
4. Leeuwen describes discourse as “***the use of language and all other semiotic modes such as gesture, facial expression and other forms of visual communication deployed for perception and expression of reality”***.
5. **What is discourse analysis?**

* ***Discourse Analysis (DA)*** is a modern discipline that covers a wide variety of different [sociolinguistic](https://sites.google.com/a/sheffield.ac.uk/all-about-linguistics/branches/sociolinguistics/what-is-sociolinguistics) approaches. It aims to study and analyze the use of discourse in at least one of the three ways stated above, and more often than not, all of them at once. Analysis of discourse looks not only at the basic level of what is said, but takes into consideration the surrounding social and historical contexts. Example: making the distinction between whether a person is described as a ‘terrorist’ or a ‘freedom fighter’ is something **DA** would look at, whilst considering the implications of each term.
* **Some definitions of discourse analysis:**

1. Brown & Yule: ***studying and analyzing the uses of language.***
2. Jorgensen and Philips: ***the study of different patterns that people‘s utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life.***
3. McCarthy: to be ***concerned with the study of language and the contexts in which it is used***.
4. Gee: it considers ***how language, both spoken and written, enacts social and cultural perspectives and identities***. In other words, analysts in this field are involved in ***asking questions about how language is constructed in speech and writing to interpret the aspects of the socio-cultural contexts in which it is used***.

* These descriptions of discourse analysis indicate that elements of context such as topic, participants, place, time, are relevant in the interpretation of language in use.
* In fact, it is not just the study of language, but also a way of looking at language that focuses on how people use it in real life to do things like joke, argue, and persuade, and to show that they are certain kinds of people or belong to certain groups. This way of looking at language is based on four main assumptions:

1. ***Language is ambiguous***. What things mean is never absolutely clear. All communication involves interpreting what other people mean and what they are trying to do. For example if a student wants to borrow a pen from his classmate, he may express his desire with the question “do you have a pen?” Strictly speaking, this question does not communicate that he needs a pen. So the other person needs to undertake a process (which is automatic and unconscious) of figuring out what he meant. In this case, the question may imply that the student is shy to ask directly or he just is not sure if his classmate has an extra pen or not.
2. ***Language is always ‘in the world’*.** What language means is always a matter of where and when it is used and what it is used to do. The meaning of an utterance can change dramatically depending on who is saying it, when and where it is said, and to whom it is said. The same last question “do you have a pen?” may have another meaning and interpretation in another situation. If a teacher asks one of his students that question, it may imply that he just wants to be sure that he is equipped with the necessary tools to do his exam. Or maybe he wonders how come that a student attends his class without a pen.
3. ***The way we use language is inseparable from who we are and the different social groups to which we belong***. We use language to display different kinds of social identities and show that we belong to different groups. A student enact an identity at the class most likely different from the one he enacts at home or with his friends. It is not a change in personality, but rather a change in the way he uses language
4. ***Language is never used all by itself***. It is always combined with other things such as our tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures when we speak, and the fonts, layout and graphics we use in written texts. What language means and what we can do with it is often a matter of how it is combined with these other things.

* The study of discourse has been described as ***interdisciplinary***. By interdisciplinary, it means that researchers integrate relevant conceptual tools, methods and insights from different theoretical disciplines in order to solve research problems.

1. **Approaches to discourse analysis**

* There are **different approaches** to discourse analysis based on the perspective from which the analyst views and describes discourse (i.e. functionalism, structuralism, social constructionism, etc.). These approaches could be simplified into three clusters of:

1. ***Formal linguistic discourse analysis***, (descriptive approach that lines up with “language beyond the sentence”) involves a structured analysis of text in order to find general underlying rules of linguistic or communicative function behind the text. For example, a discourse analyst could adopt a linguistically oriented approach to discourse analysis such as Text Linguistics.
2. ***Empirical discourse analysis*** (descriptive approach that lines up with “language in use”) does not use highly structured methods to code individual words and utterances in detail. Rather, they look for broad themes and functions of language in action using approaches called conversation analysis (the study of "talk-in interaction") and genre analysis (the study of recurrent patterns, or genres of language that share similar structure and context-such as case report or scientific article).
3. ***Critical discourse analysis*** (applied approach “language as larger social processes) is used by researchers in cultural studies, sociology, and philosophy to encompass an even wider sphere that includes all of the social practices, individuals, and institutions that make it possible or legitimate to understand phenomena in a particular way, and to make certain statements about what is "true".

Three approaches to discourse analysis

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Orientation to discourse** | **Sources of data** | **Analysis** |
| Formal linguistic discourse analysis (such as sociolinguistics) | Samples of written or oral language and texts | Microanalysis of linguistic, grammatical, and semantic uses and meanings of text |
| Empirical discourse analysis (such as conversation analysis, genre analysis) | Samples of written or oral language and texts; and data on the “uses” of the text in social settings | Microanalysis and macroanalysis of the ways in which language and/or texts construct social practices |
| Critical discourse analysis (such as Foucauldian analysis) | Samples of written or oral language/texts; and data on the “uses” of the text in social settings; and data on the institutions and individuals who produce and are produced by the language texts | Macroanalysis of how discourses (in many forms) construct what is possible for individuals and institutions to think and say |