Discourse & Discourse Analysis

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Today's Lecture

- What is discourse?
- Definitions of Discourse
- Doing Discourse Analysis
- Scope
- Influences
- Approaches

Why analyse discourse?

Some (many?) things happen primarily (only?) in language

From (say) *promising to come to dinner*
To (say)   *telling someone you love them*
(Or indeed: talking to the dog)

- Discourse is "language above the sentence or above the clause" (Stubbs, 1983: 1).

- 1960s grammarians became convinced of the usefulness of considering stretches longer than individual sentences in their analyses, at least two terms came to be used in parallel fashion: *text linguistics* and *discourse analysis*.

- Originally, some people preferred to use *text* to refer to written language and kept *discourse* strictly for oral production.

- However, we do not make any distinctions between *text linguistics* and *discourse analysis*, and between *discourse* and *text*, because they are now often used interchangeably.

Definitions of Discourse (1)

- A particular unit of language (above the sentence), or **discourse in structure;**
- A particular focus on language use, **discourse as function**.

Discourse as structure ?

Problem: you can have a unit which looks like a sentence but doesn't mean anything

e.g. Colourless green ideas sleep furiously

… but on the other hand the units in which people speak do not always look like sentences.

e.g. You can run a hou- whatcha- now whatcha you can run a house-you   can run a house a- and do the job, which is important, y' can't y- a man can't do it himself, and a woman can't do it himself w- if y' want it to be successful. In most cases.

How do you analyse something which is not a sentence?

Discourse as a System of functions ?

e.g. "what's the time?"

Phatic function (opens a contact)

Emotive function (conveys the need of the speaker)
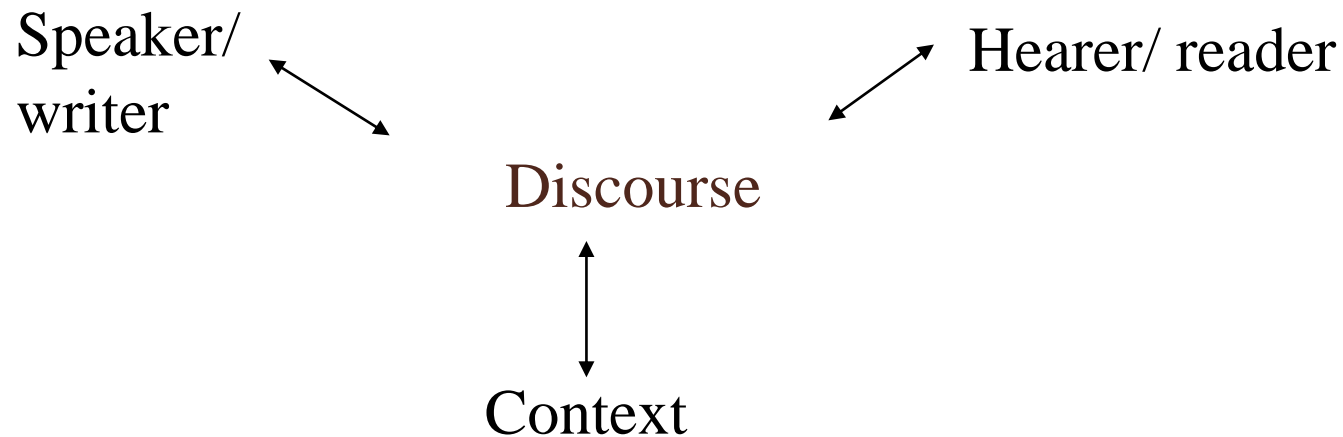
Conative function (asks something of the addressee)

Referential function (makes reference to the world outside the language)

PROBLEM:

Discourse analysis may turn into a more general and broader analysis of language functions.

