

Discourse

What is discourse?

- Most of the available definitions of discourse fall into **three** central categories (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001, p. 1):

(1) anything beyond the sentence,

(2) language use - The study of discourse refers to the study of the different aspects of language *use* (Fasold, 1990, p. 65)

Discourse

(3) a social practice that includes **nonlinguistic** instances of language.

What are the types of discourse?

- The term ‘**discourse**’ covers different **types** of discourses such as written, spoken, visual languages as well as multimodal/multimedia forms of communication (Merry, 1990, p. 110).

1.2 Discourse, text, and context

- ‘**discourse**’ and ‘**text**’ are two different terms.
- Traditionally, *discourse* had been treated as “a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence” (Crystal, 1992, p. 25); whereas, *text* had been viewed as written language (Alba-Juez, 2009, p. 6).

1.2 Discourse, text, and context

- **Text** refers to “[a] stretch of language interpreted formally, without **context**” (Cook, 1989, p. 158);
- **discourse** “brings together language, the individuals producing the language, and the **context** within which the language is used” (Nunan, 1993, p. 6).
- “**Text** refers to a written or taped record of a piece of communication, whereas **discourse** refers to the piece of communication in context” (Nunan, 1993, p. 20)

1.2 Discourse, text, and context

- **Discourse** is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 277).
- **Discourses** are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 277).
- **Text** is viewed as part of **discourse**.

1.2 Discourse, text, and context

- To illustrate the differences between the two notions, the following simple sentence is analyzed:

- ✓ Yeah I loved it.

- If one considers this sentence as a text, then you can analyze it syntactically, phonologically, grammatically, etc. Yet, the exact meaning and intention of the given sentence and the speaker including the cultural aspects is not examined.

1.2 Discourse, text, and context

- In textual analysis, the real meaning and intention are overlooked, because the context is excluded.
- On the other hand, if the same sentence is examined as a discourse, then it is plausible to uncover the meaning, the intention of the speaker, and its effect on the hearer, as the analysis examines the context of the sentence. That is, the analyst will take into consideration the speaker, the addressee, the cultural aspects, etc.

1.2 Discourse, text, and context

- The notion of **context** should be highlighted here.
- The word ‘context’ is derived from the Latin words *con* (meaning ‘together’) and *texere* (meaning ‘to weave’). The raw meaning of it is therefore ‘weaving together’.
- In this sense, discourse is “more than *just* language use: It is language use seen as a type of social practice” (Fairclough, 1992b, p. 28). It takes place within a given context.

1.3 Discourse as a social practice

What is the starting point to examine language?

Language is a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1989, p. 22).

What is the meaning of social practice?

Fairclough (1989: 22) explains the meaning of social practice in three points:

1. language is not an external entity; rather, language is part of society.

1.3 Discourse as a social practice

2. language is a social process. In this sense, the line can be drawn between discourse and text.

- **Text**, both written and spoken, is a **product** (of the process of text production) not a process.

- **Discourse** is “the whole **process** of social interaction of which a text is just one part” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24); hence, **text** is an essential part of discourse.

1.3 Discourse as a social practice

○ In both processes, i.e., the process of **text production** as well as the process of **text interpretation**, **text** is considered as a resource *only*.

1.3 Discourse as a social practice

3. language is a **socially conditioned process** (of both production and interpretation) by other nonlinguistic part of society (or parts of society).

○ These nonlinguistic parts are referred to as *members' resources* by Fairclough (1989: 24)

○ *The term members' resources refers to* what “people have in their heads and draw upon when they produce or interpret texts – including their knowledge of language, representations of the natural and social world they inhabit, values, beliefs, culture, assumptions and so on.”

1.3 Discourse as a social practice

- In short, discourse might be viewed as “socially **constitutive** as well as socially **conditioned** – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258).
- Yet, in order to (re)construct and represent any social reality, **discursive practices** are needed.

1.4 Discursive practices

- Discursive practices are essential, because they are the practices discourse analysts seek to uncover and reveal in order to pinpoint the different versions of reality.
- One of language's functions is to '*do* things'. "Language-in-use is about saying, doing, and being" (Gee, 2011, p. 16).

1.4 Discursive practices

What are discursive practices?

- They are an identifiable set of (non)linguistic elements and tools that usually go together to achieve a specific goal. (e.g., anger, happiness, etc)
- These tools are utilized to construct discourse that can (re)construct reality.
- **Example:** media has its own discursive practices to manipulate people (or at least represent their own reality in accordance with their ideology), e.g., metaphors, rhetorical styles, euphemism, colors, font size, etc.

1.5 Discourse structure (hierarchy of discourse)

- “[d]iscourse is neither flat nor linear in its organization; it is **hierarchical**” (Tomlin, Forrest, Ming Pu, and Hee Kim, 1997, p. 66).

What is a hierarchy?

