



THE MAIN APPROACHES TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Discourse analysis (DA) is a broad field of study that draws some of its theories and methods of analysis from disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, philosophy and psychology. More importantly, discourse analysis has provided models and methods of engaging issues that emanate from disciplines such as education, cultural studies, communication and so on. The vast nature of discourse analysis makes it impossible for us to discuss all that the reader needs to know about it in an introductory work of this nature. However, the chief aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to some of the basic terms and concepts involved in discourse analysis. The reader is also introduced to some of the approaches to linguistic study of discourse.

The article is concerned with the study of different approach to discourse analysis. discourse analysis has provided models and methods of engaging issues that emanate from disciplines such as education, cultural studies, communication and so. The study focuses on the certain special features of four types of approach to discourse, including The Speech Act Theory, Interactional Sociolinguistics, The Ethnography of Communication and Pragmatics.

Previous researches and studies in this area of investigation have been gathered and analyzed. Several points of the issue have been taken into consideration and concluded that The Speech Act Theory, Interactional Sociolinguistics, The Ethnography of Communication and Pragmatics has a main role in the analysis of discourse.

Keywords: Discourse, Discourse analysis, Approaches, The Speech Act Theory, Interactional Sociolinguistics, The Ethnography of Communication, Pragmatics.

Introduction

Discourse analysis is usually defined as a broad field which can include the theories and methods of linguistics, sociology, philosophy and psychology. When it comes to define what discourse analysis is, it is important to point out the background of this theory. In simple terms, Discourse analysis uses the language presented in a corpus or body of data to draw meaning. This body of data could include a set of interviews





or focus group discussion transcripts. While some forms of discourse analysis centre in on the specifics of language (such as sounds or grammar), other forms focus on how this language is used to achieve its aims

The term discourse analysis was first used by the sentence linguist, Zellig Harris in his 1952 article entitled “Discourse Analysis”. He defined this term as a method for analysis of connected speech or writing for continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limit of a simple sentence at a time. However, the definition of discourse analysis has still been under the discussion. According to Brown and Yule, discourse can be the analysis of language in use. The term language in use means the set of norms, preferences and expectations which relate language in context. Guy Cook describes that: “ discourse is seen as a language in use or language used to communicate something felt to be coherent which may or may not correspond to a correct sentence or series of correct sentences. Similarly, Stubbs perceives discourse analysis as a “conglomeration of attempts to study the organization of language and therefore, to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written text. As Wodak and Krzyżanowski (2008) put it: “discourse analysis provides a general framework to problem-oriented social research”. Basically, discourse analysis is used to conduct research on the use of language in context in a wide variety of social problems (i.e., issues in society that affect individuals negatively).

The theory of discourse analysis was in the centre of several researchers during the 1960s and early 1970s, paying also attention to linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, psychology and sociology during in the process of analysis. Some of the scholars and the works that either gave birth to, or helped in the development of discourse analysis include the following: J.L. Austin whose *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) introduced the popular social theory and speech act theory. Dell Hymes (1964) provided a sociological perspective with the study of speech. The linguistic Philosopher, M.A.K. Halliday greatly influenced the linguistic properties of discourses and in the 1970s he provided sufficient framework for the consideration of the functional approach to language.

Briefly, it can said that approach to discourse can be defined in different ways, so below is an attempt to provide a more systematic insight into some of the approaches to discourse.

Approaches to Discourse

The Speech Act Theory

The term discourse analysis has been investigated in a variety of academic disciplines and approaches to describe what they do, how they do or both. This illustrates that





the analysis of discourse has been done under the circumstances of different methods and approaches. Schiffrin in her *Approaches to Discourse* (1994) discusses and compares some of the different approaches to the linguistic analysis of discourse: speech act theory, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, pragmatics, conversation analysis, and variation analysis. This part of the work, therefore, summarizes the approaches to linguistic analysis of discourse identified by Schiffrin.

The Speech Act Theory was first formulated by the philosopher John Austin (1962) and was later developed and presented more systematically by another philosopher John Searle (1969, 1975). The theory proceeds from the assumption that language is used to perform actions hence its main concern is on how meaning and action are related to language. John Austin and John Searle believe that language is not just used to describe the world, but to perform a range of other actions that can be indicated in the performance of the utterance itself. For example, 'I promise to come on time' and 'I want to inform that the meeting is 9.00' perform the functions of promising and informing respectively. However, an utterance may perform more than one act at a time as in: 'Can you open the door?' which can be understood as both a question and a request. But one can hardly understand the utterance as a question to test the physical ability of the hearer but as a request to perform the action requested.

Interactional Sociolinguistic

Anthropologist and Sociologist John Gumperz introduced the approach "Interactional Sociolinguistics" and made a great contribution by an understanding of how people may share grammatical knowledge of a language, but differently contextualize what is said – such that very different messages are produced and understood. According to Schiffrin, the approach has the most diverse disciplinary origins ...it is based in anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, and shares the concerns of all three fields with culture, society, and language. He also argued that language and context co-constitute one another: language contextualizes and is contextualized, such that language does not just function "in" contexts, language also forms and provides context. Social interaction is identified as an instance of context. Language, culture, and society are grounded in interaction: they stand in a reflexive relationship with the self, the other, and the self-other relationship, and it is out of these mutually constitutive relationships that discourse is created.





The Ethnography of Communication

The approach to discourse known as “The Ethnography of Communication” is essentially derived from the works of Dell Hymes in 1960s and 1970s. Hymes argues that Chomsky’s definition of competence is too narrow, and that an adequate approach must distinguish and investigate four aspects of competence. The four aspects include (i) systematic potential (to what extent is something not yet realized), (ii) appropriateness (to what extent is something suitable and effective in some context), (iii) occurrence (the extent to which something is done), and (iv) feasibility (the extent to which something is possible).

In this approach, conversational inferences has a vital place: participants link the content of an utterance and other verbal, vocal, and non-vocal cues with background knowledge. Hymes argues further that any description of ‘ways of speaking’ will need to provide data along four interrelated dimensions which are: the linguistic resources available to the speaker; the rules of interpretation; supra-sentential structuring; and the norms which govern different types of interaction.

In discourse analysis based on the ethnography of communication approach, the analysis of situated talk play a main role. Hymes, therefore, places emphasis on the interpretation of verbal strategies.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics can be another approach to discourse analysis, which is based on three concepts: Meaning, context and communication. Jacob Mey (2001) defines pragmatics as the study of the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society.

Grice developed the cooperative principle on the assumption that conversation proceeds according to a principle that is known and applied by all human beings. According to him, we interpret language on the assumption that its sender is obeying four maxims which are:

Quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

Quantity: Try to make your contribution one that is true

1. Do not say what you believe to be false
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

Relation: Be relevant





Manner: Be perspicuous

1. Avoid obscurity of expression
2. Avoid ambiguity
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
4. Be orderly

She concludes by showing that referring sequences are the outcome of pragmatically based choices concerning the provision of appropriate quantities of information in relevant ways, and thus that discourse structures are created (in part) by the cooperative principle.

Conclusion

We have tried in this article to discuss aspects of discourse analysis we consider fundamental to the study and analysis of discourse. We attempted to define the concept of discourse and the approaches to analysis of discourse. Further, we discussed some of the approaches to discourse, including The Speech Act Theory, Interactional Sociolinguistics, The Ethnography of Communication and Pragmatics. As we noted in the introductory part of the article, Discourse Analysis is a vast discipline and insights from it have been used in solving problems that originate from so many other disciplines and domains of study.

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