Definition of Discourse (2)

Discourse – written and spoken

Speaker/
writer

Hearer/ reader

Discourse

Context

Objects of discourse

'Discourse' refers to any utterance which is meaningful. These texts can be:

- written texts

- oral texts ('speech'/'talk')

- mixed written/oral texts (e.g. Internet chat)

Discourse does not depend on the size of a text ("P" and "Ladies" can both be analysed as discourse)

Definitions of 'discourse' (3)

(a) A set of terms, metaphors, allusions, ways of talking, references and so on, which constitute an object

(b) A to-and-fro of exchanges in talk (or text) that performs social actions
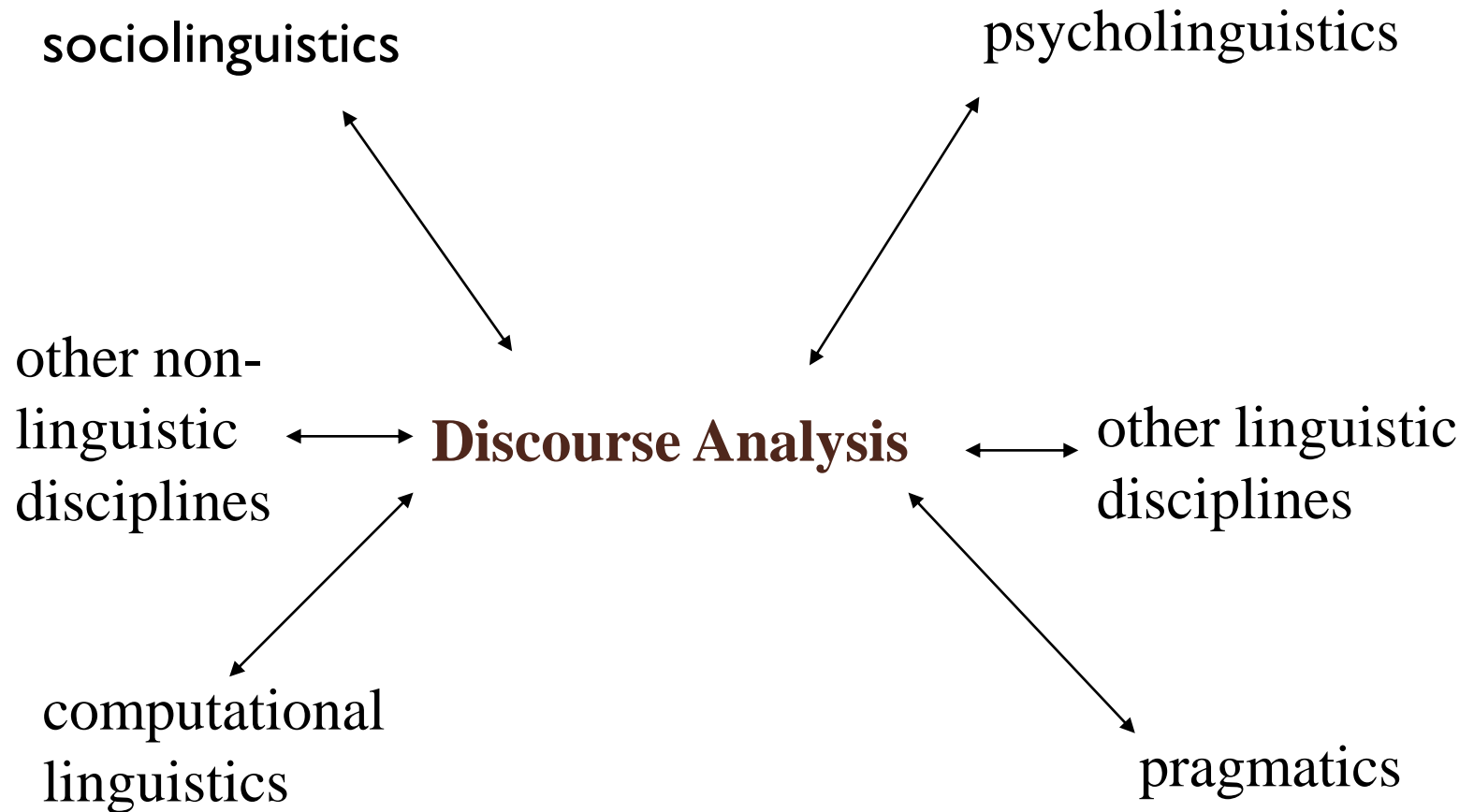
Doing discourse analysis

