

Discourse Analysis

- Discipline within linguistics
- Definitions of discourse

- What is “discourse”? “Narrow” and “wide” definitions of discourse & examples of discourse

Discourse is

- the word 'discourse' comes from Latin 'discursus' which denoted 'conversation, speech'.
- "Discourse: a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative" (Crystal 1992:25)

- Cook (1990:7) novels, as well as short conversations or groans might be equally rightfully named discourses

- Ferdinand de Saussure divided the broad meaning of language into **langue**, which is understood as a system that enables people to speak as they do, and parole - a particular set of produced statements.
- Following this division, discourse relates more to **parole**, for it always occurs in time and is internally characterized by successively developing expressions in which the meaning of the latter is influenced by the former, while langue is abstract.

So...

- language above the sentence or above the clause
- a continuous stretch of spoken language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit.
- a stretch of language perceived to be meaningful unified, and purposive; language in use (viewed) as social practice determined by social structures

2 approaches to understanding discourse

“narrow”

Discourse as

opposite to text:

Written, spoken,
mediated discourse

(e.g. Internet), visual
discourse

“wide”

Discourse as a social
practice

Examples of Discourse

- Language above the sentence or above the clause:
- One day her mother said to her, "Come, Little Red Cap, take this piece of cake and bottle of wine and bring them to your grandmother." (Little Red Riding Hood. By J. and W. Grimm).

Examples of Discourse

Discourse as a social practice:

- Discourses of peace
- Discourses of food
- Medical discourse, etc.

Written, spoken, marginal?

- hi all, first let me thx Line, or i would hv forgotten 2 do this... well, wot m i gonna say...? oh yea! there's gonna b a cultural education programme organised by members of Intensified Learning Opportunity Programme (ILOP) n da xchange Office fr feb 23 - 27.
- There're gonna b a greaaaaat deal going on during the week [...]
- nite nite
- Toni

Examples of Discourse



- **Visual Discourse**





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Various social problems; **Law**: the study of how to ask questions in court, example from the last lesson: When did you last see the murdered woman?

Medicine and Therapy: the study of communication problems in medical setting; the study of how treatment decisions are negotiated in doctor-patient communication;

Business and Workplace: Advertising

- Issues of gender, race and culture (“Prohibition of mixed marriages”)
- Education: the study of teacher talk, black English in the classroom; etc.

Note on cohesion

Cohesion

Example A

One day her mother said to her, "Come, Little Red Cap, take this piece of cake and bottle of wine and bring them to your grandmother. She's sick and weak, and this will strengthen her. Get an early start [...]"

Example B

And this will strengthen her. Take this piece of cake. One day her mother said to her. She's sick.



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Discourse, to be called so, must have the following features.

- * **Cohesion** - grammatical relationship between parts of a sentence essential for its interpretation;
- * **Coherence** - the order of statements relates one another by sense.
- * **Intentionality** - the message has to be conveyed deliberately and consciously;
- * **Acceptability** - indicates that the communicative product needs to be satisfactory in that the audience approves it;
- * **Informativeness** - some new information has to be included in the discourse;
- * **Situationality** - circumstances in which the remark is made are important;
- * **Intertextuality** - reference to the world outside the text or the interpreters' schemata;

- Text taken from the Daily Mail Online (accessed 11 August 2009). The main headline reads:
- "Baby Peter's father tries to cash in with demand for £200,000 compensation".

"Baby Peter's father tries to cash in with demand for £200,000 compensation".

- Let's try to deconstruct this headline - this means, simply, let's use our knowledge of how English is used to unpack the meaning of the text.
- Firstly, let's begin with "Baby Peter". The newspaper writers and editors are relying on the fact that this is a well-known case, which is often just referred to in the media as "baby Peter". However, the text refers to the father of baby Peter.

"Baby Peter's father tries to cash in with demand for £200,000 compensation".

- Next, the term "tries to cash in" is used. In common language this refers to the act of trying to take advantage of a situation (either for money or in a metaphoric sense, as in trying to take praise for someone else's endeavours). However, the next few words "with demand for £200,00" lets us know that this is not a metaphor but a literal claim for money and in an opportunistic way.

"Baby Peter's father tries to cash in with demand for £200,000 compensation".

- The use of the term "cash in" implies that the writer is unsympathetic with the father and there is the hint that the writer believes that the father is an opportunist rather than a grieving parent.
- The sentence ends with the word "compensation". This might seem to contradict the notion of "cashing-in" as compensation is associated with genuine loss.
- However, the word is most likely being used to refer to the legal process required to receive such a payment.

"Baby Peter's father tries to cash in with demand for £200,000 compensation".

- Finally, the word "demand" is quite a forceful choice of word. To "demand compensation" implies that the father believes he has this right but that he may receive some resistance.

How to Do a Discourse Analysis

A. Things to Look For

What to notice when doing a
discourse analysis

1. Hidden relations of power present in the articles
2. Who is exercising the power, that is, whose discourses are being presented.

3. Who are consulted for the article (who are the spokespeople).

4. Who is the 'ideal subject' or audience for the article.

5. What is left unspecified or unsaid.

6. The use of passive voice, or processes expressed as ‘things’ (reification).

7. The use of colourful, descriptive language (adjectives) to indicate a strong discourse.

B. Ask these questions:

When doing a discourse analysis

- Would alternative wording of the same information have resulted in a different discourse being privileged?

2. **How** are the events presented?

3. How are people in the article characterised?

4. What message does the author **intend** you to get from the article?

5. Why was **this particular** picture chosen to accompany the article (if applicable)?

6. What repetition exists (a) within the article and (b) between different articles on the same topic?

7. What professional media practices assist with the presentation of dominant discourses (eg editorial constraints, journalistic standards etc)?

Analyse the following text...

- ...al igual que en los edificios que cayeron, la fachada era de ciudadanos bien formados y conectados con el mundo y el consumo, pero el interior no estaba soportado por valores sólidos ni principios fuertes. Rápidamente y ante la primera dificultad corrieron a tomar lo que pudieron.
- ...like the fallen buildings, the facade [of Chileans] was one of well-educated citizens that were connected with the world and consumerism, but their interior was not held by solid values or strong principles. Swiftly, and at the first sign of trouble, they hurried to take what they could.
- From:
<http://elitestv.com/pub/2010/03/chile-earthqu>