Discourse and other Disciplines

Discourse and Semantics

According to Bloomfield, the definition of meaning explicitly included "the situation in which a speaker utters[an expression] and the response it calls forth in a hearer". By contrast with most other work in semantics (semantic notions as meaningfulness, anomaly, contradiction, tautology, synonymy, antonymy, paraphrase, and so on), the functional-systemic linguistics of Halliday (1967, 1977, 1978) recognizes not only ideational and interpersonal meaning, but also textual meaning. It associates various sorts of meaning with choices made all along the way in the production of a sentence in a text. This sort of analysis reflects the proposals Firth made about semantic analysis as early as 1935. Thus, systemic linguistics has operated with the goal of describing discourse meaning all along.

The notion of meaning has increasingly become bound to discourse contexts, since the early 1970s or so. **Discourse context** has been evoked ever more frequently to handle phenomena not describable in terms of truth-functional and structural semantics. Speaker intentions and audience responses found their way back into semantic theory via pragmatics and speech act theory. Research on talk in real contexts showed the necessity for considering the interactional goals and relationship of conversational participants in the description of meaning. The gradual inclusion of context began to erode the traditional dichotomy between competence and performance, and as it did, interpersonal elements of meaning returned to prominence in semantic analysis.

Certain topics arise only within a discourse study of meaning, for instance cohesion, coherence, register, framing, and the interpersonal meaning of such devices as repetition, parallelism, allusion, and formulaicity. Many linguists have sought to identify discourse strategies for determining contextual meaning rather than go on attempting to describe alleged discourse-independent meanings for sentence types, sentences, constructions, or even words.

Some basic notions of semantic theory have been recognized to be discourse (or pragmatic) phenomena from their very introduction into considerations of linguistic meaning. Thus Bar-Hillel (1954) drew attention to indexicality (or deixis) and anaphora as aspects of meaning requiring inferences about speaker beliefs and intended referents, beyond truth-functional semantics proper. In fact, even traditional grammarians such as Christophersen (1939) and Jespersen (1924) had recognized the fundamental discourse orientation of pronouns. The notion of **presupposition (versus assertion**) entered into the discussion of linguistic semantics from philosophy (Frege 1892; Russell 1905; and especially

Strawson 1950), as did the recognition of performative utterances with nontruth-functional meaning (Austin 1962; Searle 1969, 1979). Other notions like entailment are less clearly demarcated into semantic versus discourse areas. Semantic relations like synonymy, hyponymy, and antonymy were in principle described without recourse to discourse contexts.

Indexicality and Anaphora

Indexicality or deixis is the only area of meaning universally acknowledged to belong in the area of discourse or pragmatics, since it pertains to the contextual determination of reference which necessarily precedes a decision as to **the truth of falsity of an assertion**. Over 90 percent of our declarative sentences are indexical in requiring implicit reference to the speaker, the addressee, the time and place of utterance with pronouns like *I* and *you*, adverbs like *now* and *yesterday*, *here* and *there*, *right* and *left*, and demonstratives like *this* and *that*. The meanings of such lexical items are simply not describable without noting that their reference shifts each time the setting changes, each time a new speaker takes over or points in a different direction. This sort of meaning is irrevocably bound to context, and it represents a historical foothold for discourse analysis within semantic theory.

As early as 1967, Halliday was developing a treatment of anaphora in connected discourse built around his analysis of cohesion and text-semantic categories, namely *transitivity* (Actor, Process, Goal), *mood* (Subject, Predicate, Complement), and *theme* (Theme, Rheme). Chafe (1970, 1974, 1993) proposed a discourse-based interpretation of anaphora in terms of the given–new distinction as reflected in the presence of referents in consciousness. Givón (1985) argued for a pragmatic description of reference which would take discourse **topicality and accessibility** as well as cultural knowledge into account. Ariel (1994) works with a related notion of Accessibility in consciousness to account for anaphora in discourse. Prince (1981), Clark and his associates, and Levinson all proposed **hierarchies of referential expressions**, where choice was determined by the Gricean Maxim of Quantity and related factors.

Presupposition

Presupposition is also at heart a discourse or pragmatic notion, since the knowledge and beliefs of the speaker and the audience about things in the world are crucial in determining whether a sentence makes sense.

Strawson later (1964) expressed concerns about some apparent counterexamples to his presupposition theory, saying that our intuitions about the truth or falsity of sentences containing definite descriptions may depend on discourse matters such as the topic of conversation. Other aspects include **appropriateness, assumptions and dispositions of speakers, and reasonable inferences by their** audiences. Most recent research tends to define presupposition in terms of **reflective assumptions about knowledge shared by speakers and hearers.**

Speech Acts

Since Austin (1962) described performative utterances as apparent declarative sentences with no truth-functional meaning as such, but instead with some illocutionary act potential, semantic theory has recognized for performatives a special discourse-based type of meaning. Searle's (1969, 1979) development of speech act theory enriched semantic theory in several parallel ways: he provided a functional classification of utterance types and interesting approaches to locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary meaning. Speech act theory also offers a description of conditions for the successful performance of the different illocutionary acts, their so-called "felicity conditions."

