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An A–Z of ELT

A Dictionary of Terms and Concepts

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the target language, survives as an article of faith amongst many teachers to this day.

direct/indirect question → **question**

direct speech → **reported speech**

discourse, discourse analysis DISCOURSE

Discourse is any connected piece of speaking or writing (like this). Discourse analysis is principally the study of how such stretches of language achieve both **cohesion** and **coherence**. Whereas traditional grammar is concerned only with sentences and their components, discourse analysis seeks to identify patterns and regularities of language 'beyond the sentence'. It is closely related to, and partly overlaps with, other text-based fields of study, including **conversation analysis**, **genre** analysis, **pragmatics**, and text linguistics. Critical discourse analysis examines the relation between texts and ideology, and how readers are 'positioned' by the language choices made by writers.

For the language teacher, the main implications of discourse analysis are in the teaching of writing, especially with regard to the ways that texts are made cohesive. But discourse analysis also offers insights into areas of grammar whose functions are best understood *across* sentences, rather than *within* them. For example, the sequencing of information in a sentence is sensitive to the sentences that precede and follow it (the *co-text*). Given a sentence such as *Radium is a radioactive substance*, and given the choice between two possible ways of following up this sentence: (a) *Marie and Pierre Curie discovered it in 1902*; or (b) *It was discovered by Marie and Pierre Curie in 1902*, the second is preferred. This is because the organization of sentence (b) follows the principle of *end-weight*, by which new information is placed at the end of the sentence rather than at the beginning, which is normally reserved for given information (ie, *radium/it*). This in turn calls for the use of the **passive** (*was discovered*). In other words, the passive is not an arbitrary choice, nor a sentence-internal one, but is governed by rules of discourse.

Other grammar areas that are often affected by discourse choices include **tense**, **aspect**, and **modality**. For example, in spoken narratives, speakers typically set the scene for the narrative by using past tense forms (*I was on my way to the station ... it was raining ...*) but shift into the present tense for key events (*... when this bloke stops me, and says ....*). And in news reporting, an account will typically begin in the present tense, **perfect** aspect, before shifting into the past:

> A parrot up a power pole has sparked a four hour rescue operation in Auckland. The green parrot was trapped by its foot at the top of a rather wobbly old power pole in the Auckland suburb on New Lynn ...[2]

discourse intonation → **intonation**

discourse marker DISCOURSE

Discourse markers (also called *pragmatic markers*) are words or expressions like *well*, *anyway*, *I mean*, *right*, *actually*, that normally come at the beginning of an utterance, and function to orient the listener to what will follow. They do this either by

[2] 'Firefighters free parrot up pole' *One Network News* website (www.tvnz.co.nz/news/general) 17 May 1997.

indicating some kind of change of direction in the talk, or by appealing to the listener in some way. Here are some common discourse markers and their meanings:

right, now, anyway	These mark the beginning or closing of a segment of talk.
well	This is a very common way of initiating a *turn* (→ **conversation analysis**) and linking it to the preceding *turn*, often to mark the onset of a contrast, eg a difference of opinion.
oh	This is typically used either to launch an utterance, or to respond to the previous speaker's utterance, often with implications of surprise or unexpectedness.
then	This is often used to signal an inference based on what someone else has said.
y'know, I mean	These markers serve to gain attention or to maintain attention on the speaker – the first by appealing to the addressee's shared knowledge, and the second by signalling that some kind of clarification is going to follow.

Linkers, which connect what has been said to what follows, are sometimes classified as discourse markers as well. In spoken language, the most common linkers are:

and, but, or	*And* marks some kind of continuity, *but* marks a contrast, and *or* marks an option.
so, because	These signal that what follows is (respectively) the *result* or the *cause* of what has been mentioned.

In this short extract,[3] in which three people are talking about ballroom dancing, the discourse markers and linkers are highlighted:

<Speaker 1>	But[1] you're not doing it any more are you?
<Speaker 2>	No we're not. But[2] when you start dancing you, it's like getting a high on exercise and[3] when Alison started she was going three times a week which, you know[4], is a fairly big commitment, and[5] just in, you know[6] she had some relationship problems and[7] she decided okay[8] I'll see if I, take up dancing, and[9] for six months, three times a week she just, her dancing improved
<Speaker 3>	Well[10] she was having personal tuition lessons wasn't she?

