

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from Different Perspectives: A Tentative Reclassification and Exploration of Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This paper, based upon academic foci and theories of different disciplines, reclassifies and interprets distinct concepts of 'discourse' via three major perspectives: (1) linguistic perspective (e.g., anthropological linguistic, systemic functional linguistic, cognitive linguistic and sociolinguistic studies); (2) non-linguistic perspective (e.g., philosophical and literary studies); (3) interdisciplinary perspective (e.g., conversation analysis [CA] and critical discourse analysis [CDA]). It also explores the practical significance of different kinds of discourse analysis, and concludes that the contributions made by various discourse analysis schools may mainly fall into three categories. They facilitate language use, refresh people's spiritual outlook, and lead more disciplines of social sciences to scrutinize society.

Keywords: Discourse, Perspectives, Reclassification, Interpretation, Significance

Introduction

Since the publication of the academic thesis titled 'Discourse analysis' authored by Harris (1952), discourse analysis has undergone a course of over fifty years. Associated with a number of disciplines, this field of study is currently experiencing a rapid development. Scholars of linguistic studies, philosophical studies, cognitive science and so on all have performed systematic research on this issue. The assimilation of research findings of various disciplines, for one thing, has continuously brought about cross-disciplinary and theoretical approaches to discourse analysis; for another, it has, indeed, blazed a new trail for such a novel subject.

The interdisciplinary trend of discourse analysis makes it inevitable that the term 'discourse' refer to diverse things via different viewpoints. Though the identical terminology 'discourse' is employed in many fields, its notion is, nonetheless, quite distinct. Sometimes discourse is treated simply as a word for language in use (Potter, 2004; Widdowson, 2007); at other times, discourse is theorized as a linguistics object or language above the sentence (Cameron, 2001; Martin & Rose, 2007). To complicate the matter, an increasing number of scholars further elucidate the concept of 'discourse' via unique theoretical perspectives. For instance, Potter (2004) deciphers discourse as texts and talk in social practices. That is, the focus is not on language as an abstract entity such as a lexicon and set of grammatical rules (in linguistics), a system of differences (in structuralism), a set of rules for transforming statements (in Foucauldian genealogies). Instead, it is the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do. Hoey (2001), in a similar fashion, also views discourse, especially the written discourse, as an interactive process between authors, readers or audiences. Alien to these two authors' viewpoints, Gee (1999), who categorizes such kind of notion in terms of more intricate and profound theoretical grounds, thinks of discourse as "socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting in the right place and the right place and at the right times with the right objects" (p. 17). In other words, discourse, as indicated above, has no generally agreed-upon definition, and confusingly many uses.

Under the impact of the reality that there is virtually no universal consent on the concept of and the usage of the term 'discourse', the classification of discourse analysis is usually vague and contradictory. Potter (1997) identifies five versions of discourse analysis, among which the first three relate to linguist and psychological studies, the fourth one is the standard Foucauldian discourse analysis, and the final model belongs to Potter and Wetherell's (1987) own, e.g., exploring discourse as texts and talks in social practices. Cook (1998), primarily sorts out three genres of discourse analysis, i.e., the

British & American school, Foucault school and critical discourse analysis school, in virtue of the different research schools. Founded upon the categorizations of Potter (1997) and Cook (1998), Cameron (2001), Yates, Taylor, and Wetherell (2001) and Lomax's (2004) collections cover some additional types of discourse analysis (e.g., ethnography of communication and conversation analysis) so as to provide more breadth and depth in discourse studies. All these abovementioned facts manifest that discourse analysis can indeed be seen as a contested disciplinary terrain where a range of different theoretical notions and analytic practices compete, and it is, therefore, indispensable to carry out systematic categorizations pertinent to the meaning and usage of this term 'discourse'.

