

Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) relates discourse structures to social structures via a complex sociocognitive interface. It critically describes the cognitive aspects of the use of some concepts or metaphors. SCDS deals with the ongoing communicative Common Ground and the shared social knowledge, as well as the attitudes and ideologies, of language users as current participants of the communicative situation and as members of social groups and communities.

A sociocognitive approach shows that structures of discourse itself can be described in terms of various cognitive notions, especially those of **information, beliefs or knowledge of participants**. Examples of discourse structures are as follows:

**phonological stress, syntactic word order, topic and focus, the structures of propositions, local coherence relations between propositions, pronouns and co-reference, global meanings**

SCDS does so in terms of mental representations, such as individual mental models of journalists or other language users, and these models *mediate* between shared social cognition (knowledge, attitudes, ideologies), societal structures, and actual text and talk. Thus, whereas most CDS studies describe and explain discourse in terms of its social and political contexts, SCDS includes a *cognitive interface* between discourse and society.

## **The cognitive interface**

**The theory is summarized in terms of its major notions, as follows:**

### *Mind, Memory and Discourse Processing*

- a. **Cognitive processes**, such as thinking, perceiving, knowing, believing, understanding, interpreting, planning, hoping, feeling, etc., take place in the **mind** or **memory** of individual **social actors as members** of social

groups and communities.

- b. These cognitive processes in memory are implemented in the **brain** and that brain lesions caused by accidents, illness or Alzheimer may cause aphasia or other linguistic and discursive **disorders**.
- c. Cognitive processes in memory operate on specific cognitive structures usually called (mental) **representations**, e.g., by forming, changing, storing, or (de)activating them. Thus, thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, interpretations, plans, attitudes or ideologies are different kinds of mental representation.
- d. Cognitive processes and representations cause and **control all human action and interaction** and hence also all language use and discourse.
- e. A distinction is made between **Short Term Memory (STM)** and **Long Term Memory (LTM)**. Because of its specific functions, STM is also called **Working Memory (WM)**, where 'online' processes of attention, understanding or the production of action take place. LTM stores the results of these processes, for instance in the form of knowledge or beliefs used for future operations, for instance when we remember something or when we need that 'information'

**Discourse production and comprehension** are very complex cognitive processes executed ongoingly ('online') by Working Memory, for instance, the processing of sounds, images, phonemes, morphemes, lexical items, syntactic structures, local and global meanings.

and structures and strategies of interaction.

- f. One of the (many) problems to be resolved of these many complex parallel processes involved in the production and understanding of discourse is how they are **controlled** and **coordinated** in fractions of second and with apparently limited memory resources.

**Control System** probably consists of overall **semantic macrostructures** ('topics') that control the production and comprehension of local sentence meanings (propositions).

- g. The processes of language use and discourse activate and apply specific **linguistic and discursive knowledge systems** of units, rules and strategies in LTM, such as those of grammar, the lexicon, local and global semantics, pragmatics, conversation and other forms of interaction.
- h. The **cognitive psychology of discourse** specifically also focuses on the description and explanation of **‘higher’ level processing** of discourse. Such higher level processes may involve the establishment of local coherence between meanings (propositions) of sentences and its expression in various types of cohesion or co-reference (e.g., pronouns

### **Personal Cognition: Mental Models**

- i. Whereas traditionally the semantics of language and discourse was limited to the description of local or global meanings, cognitive psychology has shown that such meanings are based on underlying mental model.
- j. Mental models are *subjective* representations of events or situations in **Episodic or Autobiographical Memory (EM)**, the personal part of LTM where we store our ongoing and past personal experiences.
- k. Mental models have a **standard schematic structure** of a limited number of categories that allow very fast processing, such as Setting (Place, Time), Participants (and their Identities, Roles and Relationships), Event or Action (and its Intention or Purpose). Such a schema allows us to ‘analyze’ and understand a situation or event in fractions of seconds and then take appropriate action.
- l. **Producing a meaningful discourse** about an event, such as a story or news article, involves the (partial) expression of a mental model of that event.
- m. Mental models are **individual, personal, subjective and multimodal**.

They not only subjectively represent a situation or an event, but also opinions and emotions, and partly in terms of vision, sounds, gestures, motor movements.

- n. The **direct communicative intention** of much discourse is the transmission of the mental model of speakers/writers. Hearers/readers, however, construe their own, possibly (quite) different ‘interpretation’ of such discourse in terms of their own mental model.

Language users not only construe mental models of the events or situations they talk, write, read or hear *about*, but also of the very communicative situation *in which* they participate. These mental models are called **context models**, or simply **contexts**. Whereas mental models representing what discourse is about (refers to) may be called semantic models, context models may also be called pragmatic models.

