Tikrit University

Collage of Education for Humanities

English Department

Discourse Analysis

Higher Studies- P.hd

What is discourse?

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2023-2024

What is Discourse Analysis?

1.5 Language in and out of Context

Language is a complex and multifaceted field that involves analyzing the world around us, including the language itself. It encompasses various factors such as facial expressions, body language, and voice quality, which are lost when writing down. These paralinguistic features are also present in written messages, where handwriting or typography can influence the recipient's message. The context of a message, such as the situation, cultural and social relationships, and our knowledge of the sender, also plays a significant role. Sentence linguists, particularly in the English-speaking world between the 1930s and 1960s, believe that context should be excluded from language analysis to make discoveries about the language itself and its rules. This approach is characterized as sentence linguistics, as it focuses on what happens within sentences.

Sentence linguists either invent examples for analysis using their intuitive knowledge as native speakers or remove irrelevant features from actual language. This approach is similar to creating practice sentences for language teaching.

An example of this is a verbal exchange between two people recorded and written down, which involves loss due to the inability to reproduce all features of voices, movements, expressions, and the situation. However, it allows for the preservation or discarding of differing amounts of these features. In conclusion, while language analysis can provide valuable insights into language, it is essential to consider the context and other factors that contribute to understanding the world around us.

Example:

At one point, the exchange between A and B went something like this:

A: Right, (hhh) who's goin' to lift the bottom? Well... come o... someone's got to take 'old of it.

B: I ain't goin' to.

A: Don't jus... Come on will you?

Without using any technical transcription system (the convention hhh simply means a sharply indrawn breath) we can capture quite a lot of detail: goin' instead of going, 'old instead of hold, ain't instead of ant not all indicate a dialect other than that of standard English. O' indicates the word on broken off. Though it is unfinished, the false start Don't jus... has meaning and perhaps suggests a sense of urgency and impatience.

Sentence linguists analyze English language rules, omitting individual idiosyncrasies, physiological interference, and the most important feature: the two people moving a piano. The exchange then seems to be in the following order

A: Who is going to lift the bottom? Someone has got to take hold of it.

B: I am not going to.

A: Come on, will you?

This process, known as idealization, results in sentences similar to translation or grammatical analysis. Discourse analysts believe these transient and variable features enable understanding of meaning and sentence order. Language learners need to handle non-idealized language, and language teachers must decide if idealized language helps develop this ability.

► TASK 4

Here is a transcript of a conversation. What additional information do you need to make sense of it?

A: That blonde girl over the road there... Careful don't hang your head... Sometimes she looks...

B: What? Which one? Ow!

A: I said to you don't bang your head. Sometimes she looks quite pretty, sometimes she looks quite ugly.

B: I'm OK, leave me alone

Sentence linguistics and discourse analysis are two approaches to understanding language, both essential for its understanding and mutual dependence. While the distinction between the two is convenient, communication is not wellsuited without the rules of semantics and grammar. The following illustrates the contrast between the two:

Sentence linguistics data	Discourse analysis data
Isolated sentences	Any stretch of language felt to be unified
Grammatically well-formed	Achieving meaning
Without context	In context
Invented or idealized	Observed

1.6 The Origins of Discourse Analysis

If we accept this division between two different approaches to the search for order and regularity in language, it is not accurate to regard the second, discourse analysis, as something totally new. Discourse analysis, a branch of language study, has its roots in the history of language studies. Scholars of Greece and Rome divided grammar from rhetoric, with the former (grammar) focusing on language rules as an isolated object and the latter (rhetoric) on how to communicate effectively with people in specific contexts.

Some schools of discourse analysis are often considered one of the newest disciplines of language study, incorporating terms from classical rhetoric.

Throughout history, studies of language in context have been conducted under various titles or names. In twentieth-century linguistics, there have been influential approaches that studied language in its full context, as part of society and the world. In North America, anthropologists and linguists conducted exciting work on language, often researching native American languages and societies. In Britain, J.R. Firth saw language as part of a culture responsive to the environment.

Discourse analysis is a multidisciplinary field that combines various disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, artificial intelligence, media studies, and literary studies. It examines various aspects of society, culture, computers, media, and literature through language. Discourse analysis is not a separate activity but a pursuit that may evaporate into others. Discourse analysis focuses on discourse as its primary object, and while exploring various fields, it must always return to its main concern.

Zellig Harris, a sentence linguist, coined the term "discourse analysis" and initiated a search for language rules to explain sentence connections within a text. In 1952, Harris analyzed an advertisement for hair tonic and sought grammatical rules to explain why one sentence followed another. He observed two possible directions for discourse analysis: a. continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limits of a single sentence at a time and b. correlating culture and language (i.e., non-linguistic and linguistic behavior). Although he was not a sentence linguist, Harris concluded that almost all results lie within a relatively short stretch of sentences in every language, and only rarely can restrictions be stated across sentences. His analysis provides valuable insights into the relationship between language and culture.

*Q: Comment on the following "If we are to find the answer to the problem of what gives stretches of language unity and meaning"

Answer: we must look beyond the formal rules operating within sentences, and consider the people who use language, and the world in which it happens as well.