

Lecture1: An Introduction to Discourse Analysis (1)

1. Text

The term *text* refers to a written material with a communicative purpose. A text is novels, articles, essays, leaflets, travel guides, bills menus, road signs are examples of texts.

2. Context

The context has a vital role in the construction of discourse.

“The **context** relevant for a given act of utterance is a composite of the surrounding co-text, the domain of discourse at issue, the genre of speech event in progress, the situation of utterance, the discourse already constructed upstream and, more generally, the socio-cultural environment which the text presupposes—including mutual personal knowledge on the part of the speech participants as well as more general encyclopædic and cultural knowledge.³ The various aspects of this context are in constant development: the discourse derived via the text both depends on them and at the same time changes them as this is constructed on line (cf. also Roberts 2004; Unger 2006; Connolly 2007).” (Cornish, 2009)

“Okada (2007:186) presents a compilation of various authors’ conceptions of context:

- **Physical context** comprises the actual setting or environment in which the interaction takes place, such as a house-warming party or a hospital.
- **Personal context** comprises the social and personal relationships amongst the interactants, for instance the relationships between intimate friends or between employer and employees.
- **Cognitive context** comprises the shared and background knowledge held by participants in the interaction, including social and cultural knowledge. It is sometimes referred to [as] schemata. For example, knowledge about how an interview, a wedding or a lecture is conducted.
- **Textual context** comprises the world which the text constructs, that is the textual world (...) (Okada 2007:186).” (Okada, 2009).

3. Discourse

“Etymologically, the word ‘discourse’ dates back to the 14th century. It is taken from the Latin word ‘discursus’ which means a ‘conversation’ (McArthur, 1996). In its current usage, this term conveys a number of significations for a variety of purposes, but in all cases it relates to language, and it describes it in some way.

To start with, *discourse* is literally defined as 'a serious speech or piece of writing on a particular subject' (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 2001, p.388). In this general sense, it incorporates both the spoken and written modes although, at times, it is confined to speech being designated as 'a serious conversation between people' (ibid). This restriction is also implied in the word when it is used as a verb.

Carter (1993) specifies several denotations of the word 'discourse.' First, it refers to the topics or types of language used in definite contexts. Here, it is possible to talk of *political discourse*, *philosophical discourse* and the like. Second, the word 'discourse' is occasionally employed to stand for what is spoken, while the word 'text' is employed to denote what is written. It is important to note, however, that the text/discourse distinction highlighted here is not always sharply defined. Nunan (1993) shows that these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably and in many instances treated differently. Carter (ibid) adds that the 'discourse/text' dichotomy is often correlated with the 'process/product' dichotomy respectively. Third, this word is used to establish a significant contrast with the traditional notion of 'sentence', the 'highest' unit of language analysis: discourse refers to any naturally occurring stretch of language. In this connection, Trask (1999) clarifies that a discourse is not confined to one speaker or writer, but it can embrace the oral or written exchanges produced by two or more people. It is this last sense of the term that constitutes the cornerstone of the approach known as Discourse Analysis.

Despite that discourse is defined as a chunk that surpasses the sentence, not all chunks of language can fall within the scope of this definition. In fact, what characterizes discourse is obviously not its supra-sentential nature as much as the entirety it has_ its *coherence*. To be more explicit, discourse is a complete meaningful unit conveying a complete message (Nunan, 1993). The nature of this whole cannot be perceived by examining its constituent parts, 'there are structured relationships among the parts that result in something new' (Schiffrin, 2006, p.171). In the light of this, larger units such as paragraphs, conversations and interviews all seem to fall under the rubric of 'discourse' since they are linguistic performances complete in themselves." (Drid, 2010, pp.20-21)

Sources

Cornish, F. (2009). Text" and" discourse" as" context. Université de Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, France. Retrieved on 15 december 2020 from <(PDF) Text and discourse as context: Discourse anaphora and the FDG Contextual Component 1 (researchgate.net)>

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