- a. Context models are **ongoing experiences** in which we represent (and hence understand) the social situation in which we are currently involved and active.
- b. Context models consist of a **schematic structure**, such as Setting, Participants and Action, but then specified for communicative actions, speech acts or conversational interaction, and Participants with communicative identities, roles and relations. The information of these context categories must be **relevant** for ongoing discourse. There are many *socially* relevant aspects of interaction (such as the appearance or clothes of participants).

Producing discourse, thus, not only consists in forming or activating a semantic model of an event we want to speak or write about, but *before that* of planning, construing, and **dynamically adapting** a context model: where, when, with whom, as what, how, and with what purpose we are right now or soon talking or writing. In other words, pragmatic

models control the communicative expression of semantic models.

### ***Social Cognition: Knowledge, Attitudes and Ideologies***

- o. Social members not only produce or understand discourse as individual persons, with their own personal history, experiences, knowledge, opinions and emotions, but also as **social actors and as members** of groups, communities, organizations or institutions.
- p. Social actors also share **sociocultural knowledge of the world** with other members of various epistemic communities, as well as **attitudes, ideologies, norms and values**. These forms of **social cognition** are located in **Semantic Memory**, part of LTM, but also called **Social Memory**.
- q. The **acquisition and application of world knowledge** is crucial for all cognitive processes of perception, understanding, action, interaction, language use, communication and discourse.
- r. In **discourse understanding** such knowledge is activated and applied in the understanding of words, sentence meanings and overall discourse meanings, and in the **construction of personal mental models**. And vice versa, the understanding of discourse and the formation of mental models of specific events may be generalized and abstracted from in the **acquisition or modification of generic knowledge** of the world.

As yet we have only fragmentary insight into the location(s) of socioculturally shared knowledge in the brain and in their **structures or organizations in memory**, e.g., in terms of *hierarchical relations between concepts* (e.g., a car is a vehicle), or as *frames, stereotypes* or more dynamic *scripts* or *scenarios*. It has also been proposed that, like mental models of concrete events, such generic knowledge is *multimodal*, e.g., involving vision, sound, smell, sensorimotor and emotional information (e.g., what we know or have experienced about cars).

- s. Social actors may also act and communicate as **members of social movements or ideological groups**, and share **attitudes** about fundamental social issues, such as immigration, abortion or terrorism.
- t. Finally, these social attitudes may themselves be organized by more fundamental underlying ('positive' or 'negative') **ideologies**, such as socialism, feminism, neoliberalism, racism and anti-racism, militarism and pacifism.

**There are many discourse structures:**

- (i) **Stress, intonation and word order** of sentences depend on what *information* is currently known, focused on, new or unexpected, and as currently shared and dynamically changed as *Common Ground* among participants.
- (ii) **Meanings** of words, sentences or sequences of sentences are produced on the basis of the grammar and other linguistic and discursive knowledge of language users, and on the basis of the shared generic, sociocultural knowledge of members of an epistemic community.
- (iii) **Coherence** relations between sentences or turns of conversation may be partly expressed by linguistic or discursive forms of cohesion (e.g., by pronouns or definite articles), but are based on and defined by relations between participants or events in underlying *mental models* of language users.
- (iv) **Opinion and emotion words**, as well as volume or intonation, are expressions of personal opinions and emotions represented in (multimodal) *mental models*.
- (v) **Global topics or themes** (or frames, etc.) as semantic macrostructures are planned and interpreted as the macrostructures of underlying *mental models*, and control the sequential online

production or interpretation of the local meanings of sentences.

- (vi) **Deictic or indexical expressions** refer to or presuppose information in the schematic categories of the *context model*: Time/Place/Perspective, Participant (Identities, Roles and Relations), current social or communicative action, as well as the Intentions and current Knowledge (Common Ground) of the participants.
- (vii) **Speech acts** are produced on the basis of appropriateness conditions defined in terms of the properties of *context models* (such as the knowledge, wishes, intentions or power of the participants) – as is the case for expressions of **politeness**.
- (viii) **Evidentials**, whether as specific morphemes in some languages, or as more explicit expressions in many languages (e.g., *I saw, heard, read, etc. that...; She said that...*) are expressions of how knowledge expressed in discourse was acquired, they can refer to old experience or context models.
- (ix) **The conventional, schematic, canonical structures (superstructures)** of various discourse genres are planned and understood as expressions of shared cultural knowledge of the schematic organization of such discourse genres, as is the case for **narrative** or **argumentation**, or the conventional organization of **news reports** or **scientific articles**.
- (x) **Metaphors** are based on the multimodal structure of mental *models of experience*.
- (xi) **Ideological polarization** at all levels of discourse, emphasizing the Good properties of Us (ingroup) and Bad properties of Them (outgroup), express underlying attitudes (e.g. on immigration or abortion) and ideologies (e.g. of racism or sexism), via particular, personal mental models of specific events, for instance as polarized topics, lexicon, metaphors, images, etc.