Scope

Influences

Approaches

The scope of discourse analysis

➢ Discourse analysis is not a discipline which exists on its own. It is influenced by other disciplines and influences them as well. It is a two-way process …

➢ For this reason discourse analysis examines spoken and written texts from all sorts of different areas (medical, legal, advertising) and from all sorts of perspectives (race, gender, power)

➢ Discourse analysis has a number of practical applications - for example in analysing communication problems in medicine, psychotherapy, education, in analysing written style etc.

Influences on discourse analysis

sociolinguistics

psycholinguistics

other non-linguistic disciplines

Discourse Analysis

other linguistic disciplines

computational linguistics

pragmatics

Approaches to Discourse

Deborah Schiffrin "Approaches to Discourse" (1994) singles out 6 major approaches to discourse:

- the speech act approach;
- interactional sociolinguistics;
- the ethnography of communication;
- pragmatic approach;
- conversation analysis;
- variationist approach.

Approaches to Discourse (1)
The Speech Act Approach

Founders of the speech act theory: John Austin & John Searle.

There are different types of speech acts:

e.g. "speak louder" (directive)

"Oxford Street is a shopper's paradise" (assertive)

- Although speech act theory was not first developed as a means of analyzing discourse, particular issues in speech act theory (indirect speech acts, multiple functions of utterances) led to discourse analysis

Approaches to Discourse (2)
Interactional sociolinguistics

❖ Represents the combination of three disciplines: anthropology, sociology, and linguistics.

❖ Focuses on how people from different cultures may share grammatical knowledge of a language but contextualize what is said differently to produce different messages.

e.g. "yeah, bring them down here. I'll **flog** them for you" (Australian English)

Approaches to Discourse (3)
The ethnography of communication

❑ The way we communicate depends a lot on the culture we come from. Some stereotypes:

❑ Finnish people: the hardest nation for communication, quiet and serious?

❑ Turkish people: very talkative and friendly?

Ethnography investigates speaker culture

Pragmatics

- H. P. Grice: the cooperative principle and conversational maxims.

- People interact by using minimal assumptions about one another.

Approaches to Discourse (5)
Conversation analysis

e.g.   A: This is Mr. Smith may I help you

      B: I can't hear you

      A: This is <u>Mr. Smith</u>

      B: <u>Smith.</u>

➢ **Conversational analysis is particularly interested in the sequencing of utterances, i.e. not in what people say but in how they say it**

Summary of approaches to discourse

Approaches to Studying Discourse		Focus of Research	Research Question
Structural	CA	Sequences of talk	Why say that at that moment?
	Variationist	Structural categories within texts	Why that form?
Functional	Speech Acts	Communicative acts	How to do things with words?
	Ethnography of Communication	Communication as cultural behaviour	How does discourse reflect culture?
	Interactional Sociolinguistics	Social and linguistic meanings created during communication	What are they doing?
	Pragmatics	Meaning in interaction	What does the speaker mean?

How do you *analyse* discourse?

Various ways. Depends on what sort of discourse you're interested in.

Constituting an object vs realising a social action

Constituting an object

Usually some cultural object (marriage, crime, obesity etc)

Data:

- Media texts (e.g. news reports, magazine articles, newspaper features)
- Personal accounts (e.g.in interviews, diaries)

The Times   June 22, 2006

Bush shows Old Europe a new face of caring and sharing

FROM CHARLES BREMNER IN VIENNA

PRESIDENT BUSH sought to repair his tattered reputation in Europe yesterday, talking of his "deep desire" to close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and conceding that his response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks had not been understood by much of the continent.

At a summit with the EU leadership in Vienna, Mr Bush rejected as inadequate Iran's promise to reply in August to a US-European offer for talks on its nuclear

Mr Bush arrived in Budapest last night for the next leg of his fence-mending tour of Europe (ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO / AP)

programme. "It should not take the Iranians that long to analyse what is a reasonable deal," he said.