Although the distinct categorizations of discourse analysis turn out to be somewhat inconclusive or even in rivalry, it is nonetheless quite evident that research on 'discourse' principally falls under the umbrella of three major disciplines: linguistic studies, non-linguistic studies and interdisciplinary research. The current paper is, therefore, tentatively classifies and interprets distinct concepts of 'discourse' via the three leading perspectives. For one thing, clarification of the concept of this terminology will help to figure out the theories, methods and objects of different discourse analysis schools. For another, it will be conducive to exploring the practical significance of their research.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from Linguistic Perspective

Up to now, there is no consensus on the notion 'discourse' from linguistic perspective. The examples listed below are some common view points: (1) discourse is a language unit beyond sentence (Stubbs, 1983); (2) discourse is "more than words in clauses" (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 1); (3) discourse is "a semantic unit, a unit not of form but of meaning" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 2). Different definitions will inevitably spawn diverged focuses on research fields. It, however, merits noticing that linguists unanimously lay stress on language and its use while conducting discourse analysis. Hence, in explaining the term 'discourse', they usually build into analysis such relevant elements as context and participants which not only constitute crucial theoretical components of their study, but also impact or set restrictions on practical application of discourse analysis.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from Anthropological Linguistic Perspective

Anthropological linguistics is the study of relations between language and culture, and the relations between cognition and language. Since it emerges, it has taken the commitment to explore the significance of language and the application of discourse. According to research findings of anthropological linguistics, discourse has its root in social activities (Paltridge, 1997). Discourse inter-relates with ideology and people's conducts. Discourse is, thus, a certain type of communicative or social activities performed by either an individual or social groups. Inspired by this definition, anthropological linguists have further classified discourse into such genres as jokes, stories, speeches, conversation and so on. Moreover, bearing in mind that discourse is a communicative and social act, experts on anthropological linguistic branch will necessarily emphasize situation and context in the process of interpreting discourse. Performing profound studies on these two factors, academicians put forward or decipher influential notions like 'context of situation' (Malinowsky, 1923) and 'speech events' (Bauman, 1977; Hymes, 1981), under the guidance of which, anthropological linguists give highest prominence to ties among narrative events as well as narrative structure in discourse analysis. The experimental focus of their research is, accordingly, on genres, acts and events in specific context. To explain this in a fool-proof way, language in use is what anthropological linguists centre on.

In addition to these aforementioned points, anthropological linguistics pay utmost attention to a term named 'inter-textuality' in analyzing discourse. The emergence and interpretation of discourse interweaves with previous events or behaviors rather than commencing with any individual's deeds (Li, 2007). In this sense, any genre of discourse is, in reality, on the basis of a preceding one; the latter carries over and develops the former. Discourse is, in other words, a key component of historical events, which further indicates that a global understanding of the meaning potential of discourse in historical course serves to comprehensively account for its present meaning. Such type of interpretation calls for a proper balance between 'innovation' and 'limitation', which may to a large extent guarantee the reliability and validity of discourse analysis.

The research focus, theories and methods discussed so far in this section justify that the essence of discourse is social and historical within the framework of anthropological linguistic category. In study-

ing discourse, academicians of this field attach great significance to language in actual use, especially oral language for communicative end.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from Systemic Functional Linguistic Perspective

Systemic functional linguists concern, among other things, language and its use. In their documents, two terminologies more often than not appear together: text and discourse. Numerous scholars claim that both terms may refer to a "unit of language larger than the sentence: one may speak of a 'discourse' or a 'text'" (Chafe, 1992, p. 356; Stubbs, 1996, p. 4). Via functional linguistic theories, however, the two terms are different in one regard: discourse is a dynamic multidimensional process; a text is the static product of that process (Halliday, 1994; Brown & Yule, 1983). Here 'text' will be adopted to replace both terms.

Systemic linguistic theories tend to consider language as social semiotic (Halliday, 1977, 1978). Language, in other words, is a semiotic system which stems from culture and society and conveys certain meaning in specific contexts. In the meantime, language, on the basis of three contextual elements (Field, Tenor and Mode), is a multi-functional semantic system armed with potential significance. Abiding by contextual elements, language users make selections on lexical and grammatical levels to incarnate semantic end; words and grammar, then, are represented via phonetic level. This kind of "mutual-representation relationship" can be demonstrated very apparently in texts.