Finally, it proposes a model for deriving indirect meanings for utterances from their literal readings according to regular inferences, based on these felicity conditions. Linguists reacted to speech act theory in several ways. Interest in the performative hypothesis by linguists led Ross (1970) and others (Cantrall 1974; Sadock 1974) to represent the pragmatic or discourse force of declarative sentences in (semantic) deep structure as a matrix sentence with the form *I tell you that* . . . , which spawned more work on contexts.

Entailment

Areas of meaning like entailment divide less obviously into truth-functional semantic versus discourse areas. That *uncle* entails some feature like <male> and that *dead* entails <not alive> may be easily described within traditional structural semantics by means of so-called redundancy rules. Other entailments, however – say, that *rob* entails <commit crime> and <punishable by prison term> – become quite cumbersome in any structural semantics. such entailments involve world knowledge over and above lexical information proper.

Interpersonal Meaning

The interpersonal meanings of repetition, parallelism, allusion, and formulaicity must also count as discourse phenomena, because they can only manifest themselves within some concrete context. Historically such effects have been considered in part under the rubrics of *poetics* or even *prosody*. Jakobson (1960) placed the poetic focus of language – language directed at the message itself – on a par with the other five foci, namely the referential, the expressive, the conative (directive), the phatic, and the metalingual. Even the sociolinguist Sacks (1992) found repeated occasion to comment on the poetics of natural conversation, particularly the synonym, antonym, and punning relations between words close to each other in conversation. Tannen's (1989) *Talking Voices* concerns itself centrally with the poetics of everyday talk through the notion of *involvement*, which collects such features of talk as dialogue, detail, repetition, and formulaicity; and Tannen pioneered the study of conversational poetics in showing how such features as tempo, repetition, parallelism, and simultaneous speech go into determining "conversational style" (1984).

In this general area of interpersonal meaning, we find linguists beginning to look at such phenomena as formulaicity (Tannen 1987a, 1989), for example the use of proverbs to wrap up stories (Norrick 1985; Sacks 1992) and the use of allusion and parody in jokes and joking (Norrick 1989). Concern with the functions of repetition illustrates the growing concern with language in real discourse contexts: thus Tannen (1987), Norrick (1987), and other contributions to the special number of *Text* Johnstone edited on the topic describe the role of repetition in the production and understanding of talk, in the coherence and interpersonal meaning of conversation.

Figurative Meaning

The figurative meaning of hyperbole, irony, and some metaphors has sometimes also been seen as context bound, though early attempts to describe metaphor often remained solidly within sentence semantics proper. Thus Katz (1964) described a procedure for developing interpretations for grammatically deviant and anomalous “semi-sentences.” Semi-sentences, including many figurative examples, receive interpretations based on their relations to nonanomalous sentences sharing properties with them. Further, Katz and Postal (1964) proposed a device for assigning features from predicates to proforms and semantically depleted items. Since the verb *drip* usually requires subject noun phrases characterized by the feature <(liquid)>, *drip* can also transfer the feature <(liquid)> to *something* in (12) in order to effect semantic congruency.
Fillmore (1971) proposed that selectional restrictions as presuppositions could transfer this same way to account for metaphors. Van Dijk (1972) revises Weinreich’s analysis as a case of feature *extension* rather than transfer; Levin (1977) and Norrick (1985) suggest further modifications of Weinreich’s original proposal to account for a wide range of figurative possibilities. Still, early on (Reddy 1969; Schofer and Rice 1977; Nunberg 1978) there were arguments that figurative language required discourse/pragmatic treatment along the lines of contextual reference, or that metaphor represented a “performance phenomenon” outside the purview of semantics proper, for instance Cohen and Margalit (1972), Price (1974), and Abraham (1975). If sufficiently powerful interpretive strategies are independently required at the discourse level, they could eliminate the need for any narrowly conceived semantic rules for figures.

Metalingual Perspectives on Figurative Meaning

Although we cannot directly observe the cognitive processing people go through when confronted with figures of speech, we do have access to several sorts of data which shed light on the process, namely the clarifications, corrections, and explicit metalingual comments in everyday talk. We can observe reactions of interlocutors to intentionally produced figures and to other incongruities which arise in conversation; and we can examine the verbal attempts conversationalists make to explain the apparent incongruities and outright contradictions in their

own speech. When certain types of comments and attempts at clarification recur, they can claim a psychological reality as processing strategies which no proposed semantic rule shares. Moreover, they represent patterns which must be part of discourse competence in any case, so that it only makes good sense to see how far they go toward describing figurative meaning as well.
Metalingual talk allows conversationalists to focus on the appropriateness of a word or turn of phrase – and hence, it helps them to negotiate the sort of meaning appropriate to their particular interaction.