## The fundamental role of knowledge

the core of the sociocognitive account of discourse consists of the personal and socially shared knowledge of language users as social actors and members of epistemic communities.

We have seen that all our everyday experiences, and hence our personal knowledge of events, are stored as subjective, multimodal mental models. These mental models control topic and comment, local coherence as well as the contents of stories. Such mental models are in turn based on socioculturally shared generic or historical knowledge that is organized in memory.

### (Knowledge Device) Epistemic Device

It's a hypothetical component within context models used for communication.

It acts like a "knowledge calculator" that estimates what information the recipient (listener or reader) already possesses. This shared knowledge is called Common Ground.

### How Does it Work (Even Though We Can't Read Minds)?

The Epistemic Device relies on various sources to make its calculations:

**1.Shared Sociocultural Knowledge between participants.**

**2.Previous Encounters** (conversations or emails)

**3.Mutual Observation** (Observing each other in the current communication situation provides clues)

**4.Discourse History** (What has been said or written in the conversation is considered)

The Epistemic Device's estimations directly influence how we structure our communication through:

**Focus on New Information:** We tend to emphasize things the recipient likely doesn't know already. This can be seen in:



**Phonological Stress:** New or important information gets more emphasis (louder, slower speech).

**Word Order:** Known information often comes first in languages like English.

**Topic and Comment:** We introduce new topics first, then elaborate (comment) on them.

**Definite Articles:** "The" suggests something already introduced, whereas "a/an" introduces something new.

**Presuppositions and Implications:** We might assume the recipient understands certain things without directly stating them.

### **Epistemic Strategies Across Genres**

These strategies are used in all communication forms, but the level of explicitness varies:

**Familiar Relationships:** Conversations with family or friends who know each other well can be more implicit, relying heavily on common ground.

**Formal Settings:** News reports or lectures tend to be more explicit, assuming less shared knowledge.

**Social rules and values** also influence what we say that in some situations, revealing all you know might be inappropriate (e.g., doctor-patient confidentiality).

**Power Dynamics:** Laws and social structures can dictate what information can be shared (e.g., Official Secrets Act).

### **The telegraph editorial and its cognitive basis**

The editorials are a specific type of writing found in media outlets like newspapers. They are planned and written on the basis of journalist's generic knowledge, specific context and target audience.

-The journalist is aware of the current time (day, hour) and place (UK) to write about current affairs within a deadline.

- They write in their professional role as a journalist or editor, employed by a media organization, and targeting the readers of that organization.
- The intention of the editorial is to inform or influence the readers.
- The journalist presupposes specific political knowledge in the editorial.
- They formulate a personal or institutional opinion, which is influenced by underlying conservative attitudes towards immigration and general conservative ideologies against foreigners, as well as against the Labour party.
- These underlying context models and event models, along with their opinions, control the evaluative (appraisal) expressions present in the editorial.

In summary, the editorial genre in media discourse is shaped by the journalist's context model, political knowledge, opinions, and discursive knowledge of argumentation. These factors influence the evaluative expressions, as well as the persuasive and argumentative structures within the editorial.

## **Some specific structures of the editorials:**

### **(1) *Coalition deserves credit for progress on tackling unchecked immigration***

**David Cameron's Government is finally taking steps to stop abuses of immigration system that were ignored by his predecessors**

1. **Headline:** "Coalition deserves credit for progress on tackling unchecked immigration"

**The compound headline summarizes:**

- the overall meaning (**semantic macrostructure**) of the editorial, focusing on the coalition government's efforts to address immigration issues.
- It conveys a **positive opinion** (expressed through positive appraisal terms like "**deserves credit**," "**progress**," "**tackling**") of the journalist or newspaper regarding the government's actions.

- The metaphors "tackling" and "taking steps" emphasize the positive aspects of the government's actions, portraying them as proactive and forward-moving.

## 2. Presuppositions:

- The use of terms like "unchecked," "abuses," and "ignored by predecessors" expresses a **negative opinion** about previous Labour governments in the event model.

- The negative attitude towards immigration is also evident, reflecting the journalist's conservative ideology.

- The presupposition is that the previous governments (Labour) ignored the abuses in the immigration system, implying a contrast with the current government's actions.

## 3. Temporal adverb "*finally*":

- The inclusion of the adverb "finally" suggests that the current government's actions are long overdue, implying a positive evaluation of the government's efforts.

- It also reinforces the notion that the previous governments (implied to be Labour) had neglected the immigration issue.

Overall, the analysis reveals that the journalist's mental model reflects a positive attitude towards the current government and a negative attitude towards immigration, based on conservative ideology. The presuppositions and the use of metaphors further contribute to the polarized attitudes and ideologies between different political groups.