Under the influence of the abovementioned theoretical framework, functional linguists decipher text as a semantic unit (Halliday, 1978), a concrete form of meaning potential. A text, either in oral or written style, is confined to some context. Hailing from context (including context of situation and context of culture), a text is, hence, the actualized form of communication. With the intention to look into language in use, functional linguists propose three meta-functions of language as their theoretical basis: experiential function (including subsystems like transitivity, voice and polarity), interpersonal function (including subsystems like mood, modality and key) and textual function (including subsystems like theme, information and cohesion). The three primary meta-functions, along with their subsystems, exhibit vital linguistic factors in communication, which again verifies the key point of functional linguistic research: language in use.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from Cognitive Linguistic Perspective

On the basis of cognitive perspective, cognitive linguists construe that language system is an integration of total cognitive phenomena. Such descriptive parameters as cognitive domain, category, frame, script, schemata as well as cognitive mode are all indispensable in depicting language. With the expansion of its research field, cognitive linguistics gradually shifts its attention from a single sentence to an entire semantic unit, named text or discourse. Cognitive linguists maintain that discourse is composed of cognitive phenomena. And the principal approach to inquire discourse is cognitive analysis. Interpreting discourse is a complex and advanced course in which information is processed. Language users, in other words, have to think over various linguistic and non-linguistic factors to illuminate discourse. In the process of interpretation, schemata are usually utilized to analyze the structure of discourse in that discourse is in fact the schemata of cognition. Such sort of schemata, in terms of language use, is mapped in people's mind and enhanced with the assistance of communicative acts. Schemata which promote or set constraints on language use are, as designated by cognitive linguists, the combination of all discourse genres. Schemata, through cognitive processing, evolve into multitudinous modes, the existence of which activates the process which triggers the psychological behavior and the use of language. Complying with these modes, people apply discourse to practice and participate in all kinds of activities.

Cognitive linguists have indeed come up with break-through theories with regard to discourse analysis, and here the typical ones which have far-reaching impacts will be briefly illustrated. The first one is theory of metaphor which has been recounted in detail by Searle (1979) and Lakoff (1980). Metaphors, from cognitive linguistic perspective, are "powerful cognitive tools for our conceptualizations of abstract categories" (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996, p. 114) instead of general figures of speech as suggested by traditional views. Adept at interpreting lexical categories and tackling elaborated scientific, political and social issues, they are of extraordinary value in language. Theory of metaphor, in other words, incisively uncovers the way in which people adopt language to build up a discourse world and

an interactional process, thus realizing due communicative intention. In addition to theory of metaphor, the relevance theory posed by Sperber and Wilson (1995) occupies an outstanding role in cognitive linguistics as well. This theory, centering on shared knowledge of conversational participants, explicitly shows the measures to establish internal coherence in discourse and the means which enables the addressee to grasp the real purpose of addresser's inference. Last but not the least important theory is the 'notion of mental space' expounded by Fauconnier (1999, 2000). Mental space, alien to physical world, is an idealized cognitive mode instead of a faithful representation of reality. The core of this notion is 'sensor projection', via which different mental spaces will integrate and become a new perspective of discourse. Such a refreshing concept, no doubt, demonstrates an effective method for interpretation of discourse.

Having defined clearly the nature, structure and function of discourse, cognitive linguistics has initiated a novel route for discourse analysis. The author of the present paper, therefore, prudently proposes that cognitive linguistics which not only takes in research findings of psychology, neurology, and computer science as reference, but also contrives to prove the validity as well as the accessibility of cognitive hypothesis with the assistance of those disciplines, may enact an increasingly key role in discourse analysis.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from Sociolinguistic Perspective

Sociolinguistics, as its name indicates, is the study of language in its social context. Like functional linguistics and anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics regards language to be communicative, social and interactional by nature. It addresses questions of how language is shaped and reshaped in the discourse of everyday life, and how it reflects and creates the social realities of life. Among all its sub-branches, one tradition to discourse analysis under sociolinguistic approach titled 'ethnography of communication' warrants most of academic attention. In this section, discourse analysis made by this field will be discussed.