Discourse and stylistics

Stylistics is the discipline that studies one specific type of language variety, namely that correlating with text type and situation. Situationally conditioned language variation has been studied under many labels. To many people, 'style' suggests a predominantly literary context; they prefer to call non-literary language variants by other terms such as 'sociolects'.

When a person reads or hears a piece of discourse, s/he forms an impression of its style by comparing it to the kinds of discourse s/he has experienced before in comparable situations. For instance, if the pulpit style of a certain clergyman strikes us as personal, we must have matched it against our past experience of other preachers' sermons. Otherwise we could not possibly know whether the style was personal or not. Thus our stylistic competence, which is part of our linguistic competence, consists of our having acquired a network of standards (or 'norms' if the term is used without evaluative connotations) as to how people usually express themselves in a certain situation.

The burgeoning research in discourse analysis over the past decade offers, however, the possibility of approaching these works in a new and more productive way. If every discourse has a unique organization, then it follows that one way of identifying the individuality of a work is by analysing its organization as discourse.
Firstly, it is assumed that every clause in a discourse is in at least one semantic relation with at least one other clause or group of clauses in that discourse. **Secondly**, it is assumed that out of a finite number of such clause relations an infinite number of patterns of organization may be built. Every discourse has therefore a potentially unique organization. **Thirdly**, it is assumed that the clause relations in a discourse may be between clauses, groups of clauses, or parts of clauses; in other words the relation is no respecter of syntactic boundaries, though its realization is necessarily rooted in the grammar of the clause. **Fourthly**, it is assumed that certain patterns of organization have become culturally dominant, of which the problem-solution pattern is a particularly good example. This has three essential parts—a statement of an

aspect of the situation requiring a response (or problem), a response (whether suggested or carried out), and an evaluation of the effectiveness of that response. **Fifthly**, it is assumed that clause relations are an abstraction of connections readers make between the parts of a discourse as part of the effort of understanding the discourse; those connections are aptly and more precisely represented as questions asked of the discourse. What this means is that every reader is engaged in a dialogue with the discourse being read. Sixthly, lastly, and most importantly, it is assumed that the clause relations and the patterns of organization which they form are indentifiable by means of signalling devices of various kinds, including subordination, conjuncts and lexical signals, and by projecting the discourse into question-and-answer dialogue. Signals of clause relations also include systematic repetition, which may signal matching relations of, for example, compatibility and contrast; examples will be considered in the poem to be analysed.

One extra assumption needs to be added when the object of study is a literary discourse, namely that the implied writer (i.e. the writer required to understand the discourse, who may or may not tally with the real writer) may also be in dialogue with an implied reader (who may well be different from the actual reader). Thus in the poem that follows the implied writer is a repentant sinner who is in dialogue with an implied reader who is God the Father.

Discourse and Sociology: Sociology and Discourse

Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and linguists have advanced the study of discourse without the common descriptive terminology, without the shared theoretical or methodological predilections, and without the set of paradigmatic studies around which a unified and cumulative body of knowledge can be constructed. Proliferation of contrasting paradigms in each of the above mentioned disciplines renders the possibility of a comprehensive (and unifying) theory of language extremely remote.

Discourse and Law: forensic discourse

Forensic discourse analysis is, in the main, concerned with two kinds of text: handwritten contemporaneous records made by police officers of interviews with witnesses and suspects, and statements dictated by witnesses and suspects to police officers.

Discourse and Psychology

Discourse analysis has become one of the most important social constructionist approaches within social psychology. In cognitivist approaches to language, written and spoken language are seen as a reflection of an external world or a product of underlying mental representations of this world. In contrast to cognitivism, discursive psychology treats written and spoken language as constructions of the world oriented towards social action. discursive psychology draws partly on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in which it is

emphasised that claims about psychological states should be treated as *social activities* instead of as manifestations of deeper ‘essences’ behind the words. Utterances are oriented towards action in specific social contexts, and their meanings are therefore dependent on the particular use to which they are put. Thus language use is context bound or *occasioned*. It is language use in this sense that discursive psychologists define as *discourse*. According to discursive psychology, language does not merely express experiences; rather, language also constitutes experiences and the subjective, psychological reality.

According to discursive psychology, discourses do not describe an external world ‘out there’ as schemata and stereotypes do according to cognitivist approaches. Rather, discourses *create* a world that looks real or true for the speaker.

Language is not seen as a channel that transparently communicates a pre-existing psychological reality which is the basis of experience; rather, subjective psychological realities are *constituted* through *discourse*, defined as *situated language use* or *language use in everyday texts and talk.*

We give meaning to experiences by virtue of the words which are available, and the resulting meanings contribute to producing the experience rather than being merely a description of the experience or an ‘after-the-event’ occurrence. Discourse can be said to ‘construct’ our lived reality.

The production of meaning, and hence identity construction, are constrained by the range of discursive resources which are available to individuals by virtue of their social and cultural position and status. It is easier for some individuals to adopt, and be ascribed, certain identities such as the identity of ‘civilised’ Westerner within an Orientalist discourse or the identity of ‘expert’ within a scientific discourse.

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