- A hierarchy “is a word conventionally used to denote a series of structured levels (or ranks) of progressively increasing size, each level having its own characteristic structure in relation to levels above and below” (Poythress, 1982, p. 107).

1.5 Discourse structure (hierarchy of discourse)

- This hierarchical structure enables us to view and/or approach discourse in two ways: *top-down* and/or *bottom-up* and they are best described by the inverted pyramid below.

1.5 Discourse structure (hierarchy of discourse)

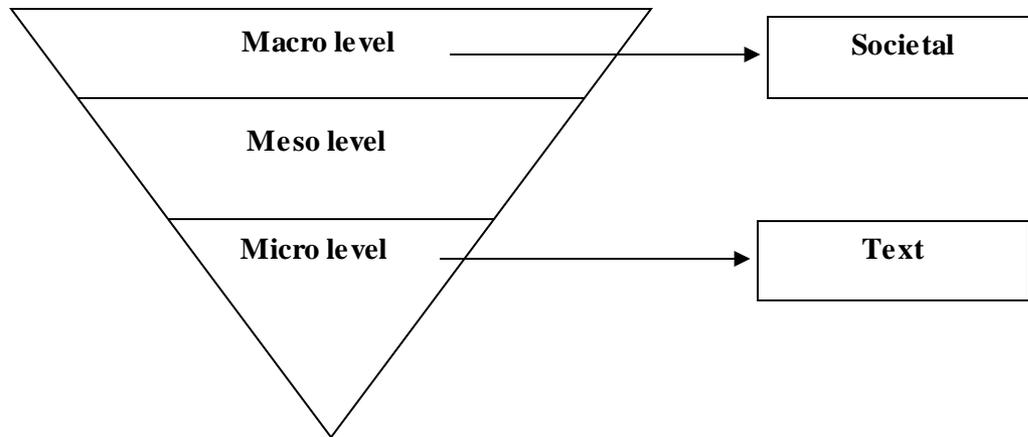


Fig. I.11 Hierarchy of Discourse

1.5 Discourse structure (hierarchy of discourse)

- These three levels, namely **micro**, **meso**, and **macro**, constitute discourse. The tapering lower portion can be purely linguistics; however, the higher a person goes, the more discorsal and social (societal) the analysis and interpretation will be.

1.5 Discourse structure (hierarchy of discourse)

1. Micro-level is “building blocks of the paragraph”; they usually consist of one or two utterances, but can have more (Hinds, 1979, p. 146).

At the micro level, “a text can be seen as a syntagma of grammatically defined units, the largest of which are generated by the syntactic component of grammar: clauses, clause complexes and – in written language – sentences” (Heuboeck, 2009, p. 39).

1.5 Discourse structure (hierarchy of discourse)

“Vocabulary, grammar and text structure are categorized in this scope” (Yi, 2009, p. 134). Simply put, the analysis of discourse at this level is a mere textual analysis, because it lacks the social aspects of discourse.

1.5 Discourse structure (hierarchy of discourse)

2. Macro-level (societal) refers to the texts as a whole, as one receives them (Dooley, 2007, p. 57). At this level, “the wider social formation is taken into account to interpret the findings of the textual analysis” (Koller, 2011, p. 127).

- In essence, this level is what makes analysts deal with the text as being a discourse.

1.6 Discourse analysis?

What is discourse analysis?

- Linguistically, **discourse analysis** as the analysis of ‘texts’ in a broad sense – written texts, spoken interaction, the multi-media texts of television and the internet, etc (Fairclough, 2005, p. 916).
- “[T]he analysis of discourse is the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent from the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs” (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 1).

1.6 Discourse analysis

- Practically speaking, Jansen (2008: 108) points out that the process of analyzing discourse is concerned with the interaction of three elements; namely ‘text’, ‘context’, and the ‘functions’ of discourse itself.

1.6 Discourse analysis

- To sum up, discourse analysis is an approach to language or text that takes into consideration the use of language in a given society where context is considered as the focal point for interpretation and analysis.
- Hence, discourse analysis is unlike other approaches to language which examines and analyzes naturally occurring texts or utterances without focusing on the context of a given text.

1.6 Discourse analysis

•From the above discussions, the agreed-upon understanding of discourse analysis can be encapsulated in the following points:

1. With reference to linguistics, discourse analysis is a linguistic approach to speech and communication that attempts to probe how the selected words in a given context can ‘construct’ a social reality.
2. Thus, the focal point of analysis is language and its function in a given context.

1.6 Discourse analysis

•From the above discussions, the agreed-upon understanding of discourse analysis can be encapsulated in the following points:

3. One of the principles of discourse analysis is that language does things at the macro level of discourse, i.e., the societal level.
4. Only through discourse and its (discursive) practices, speaker can do things using language. Of course each type of discourse has its own discursive practices.