(2) Voters consistently tell opinion pollsters that immigration is among their biggest concerns – so it is incumbent upon our political leaders to address the issue

The analysis of the specific structure is based on:

### **1. Socioculturally shared knowledge:**

- The production and comprehension of the editorial, including this paragraph, presuppose a vast amount of shared knowledge about politics, policies, and immigration.

- Terms like "voters," "polls," "leaders," and "government" reflect this shared knowledge, which is necessary for understanding the editorial.

### **2. Mental model of the journalist:**

- it is based on the journalist's mental model, which includes a negative view of past immigration policies and a positive view of the current policy.

- The journalist's opinion is expressed in the form of a recommendation to address the issue of immigration, which is typical of the editorial genre.

- The recommendation is based on a general political norm, suggesting that if voters are concerned about an issue, political leaders should address it.

- This norm reflects underlying attitudes about elections, policies, and democratic ideals, emphasizing the will of the people.

### **3. Populist ideology:**

- The paragraph can also be interpreted as expressing a populist ideology, highlighting the influence of polls on government policy.

- The mention of voters consistently expressing concerns about immigration implies that public opinion should have a determining influence on government actions.

- The populist ideology is applied selectively in this case, as the Telegraph newspaper (known to be conservative) favors such people power only for the issue of immigration.

#### 4. Implied negative opinion:

- Although the editorial does not explicitly state a negative opinion about immigration in this sentence, readers can infer it based on their understanding of the newspaper's stance.

- The negative opinion aligns with conservative attitudes and ideologies, which are consistent with the Telegraph's position.

- The paragraph highlights the presence of implied information in the underlying mental models of the participants, even if it is not explicitly stated in the surface-level discourse.

Overall, the analysis suggests that the above structure reflects the journalist's mental model, which includes a negative view of past immigration policies, a positive view of the current policy, and a recommendation to address the issue based on a norm influenced by democratic ideals and public opinion. The presence of implied information and the alignment with conservative attitudes and ideologies are also noted.

(3) The last government patently failed to do so, presiding over the greatest inflow of foreign nationals in this country's history while doing nothing to plan for their arrival.

We have seen above that ideologies tend to be polarized between positive US (ingroup) and negative THEM (outgroup). This sentence, expressing a mental model about the policies of the past (Labour) government patently does so in a (very) negative description of Labour governments – again without mentioning Labour explicitly, but only indirectly referring to the ‘last government’. Again, such an interpretation requires readers to activate their political-historical knowledge to make this inference. The negative description of the previous Labour government not only expresses a negative opinion in the mental model of the (journalist of) the Telegraph, but it does so with rhetorical emphasis with the use of specific lexical items: *patently, greatest inflow (...) in history, doing nothing*. Indeed, underlying ideological polarization precisely shows in emphasizing the negative properties of THEM.

The passage also highlights the metaphor of immigration as a "vast and menacing flood" that is commonly employed by conservative media and political discourse to

oppose immigration. This metaphor, combined with the historical comparison of the "greatest of history," aims to create fear among the population and manipulate both voters and government policies.

In summary, the analysis suggests that the language and rhetoric used in this sentence serve to reinforce a negative opinion about Labour, align with a conservative ideology, and create fear among the population regarding immigration. These tactics can be employed by conservative media and political discourse to influence public opinion and shape government policies.

## **Brief Sociopolitical Analysis**

Analyzing media discourse requires both a social and political analysis and a sociocognitive analysis.

The analysis suggests that the alignment of a conservative newspaper like the *Telegraph* with a Conservative government is not surprising. However, the editorial's discussion of immigration is not politically innocent because it influences readers' attitudes and ideologies on the topic. The newspaper **conveys negative attitudes against immigration and immigrants**, framing them as "**abusing the system.**" These attitudes, acquired through public discourse, are based on xenophobic and racist ideologies.

The passage contends that newspapers like the *Telegraph* not only express conservative opinions on immigration policies but also manipulate readers by **fostering xenophobic and racist attitudes and ideologies**. It argues that such attitudes can lead to everyday discrimination against immigrants. The sociocognitive discourse analysis presented earlier helps shed light on how and why **newspapers possess ideological and manipulative power**.

media discourse is not uniformly accepted by all recipients, and some may resist or reject its opinions and ideologies. However, on the issue of immigration, where many people have limited direct experience with immigrants, and where the persuasive messages align with readers' interests, ideological influence can be pervasive.

The analysis emphasizes that attitudes and ideologies about immigration are learned and acquired through public discourse, including media discourse. It highlights the role of newspapers and television in shaping these ideologies and influencing readers. It also suggests that such ideological manipulation by media can contribute to the reproduction of prejudice, discrimination, and racism.