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English Department



Discourse Analysis

Higher Studies- Ph.D.

Discourse Analysis and Vocabulary

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2024-2025

Discourse Analysis and Vocabulary

1. Introduction

Beginning with Discourse Dimension in Language Teaching, it is incorporating discourse into language teaching doesn't mean abandoning vocabulary teaching. Vocabulary remains essential. Vocabulary lessons will continue to be important, even in a discourse-oriented syllabus. The challenge is to integrate discourse into vocabulary teaching alongside traditional and communicative approaches.

Here the Research Focus will explore research on vocabulary in extended texts in both speech and writing, aiming to incorporate a discourse dimension into vocabulary teaching and activities. Most are already in agreement that vocabulary should be taught in context. However, it's important to examine specific relationships between vocabulary choice, context (the situation in which discourse is produced), and co-text (the surrounding text).

2. Lexical cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (1976) examined vocabulary patterns above the sentence level, focusing on lexical cohesion. They identified that related vocabulary items cross clause and sentence boundaries in writing and act, move, and turn boundaries in speech, which are key features of coherent discourse. They described two principal types of relationships between vocabulary items:

1.Reiteration: This involves the repetition of a word or using a synonym, superordinate, or related word in subsequent parts of the discourse.

2. Collocation: This refers to the tendency of certain words to co-occur in texts, although it is debated whether this belongs to the notion of lexical cohesion since it does not involve a direct semantic relationship between words.

These concepts of lexical cohesion help explain how texts maintain coherence and can be useful for language teaching by providing more varied and meaningful contexts for practicing vocabulary.

It is debatable whether collocation properly belongs to be considered part of lexical cohesion, as it only refers to the probability of words co-occurring and not a semantic relationship between them. For this discussion, lexical cohesion will be defined as exact repetition of words and basic semantic relationships that create textuality. that property of text which distinguishes it from a random sequence of unconnected sentences.

Reiteration involves repeating a word or reasserting its meaning using related words. It's a significant feature of textuality, which can be beneficial for language teachers to exploit in vocabulary teaching. Lexical relations are the stable semantic relationships that exist between words and which are the basis of descriptions given in dictionaries and thesauri: for example, rose and flower are related by hyponymy; rose is a hyponym of flower. Eggplant and aubergine are related by synonymy (regardless of the geographical dimension of usage that distinguishes them). In the following two sentences, lexical cohesion by synonymy occurs:

1. The meeting commenced at six thirty. But from the moment it began, it was clear that all was not well.

Here, commence and begin co-refer to the same entity in the real world. They need not always do so:

2. The meeting commenced at six thirty; the storm began at eight.

In (2) commence and begin referring to separate events, but we would still wish to see a stylistic relationship between them (perhaps to create dry humor /irony). Decoding the co-referring relationship in (1) is an interpretive act of the reader, just as occurs with pronouns . cohesion by hyponymy occurs:

3. There was a fine old rocking-chair that his father used to sit in, a desk where he wrote letters, a nest of small tables and a dark, imposing bookcase. Now all this furniture was to be sold, and with it his own past.

The superordinate need not be an immediate superordinate in the family tree of a particular word; it can be a general word Instead of furniture we could have had all these items /objects/ things, which are examples of general superordinates.

Other genera superordinates, covering human and abstract areas, include people, creature, idea and fact. Reiteration of this kind is extremely common in English discourse.

We do not always find direct repetition of words, and very often find considerable variation from sentence to sentence in writing and from turn to turn in speech. Such variation can add new dimensions and nuances to meaning, and serves to build up an increasingly complex context, since every new word, even if it is essentially repeating or paraphrasing the semantics of an earlier word, brings with it its own connotations and history of occurrence.

In the case of reiteration by a superordinate, we can often see a summarising or encapsulating function in the choice of words, bringing various elements of the text together under one, more general term. Reiteration is not a chance event; writers and speakers make conscious choices whether to repeat, or find a synonym, or a superordinate.

One of the important ongoing debate and research into the use of synonyms and reiteration in discourse and their impact on coherence and emphasis in text is Lack of Guidelines: Discourse analysts have not yet provided clear rules or guidelines on when or why a writer or speaker might choose to use a synonym for reiteration rather than repetition. Some research suggests that using synonyms for reiteration may be linked to the idea of "re-entering" important topic words into the discourse at a later stage, bringing them back into focus or foregrounding them. Other research indicates a correlation between the boundaries of discourse segments and the re-entering of full noun phrases instead of pronouns.

Learning to observe lexical links in a text according to Halliday and Hasan's model could be useful for language learners in various ways. For one thing, it encourages learners to group lexical items together according to particular contexts by looking at the lexical relations in any given text. One of the recurring problems for learners is that words presented by the teacher or coursebook as synonyms will probably only be synonymous in certain contexts and the learner has to learn to observe just when and where individual pairs of words may be used interchangeably.

Little is known about the transferability of these lexical features of text from one language to another. Some languages may have a preference for repetition rather than linking by synonymy (such as is often said of literary and academic styles in Spanish, for example); sometimes learners may find the transfer of these

skills to be easy and automatic. In either case the learner may need to use a range of vocabulary that is perhaps wider than the coursebook or materials have allowed for. Additionally, an awareness of the usefulness of learning synonyms and hyponyms for text-creating purposes may not always be psychologically present among learners; there is often a tendency for such areas of vocabulary learning to be seen as word study divorced from actual use, or at best only concerned with receptive skills. Conventional treatments of vocabulary in published materials often underline this word-out-of-context approach.

3 . Vocabulary and the Organising of Text

In language, the distinction between different types of words and their role in organizing text focusing on **how vocabulary is used to structure** and **the shape of the discourse**.

Types of Words and Their Functions

1- Grammar Words vs. Lexical Words

- **Grammar Words:** Also called function words or empty words (e.g., prepositions, pronouns, and demonstratives like this and that). They belong to closed systems of language and carry grammatical meaning.
- **Lexical Words:** Also referred to as content words or full words (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs). These belong to open systems and are at the "creative" end of language.
- **Discourse-Organizing Vocabulary:** A third category of vocabulary exists between grammar and lexical words. These words:
 - Combine qualities of both closed and open systems.
 - Help organize and structure text.

For Examples: Words like issue, problem, and solution are discourse-organizing words. These words do not identify the field of discourse but help guide the reader through the structure of the argument.

Role of Discourse-Organizing Words

These words act as signals in a text, they indicate the structure of the argument and discourse (e.g., issue signals a problem topic, while assessment signals judgment or evaluation). They help readers identify the problem being discussed, proposed solutions and the logical flow of the argument.

In extract (3.9): Words like issue, problem, assessment, and solution guide the reader's understanding of the text's structure but do not explain the specific subject matter. While, in extract (3.10): Words such as crisis, dilemma, and solutions are used to structure a discussion on traffic issues.

Discourse-organizing words can be difficult for learners, as understanding them requires recognizing their role in structuring the text., decoding their contextual meaning and misinterpretation of these words can lead to a misunderstanding of the text's overall intent.

For predictive and retrospective functions, Discourse-organizing words help readers to anticipate upcoming sections of the text (predictive function). Reflect on previously introduced ideas (retrospective function). Teachers can use non-narrative texts (e.g., press articles, arguments) to teach discourse-organizing vocabulary and help learners recognize how these words shape the structure of texts .Predictive skills, often emphasized in reading materials, can improve students' comprehension of text organization.

In this case, teaching and learning language highlights the importance of discourse-organizing vocabulary in text comprehension. These words play a critical role in structuring arguments and guiding readers, making their understanding vital for both effective reading and teaching practices.