"The approach to the sociolinguistics of language in which the use of language in general is related to social and cultural values is called the ethnography of speaking or, more generally, the ethnography of communication" (Fasold, 1990, p. 39). Based on anthropology and linguistics, researchers on this field are "concerned with the situations and uses, the patterns and functions of speaking as an activity in its own right" (Hymes, 1968, p. 101). Their focus of attention is, in other words, on how communicative patterns are determined by cultures and social structures in speech communities. Driven by this research object, scholars claim that discourse, an important means of communication, enables people to deploy all kinds of communicative activities. Discourse sets limits on people's communication, and communication in turn regulates the actual use of discourse. The appropriate way of employing discourse is, then, the primary concern of ethnography of communication in discourse analysis.

In an attempt to investigate the connection between discourse and communication, ethnography of communication will, no doubt, implement their research within a special social or cultural setting. With reference to this point, Hymes identifies several component factors by which a speech situation is recognized, and he put them into eight groups, each labeled with the letter of 'speaking' (s: setting; p: participant; e: ends; a: act sequence; k: key; i: instrumentalities; n: norms; g: genre) which is suitable for context study (Hymes, 1972). Identification of these components is central to an ethnographic approach to language, as it is the values of these components that enable the ethnographer to determine the appropriateness of people's use of language in a certain situation. That is to say, such series of situational components all constrain or standardize the usage of language. To apply this theory to practical account, only by proper utilization of language within specific social and cultural context can discourse positively serve communication.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from Non-Linguistic Perspective

True, discourse analysis is intricately and intimately bound up with linguistics, but it can also be applied to other fields. Currently, a number of non-linguistic disciplines have defined the term 'discourse' under unique approaches. As far as the profundity of theories and research achievements are concerned, the contributions made by philosophical and literary studies stand out above the rest.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from the Perspective of Philosophical Studies

Since philosophy views the entire world as its research subject, language is merely a fraction of its academic scope. Under philosophical approach, achievements with reference to language study attained by Foucault and his followers outshine others. Here all those who perform their research under the guidance of Foucault's ideals will be called "Foucault school", which, though, has not been universally accepted.

Foucault is best known for his critical studies of social institutions, especially of relationship among power, knowledge and discourse. Founded upon the dichotomy of *langue* and *parole* proposed by Saussure, Foucault comes up with his own interpretation with respect to discourse. It is Foucault's contention that discourse, though constructed by symbols, has nonetheless transmitted much more information than those ordinary symbols does. (Foucault, 1972) Discourse, in other words, cannot be arbitrarily generalized into *langue* or *parole*. Discourse, according to his understanding, consists of basic constituents named statements which are functional semiotics other than structural unities like prepositions, utterances and speech acts. A group of statements depends upon "the conditions in which they emerge and exist within a field of discourse; the meaning of a statement is reliant on the succession of statements that precede and follow it" (Gutting, 1994, p. 231). The integration of these statements naturally forms a genre of discourse. Corresponding to semiotic function of statements, discourse, simultaneously armed with linguistic and material properties, is a system of practice, existing in a 'cubic' context. It, on the one hand, varies along with the change of context; on the other, it spontaneously shapes context as well. Besides, Foucault further maintains that people and the world enter into a 'discourse relation', upon which both are depended (Foucault, 1972).

Apart from these fundamental concepts, theories and method of Foucault school merit discussion as well. Dissimilar to traditional historical approaches, Foucault school concern, among other things, the formation and function of discourse. Foucault, as well as his followers, lays great stress on the association between discourse and social hierarchy instead of language in use. Their research objects include power-relations, ideology, knowledge, etc. It is in discourse, according to Foucault, that power is both most manifest and hardest to identify. Discourse is where everything that relates to power and knowledge (Hynes, 1996); power relations, in turn, "shape discourses, social practices, subjects, objects, knowledge, history—in short, almost everything" (Kopytko, 2001, p. 1640). Discourse, in other words, is a component which construes society. It adjusts the relationship between knowledge and society, amplifies or enfeebles power and demonstrates identities of different social status. Aiming to explore the nature and function of discourse, Foucault (1972) put forward such notions as discursive formation and system of dispersion, which are entirely distinct from theories of discourse analysis brought up by other disciplines. Nevertheless, academicians of Foucault school reiterate that the analysis they are outlining is only one possible procedure, and that they are not seeking to displace other ways of analyzing discourse or render them as invalid. As a result of the refreshing research findings, Foucault school has, no doubt, occupies a unique and outstanding role in discourse analysis (For detailed overviews concerning Foucault's ideals and approaches, see Gutting, 1999; Powers, 2007).