1, 2	linker: contrastive
3, 5, 7, 9	linker: additive
4, 6	discourse marker: appealing to shared knowledge
8	discourse marker: indicating decisiveness
10	discourse marker: indicating continuation but with some qualification

discovery learning → **inductive learning**

discrete item → **syllabus**; → **test**; → **whole language learning**

discussion METHODOLOGY

Discussions and debates provide learners with opportunities to interact freely and spontaneously, to cope with unpredictability, and to voice opinions using

[3] OZTALK: Macquarie University/UTS Spoken Language Corpus.

Nevertheless, Chomskyan linguistics, like structural linguistics, is interested more in linguistic forms than in how these forms are realized in use. It was left to linguists working in the functional tradition, including Michael Halliday, to account for the way linguistic forms are related to their contexts of use (→ **systemic functional linguistics**).

The study of language has combined with other disciplines to give rise to many specialized fields, including *psycholinguistics* (the study of the relationship between language and the mind), *historical linguistics* (the study of language change), **sociolinguistics** (the study of the relationship between language and society), **corpus** linguistics (the use of data bases of authentic language for linguistic description), *critical linguistics* (the study of the relationship between language and ideology) and **applied linguistics**. It is in this last area that the study of second language teaching is located. It would be misleading, though, to think of language teaching as being solely a branch (of a branch) of linguistics. It is as much concerned with psychology, education and sociology as it is with language description.

linker DISCOURSE

Linkers (also called *conjuncts*) join what has already been said (or written) to what follows. They do so by showing the sense relationship between the two linked elements. The main kinds of sense relations that linkers express are:

- additive: *and, what's more, moreover, firstly, secondly* ...
- summative: *all in all, in sum* ...
- appositive: *that is to say, ie, namely, in other words* ...
- contrastive (also called adversative): *but, instead, on the other hand* ...
- concessive: *however, still, all the same* ...
- resultative (also called causal): *so, as a result, therefore, in consequence* ...
- temporal: *then, next, meanwhile, eventually* ...

Linkers are one means by which **cohesion** is achieved in texts. Linkers can join parts of sentences (phrases and clauses), sentences, and whole paragraphs. In spoken language, many **discourse markers**, such as *so, yes but, I mean*, have a linking function, and there is considerable overlap between these terms.

Discursive texts often have a high frequency of linkers, but less formal kinds of text achieve cohesion by other means. There is a tendency in ELT materials to over-emphasize linkers at the expense of other cohesive devices. The most commonly used linkers in casual conversation are *and*, *so*, *but* and *then*, and these often do quite well for written texts as well.

linking verb GRAMMAR

Linking verbs (also called *copular verbs*) are the small set of verbs, including the verb *to be*, that take an obligatory **complement**. The complement is either a noun phrase (*This is my tailor*) or an adjective phrase (*My tailor is rich*). The complement either expresses a current attribute (*My tailor seems rich*) or a resulting one (*My tailor became rich*). The most common linking verbs are:

(current attribute): *be*, *appear*, *feel*, *look*, *seem*, *smell* (+ adjective only), *sound*, *taste* (+ adjective only)

(resulting attribute): *become*, *get* (+ adjective only), *go* (+ adjective only), *grow* (+ adjective only), *turn* (+ adjective only)

Some linking verbs can also be followed by **adverbials**, usually of place, as in *My tailor is in prison*.

listening METHODOLOGY

Listening is the skill of understanding spoken language. It is also the name given to classroom activities that are designed to develop this skill – what are also called *listening comprehension* activities – as in 'today we're going to do a listening'. Listening is one of the four language **skills**, and, along with **reading**, was once thought of as being a 'passive' skill. In fact, although receptive, listening is anything but passive. It is a goal-oriented activity, involving not only processing of the incoming speech signals (called *bottom-up processing*) but also the use of prior knowledge, contextual clues, and expectations (*top-down processing*) in order to create meaning (→ **comprehension**). Among the sub-skills of listening are:

- perceiving and discriminating individual sounds
- segmenting the stream of speech into recognizable units such as words and phrases
- using **stress** and **intonation** cues to distinguish given information from new information
- attending to **discourse markers** and using these to predict changes in the direction of the talk
- guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words
- using clues in the text (such as vocabulary) and context clues to predict what is coming
- making inferences about what is not stated
- selecting key information relevant to the purpose for listening
- integrating incoming information into the mental 'picture' (or **schema**) of the speech event so far