PRESIDENT BUSH sought to repair his tattered reputation in Europe yesterday, talking of his "deep desire" to close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and conceding that his response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks had not been understood by much of the continent.

Assumes it is tattered

Compare *expressing his deep desire*

Assumes (someone) has made an accusation

Discourse as language-in-interaction

Language in interaction comes through in a sequence, in turns. Each turn has an implication for the next.

An example analysis: doctors delivering diagnoses.
Do they tell the patient immediately?

From Maynard (2004, p 63)

```
1    Dr Y:    From the:: test results (0.3) he seems to function (0.6)

2             comfortably (0.2) you know and (achieve) some kind of you

3             know happy and responsive

4             (0.2)

5    Mrs R:   Ye [e:s  ]

6    Dr Y:       [ .h  ]hh ON THE LEVEL of about you know three (0.1) and

7             a half year old child

8    Mrs R:   mm
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Notice that Dr. describes test results first

From Maynard (2004, p 63) [follows from previous]

1   Dr Y: I feel very strongly that, you know, because he (0.4) te<u>sts</u>

2   some kind you know, fu<u>nct</u>ions between <u>mil</u>dly retarded and

3   <u>bor</u>derline level [.hhhhh   ]he <u>nee</u>ds special class placement.

4   Mrs R: [Mm hmm]

5   Dr Y: (Yeah) the (.) <u>class</u> for (0.2) .hh <u>edu</u>cable mentally retardet

6   (0.2) will be the <u>best</u> (.) for his (0.8) you know?

7   functioning and emotional, he's still not rea<u>dy</u> you know

8   enough [to be more-   ]

9   → Mrs R: [Are y- are you <u>tr</u>]yin' ta tell me that you feel he

10   <u>is</u>: s:lightly mentally re [tard]ed?

11   Dr Y: [Yes.]

Dr. moves from test to treatment without explicit diagnosis

What does this results-first practice achieve?

(a) Gives patient the sight of the evidence first

(b) Shows that the diagnosis when given is well-founded

(c) Allows the patient to guess or predict what is to come

(d) Allows them to voice it themselves

Some worries & objections

It's not quantitative, so is it 'subjective'?

- not particularly; argument still has to convince readers, editors etc., by appeal to established findings & theory

Is it useful?

- reveals how objects get constituted & unmasks the interests that serves (and perhaps could be resisted)

- shows how mundane interaction achieves its business (and perhaps could be improved)

what actions are to be revealed	candidate theory / method	typical data
Personal meaning-making	**Narrative Analysis, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**	**interviews, diaries, autobiographies, stories**
Imposing and managing frames of meaning and identities	**Interactional Sociolinguistics, Ethnography of speaking**	**audio and video recordings, ethnographic observations**
Accomplishing interactional life in real time	**Conversation Analysis**	**audio and video recordings**
Displaying and deploying psychological states; describing the world and promoting interests	**Discursive Psychology**	**audio and video recordings; texts**
Constituting and representing culture and society	**[Generic] Discourse Analysis**	**texts, interviews**
Constituting and regulating the social and the political world; the operation of power	**Critical Discourse Analysis**	**official and unofficial texts; speeches; media accounts and representations; interviews**

Why you shouldn't do Discourse Analysis

- recording the data (other than media texts) isn't always easy
- transcribing the data is laborious
- mastering the craft of explicating what's going on, without overinterpreting it or merely describing it, is hard
- you won't come away with a demonstration that X caused Y
- or a survey of the incidence of A is X in Y population etcetera

Why you might do Discourse Analysis

- you get close to the data

- the data (eg video recordings) are of life as it's lived

- you uncover the subtle organisation of language, the prime medium of our social lives (and selves)

- You plug in to social practices that - at the grandest - constitute reality and our place in it

Other reasons why discourse analysis might interest you

- it might be connected to your life (job, family, friends and so on)
- it can go on your cv
- if you get interested in the subject you might want to take it further (tesi, specialistica)

so it's worth starting to think about what you are interested in (linguistically)

Recap

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