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from the Perspective of Literary Studies

Research on discourse gained litterateurs' favor early in ancient Greek ages. It, however, warrants attention that the academician's research focus of ancient times is primarily on the artistic feature of literature works. Enlightened by these conventional theories, text structure, genre and style have long been the subject of literary discourse analysis.

Under the influence of the cross-disciplinary trend, literary studies, in its long historical development, have overlaps with other fields of social sciences in virtue of discourse analysis. This kind of overlapping, nevertheless, does not mean that literary language is identical to ordinary language. Ordinary language which serves to convey information for communication possesses the function of external denotation. It refers to the physical world, thus entailing realistic feature. Literary language, on the other hand, is in favor of internal denotation, hence assuming aesthetic essence. With regard to this distinction, a great many scholars expound their standpoints. Admittedly, literature works, according to their understanding, can convey information or reflect social relation, but the principal intention of reader is not to accept such information passively. Hence, literary discourse cannot be simply viewed as a communicative approach. Cook (1994) and Hakemulder (2004) propose that literary discourse has a particular effect on the mind, refreshing and changing the readers' mental representation of the

world. Discourse, thus, possesses psychological intentions and it represents social fact via reader's mental activities. In other words, through artistic processing, the author bestows upon literary discourse psychological function, which constitutes an interaction between readers and writers (Steen, 2004). This kind of interaction disturbs the schemata already established in readers' mentality and helps to build up a world dissimilar to reality which depends upon but evolves from social factors (Shen, 2001). This effect indeed proves the significance of literature works, and it is noted that considerable plain languages, once embodied within literary texts, are endowed with tremendous value. All this further indicates that literary studies of discourse focus on language trait as well as other indispensable elements like society, reader and so on. Discourse, interpreted from literature perspective, is an elaborated collection which involves both concrete material and abstract psychological factors

Being an important field of discourse analysis, literature has made rare exceptional contributions to the research on analyzing discourse. Another current state meriting attention is that its research findings, though remarkable, are still in the process of being perfected.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from the Perspective of Interdisciplinary Fields

Discourse analysis has been taken up in a variety of social science disciplines, and some of them do not belong to any specific fields. Studies of these fields, in other words, cross traditional boundaries between academic disciplines, and become so called 'interdisciplinary fields'. Taking in research theories and methodologies of many other disciplines as references, interdisciplinary fields have definitely made valuable contributions to discourse analysis. This section groups together two primary and influential interdisciplinary discourse analysis schools, i.e., CDA and CA, for they both have interpreted discourse via approaches of sociology and linguistics.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from the Perspective of CDA

The school of CDA, for one thing, finds illumination in social semiotic views presented by systemic functional linguists. For another, it backs its theories by drawing reference from critical linguistics. CDA is the name given to the discipline which studies language in terms of social and cultural view. Founded on the idea that there is unequal access to linguistic and social resources, its theories suggest that discourse is social by nature. Being a kind of social power, it is able to interfere with political, economical and cultural activities. Discourse can, therefore, be generally viewed as political and ideological conducts.

