(**Major**) Literature and Civilization   (**Course**) Discourse Analysis

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Historical Overview

Outcomes of the Tutorial: *By the end of this tutorial, you will be able to :*

1. ***Define*** discourse analysis

2. ***Outline*** its emergence and goals ;

3. ***Distinguish*** it from other branches of linguistics

4. ***Single out*** its scopes and field of inquiry.

Terminology Used in this Toturial:

Language, linguistics, grammar, semantics, syntax, semiotics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, context, interaction, language in use, meaning, utterance, speaker meaning, utterance, and interpretation.

Linguists consider the discourse level the apex of linguistic description. The enterprise of Discourse Analysis is to study and reveal the regularities of language that surpass the sentence_ the traditional 'highest' unit of description _ and that encompass the context of its use. Discourse Analysis is interdisciplinary in nature and has applications in several fields to which language has a particular relevance.

Etymologically, the word discourse is taken from the Latin word 'discursus' which means a 'conversation' (McArthur, 1996). In this general sense, it incorporates both the spoken and

written modes (although, at times, it is confined to speech). Carter (1993) specifies several denotations of the word 'discourse':

1. The topics or types of language used in definite contexts. Here, it is possible to talk of political discourse, philosophical discourse and the like.

2. What is spoken, in contrast to 'text' which denotes what is written. (The text/discourse distinction is not always sharply defined. Nunan (1993) shows that these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably and often treated differently. The 'discourse/text' dichotomy is often correlated with the process/product' dichotomy respectively.

3. It is contrasted with the traditional notion of 'sentence', the highest unit of language analysis: discourse refers to any naturally occurring stretch of language. It is this last sense of the term that constitutes the cornerstone of the approach known as Discourse Analysis (DA).

Since the 1950s, the two prevailing approaches to language have been structuralism and Chomskyan theory. Although these approaches present, respectively, many different views about language analysis they share a central feature that is largely responsible for the unfortunate state of the field of discourse analysis before the 1970s. Following the well-known distinction established by Saussure between langue and parole, both the structuralist and the Chomskyan approaches are (almost) exclusively preoccupied by phenomena pertaining to the realm of langue. These researchers are interested in the internal functioning of grammars seen as nearly closed systems, that is, as systems defined and discussed as largely independent of contingencies observed in everyday language use. Researchers look for regular mechanisms, processes, or rules, especially in the fields of phonology and syntax. The keywords for both these fields are: units, positions, distributions, relations, and changes (Patry R., Nespoulous JL. 1990). According to linguists of

this period, the sentence was the absolute boundary of language study and discourse analysis has been generally dismissed as a nonlinguistic entity by a whole generation of linguists due to several reasons. The first reason is that the study of discourse is closely related to the study of meaning. Second, discourse analysis is a multileveled object of study. Third, it rests on contextual evidence. Fourth, it is subject to individual (speaker to speaker) variation. Finally, discourse analysis implies a beyond-the-sentence approach.

The term *discourse analysis* first entered general use in a series of papers published by **Zellig Harris** beginning in **1952** and reporting on work from which he developed transformational grammar in the late 1930s. Formal equivalence relations between sentences of a coherent discourse are made obvious and explicit by using sentence transformations to regularize the text to a canonical form. Words and sentences with equivalent information then appear in the same column of a binary array (table). This work continued over the next four decades into a science of sublanguage analysis (Kittredge & Lehrberger 1982), culminating in a demonstration of the information structures in texts of an immunology sublanguage of science (Harris et al. 1989) and a fully articulated theory of linguistic information content (Harris 1991). During this time, however, most linguists pursued a succession of elaborate theories of sentence-level syntax and semantics.

Though Harris had mentioned the idea of analyzing whole discourses, he had not worked out a comprehensive model as of January 1952. A linguist working for the American Bible Society, *James A. Loriot/Lauriault* needed to find answers to some fundamental errors in translation of Quechua in the Cusco area of Peru. He took the idea, recorded all of the legends and, after going over the meaning and placement of each word with a national; he was able to form logical, mathematical rules that transcended the simple sentence structure. He then applied the process to another dialect of Eastern Peru: Shipibo. He taught the theory at Norman, Oklahoma in the summers of '56 and '57, and entered University of Pennsylvania in the interim year. He tried

to publish a paper *Shipibo Paragraph Structure*, but it was not published until 1970 (Loriot & Hollenbach 1970). In the meantime, Dr. Kenneth L. Pike, a professor at University of Michigan Ann Arbor, taught the theory. and one of his students *Robert E. Longacre* was able to disseminate it in a dissertation.

Harris's methodology was developed into a system for computer analysis of natural language by a team led by *Naomi Sager* at *NYU* which has been applied to a number of sublanguage domains, most notably to medical informatics. The software for the *Medical Language Processor* has been made publicly available on *SourceForge*.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, and without reference to this prior work, a variety of other approaches to a new cross-discipline of DA began to develop in most of the humanities and social sciences more or less concurrently with, and in relation to, other new (inter- or sub-) disciplines, such as **semiotics**, **psycholinguistics**, **sociolinguistics**, and **pragmatics**. Many of these approaches, especially those influenced by the social sciences, favor a more dynamic study of (spoken, oral) talk-in-interaction.

In Europe, *Michel Foucault* was one of the key theorists on the subject, mainly referring to discourse in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

Key terms in Discourse Analysis: text, context, discourse, cohesion, coherence, genres, background knowledge, scripts, proposition, meaning, utterance, turn taking, speech acts, etc.