CDA lays great stress on 'critical'. Experts on this field, above all, pay special heed to the association between discourse and ideology. To illustrate this in detail, they examine the way in which language choice impacts the so-called 'influential relation' like thematic option and turn taking between speaker and receptor. Meanwhile, power relations, gender issues, and other political and social elements of asymmetry draw academic's concern as well (Mey, 2001). Kress and Hodge (1979) behold that language functions as a tool both for communication and for power control. Language serves to manipulate people's thoughts and acts; it classifies people, events, as well as material goods into different genres and ranks, attempting to maintain the stability of certain system and some individuals' identities (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979). All genres of discourse are, therefore, inevitably confined to the configurations of language and society. Mastering a specific genre of discourse, to some extent, endows the owner with the power that others can hardly procure, thus having more control over others. As a result, it follows naturally that unequal distribution of economic, political and cultural resources come into being. Tackling the existing unfair distribution, then, becomes one of the primary tasks of CDA. Academicians of CDA, based upon these theories and tasks, carry out inquiries into the close tie between discourse and society. These two factors, as suggested by CDA, enter into a two-way influential link. Taking this point into consideration, Fairclough (1995) addresses three-dimensional discourse analysis mode. According to his understanding, any genre of discourse can be viewed as a three-dimensional concept: text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice. Such properties of discourse, accordingly, call for a three-dimensional discourse analysis mode which involves linguistic description of text, exposition of the relation between text and discourse practice and interpretation of association between discourse practice and socio-cultural practice. Having consolidated linguistic analysis and social analysis, this mode evidently demonstrates that discourse is one of the component elements which construct the society. Lexical-grammatical choice and organization of discourse, hence, are necessarily subject to other social factors; discourse, in turn, can impact these

social constituent elements. The advancement of society will give rise to changes in discourse, and vice versa (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). By examining this sort of inter-relationship, CDA enables people to get a more transparent overview of the society and to persistently establish a better world.

It is worth noting that, in recent years, several refreshing developments in CDA appear which indeed elicit attention and warrant discussion. First, Martin (2004, 2007) has proposed and elaborated on a concept termed 'positive discourse analysis' as opposed to the traditional theory of CDA which explicitly present to readers the inequality of world order via sharp criticism of social realities and profound analysis of the unfair distribution of power relations, political and economic resources and so on. It is, then, Martin's contention that experts should fathom discourse and other social practices positively and mildly which can benefit the two parties or campaigns in rivalry simultaneously. Positive discourse analysis is expected to bridge the misunderstanding among people and to expedite their communication, which may eventually construct a more harmonious society where all people are able to coexist in peace. In addition to positive discourse analysis, Shi (2009) claims that current scholarship on language and communication has largely been culturally western monological rather than dialogical and diversified. He critiques the ethnocentrism of discourse analysis, and elucidates the significance and realities of eastern discourses (e.g., discourse of Asian, African and Latin American). He illustrates in detail the textual and contextual properties of the Third World discourse and depicts the reconstruction of eastern paradigms of discourse studies, aiming to promote western scholar's understanding of eastern discourse and other social realities. His efforts may, in the final analysis, enhance the cross lingua and cross cultural communication. All these sparkling recent change features in CDA demonstrate that the theories and research scopes are developing both in breadth and depth, and all the researchers' labor are unanimously dedicated to a common ground: to establish a more harmonious and peaceful world.

Interpretation of 'Discourse' from the Perspective of CA

CA which originated in the 1960s within sociology is the study of talk in interaction and social organization of everyday activities. Strongly influenced by ethno-methodology developed as "paying to the most commonplace activities of daily life the attention usually accorded extraordinary events" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 1), CA attempts to illustrate the way in which activities are produced and interpreted so as to uncover how members of a community establish a sense of social order by means of the linguistic resources. Bearing in mind these core objectives, conversation analysts, for one thing, spare no effort to examine such conversational regularities as orderliness, structure and sequential patterns of interaction; for another, they account for the way in which language and context 'inter-shape' each other.

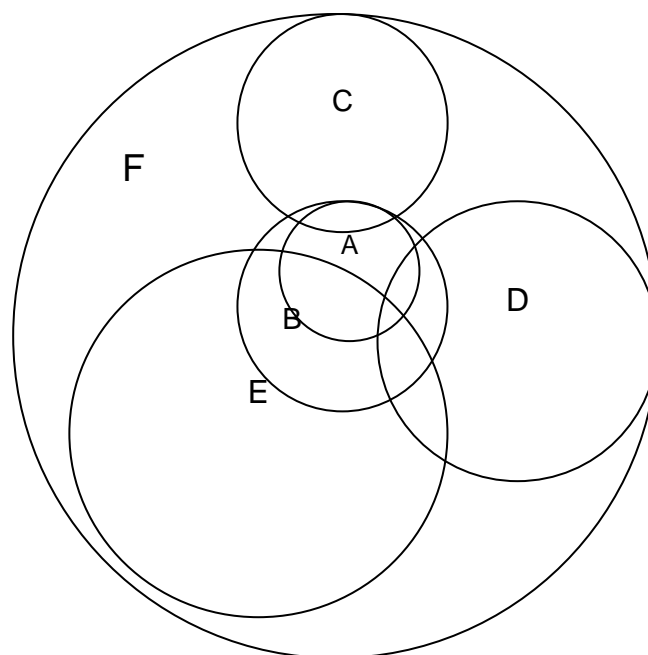
Among all research theories with regard to CA, one striking point which deserves mentioning is that the data under description in CA are naturally occurring talks rather than speeches that are simulated or degraded form of idealized competence. Any kind of interactions, hence, can be studied, for instance, teachers' instructions at school, telephone conversation, news broadcast, etc. In the course of collecting the data, conversation analysts will not make any preparations or interfere with the conversation process in that they are entirely observers instead of participants of the talks. After the conversations terminate naturally, they start to describe and analyze the recorded data through fundamental aspects of conversation organization like turn taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), preference organization (Pomerantz, 1978, 1984), etc.

By briefly introspecting the methodologies and objects of CA, we can apparently figure out that CA performs its research on conversation from a macro social perspective. Conversation, either institutional (under formal circumstances) or casual (in informal context), can be parsed as a social phenomenon. We can further assume that discourse is, in fact, the actualized oral media of conversation. When people initiate a talk, they use discourse to exchange information for communication which is the ultimate purpose of conversation.

Theories and methodologies of CA contrast sharply with those traditional scientific research approaches. CA, therefore, has been criticized by some linguists and socialists for its lack of systematicity and its narrow research focus. Experts on CA, however, carry out persistent efforts to draw references from other disciplines, aiming to improve its theoretical deficiencies. Their object is to make CA a genuine discipline rather than random fragments of thoughts or individual's subject assumption (Have, 1999). Today CA has been widely applied to anthropology, psychology and many other disciplines, which manifests that this field of study can become a very significant and promising discipline.

Practical Significance of Different Categories of Discourse Analysis

The development of interdisciplinary trend makes it impossible that discourse analysis confined to branches of linguistic studies. Some none-linguistic fields also carry out discourse analysis. The illustrations from the above paragraphs evidently demonstrate that connotation and denotation of the term 'discourse' vary considerably in different disciplines. Having taken a retrospective view of research focus and theories of discourse analysis conducted by the aforementioned fields, we may tentatively draw a diagram (See Fig. 1) which displays the academic scope and relations of these disciplines.



- A: Language
- B: Linguistic Studies
- C: Literary Studies
- D: Interdisciplinary Studies (CA and CDA)
- E: Philosophical Studies (Foucault School)
- F: Society

Fig. 1. Scopes and Relations of Different Discourse Analysis Schools

Fig. 1 explicitly manifests that discourse analysis borders on and overlaps with linguistic studies, philosophical studies, literary studies and interdisciplinary fields. It is, however, undeniable that certain overlapping is incapable of eliminating the distinctions of academic focus and research scope of each discipline. Language is a constituent factor of society. On implementing discourse analysis, linguistic studies give utmost prominence to language use. Meanwhile, they deliberate on the association between language and society which is the peripheral and secondary research end. Literary studies, on the other hand, emphasize intricate material and psychological elements other than language itself. Compared with these two, CA and CDA have extended their research from language to social issues, which cover a more comprehensive ken than linguistic and literary studies. All these, however, cannot be mentioned in the same breath with philosophy which regards the total world as its research object. Philosophy not only encompasses the academic scope of different disciplines, but also has its own study priority. On the basis of their diverse research stress, the following subsections will offer a brief instruction for numerous practicalities under the guidance of different sorts of discourse analysis.

Facilitating Language Use

Discourse analysis carried out by linguistic studies will inevitably enhance language use in a great many respects. Here three primary points will be listed.

To begin with, language teaching and learning will be remarkably enhanced. Discourse analysis carried out by systemic functional linguistics will assist language teachers in improving their teaching methods in that some abstract grammatical concepts can be mastered by actual use of language. Such theories as coherence and cohesion in linguistics can promote language learners' awareness of the textual structure so as to reinforce their oral or written ability. Moreover, with the development of cognitive linguistics, such theories as conceptual metaphor, schema have been widely applied to language learning and teaching, which is of vital significance for language teachers to update teaching approaches and for learners to acquire language.

Besides, there is hope that the technology of machine translation (MT) will undergo rapid progress. MT, though witnessing remarkable changes since its embryo stage, still has deficiencies which have not yet been overcome. Problems like mistranslation and ambiguity are indeed thorny issues in the domain of MT. Such phenomena derive from the fact that current MT is, to a great degree, based upon 'word to word' or 'sentence to sentence' level. It fails to decipher the original text as a macro semantic unit. Therein lies the challenge in machine translation: how to program a computer that will understand the text as a complete semantic entity, and that will create a rendering in the target language that resembles both the form and meaning of source text. By taking advantage of more advanced linguistic theories, especially these in functional linguistics, MT is expected to evolve to a higher degree. That is to say, MT, in the translation process, will decode the meaning of the source text as a semantic whole and re-encode this meaning in the target language on semantic level as well. Beyond that, relevant textual elements like cohesion and coherence as well as context will be taken into consideration so as to further guarantee the reliability and validity of MT.

Last but not least, linguistic analysis of discourse is conducive to social communication. Discourse is generally considered as a social phenomenon from the perspectives of anthropological linguistics and ethnography of communication. Theories and research findings of these disciplines help ordinary people to comprehend and grasp social discourse and to regulate the connection among discourse, culture, society and so on. Only in this way can people work, exchange ideas and enter into personal relationship as social members in a proper way.

Refreshing People's Spiritual Outlook

Literary studies with respect to discourse analysis evidently differentiate ordinary language, the one emphasizing realistic essence, from literary language, the one in favor of artistic feature. Since armed with aesthetic character, the function of literary discourse is more of a tool to convey information and to reflect reality. Being an elaborated material and psychological integration, literary discourse creates a world not confined to any specific time and space in which reader interacts freely with the text. This interactional process, which gives readers insight into their mentality and helps them to assess the value of art, to perceive the essence of beauty and to receive moral education, will eventually assist them in acquiring a positive life view and world view.

Leading More Disciplines of Social Sciences to Scrutinize Society

Foucault school, corresponding to some extent to CA and CDA, profoundly redefines the notion of 'discourse' in terms of social and philosophical perspectives. Researchers of these three fields hold that discourse, effectively constructing society, manipulating and controlling knowledge, social relationship and social institutions, will maintain social order and social status. Inspired by their novel research finding, such experts as politicians, psychologists and geographers progressively carry out discourse analysis in an attempt to scrutinize society. Their effects, no doubt, demonstrate that discourse analysis is heading for a promising future. Beaugrande (1997) proposes that in the 21st century, discourse analysis is inclined to shift its heed from abstract and idealized approaches and theories to practicalities. Discourse analysis will, then, center on the relationship among language, knowledge, society, culture and so on, aiming to explore a greater range of social issues.

Conclusion

There are few areas in the study of language and literature that are more exciting than discourse analysis. This is because discourse has been variously defined as language, a message, as cognitive process between individuals in verbal interaction, and as culture and ideology. Discourse is an extremely rich field of enquiry that lies at the centre of the humanities and social sciences. (Steen, 2004, p. 161)

There can be no all-purpose modes or theories of discourse analysis, any more than there can be an all-purpose key. True, discourse can be further interpreted from a great many perspectives other than those listed in the present article, but the disciplines introduced here are generally views as the basic and representative ones to implement discourse analysis. The notion 'discourse' elucidated by these disciplines has indeed exerts a profound impact upon discourse analysis conducted by other fields.

In addition to the tremendous theoretical influence upon other fields, different types of discourse analysis carried out by linguistic, non-linguistic and interdisciplinary studies have practical significance. They serve to facilitate language use, to refresh people's spiritual outlook and to lead more disciplines of social sciences to scrutinize society. Hence, though discourse analysis performed by these disciplines does have their limitations, they nonetheless entail practical value.

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