
In linguistics, discourse refers to language "in use." It's a unit of communication that goes beyond the single sentence, whether written or spoken. The study of discourse, known as discourse analysis, focuses on how language is structured and how it functions to create meaning within a specific social context.

Key Concepts in Linguistic Discourse

Cohesion: *This refers to the grammatical and lexical ties that link sentences together in a text. Cohesive devices include pronouns (e.g., "he," "it"), conjunctions (e.g., "but," "and"), and repetition of words or synonyms. For example, in the sentence "My father bought a car. He saved for a long time," the pronoun "he" links the second sentence to the first, creating cohesion.*

Coherence: *This is the underlying logical connection that makes a text or conversation make sense as a whole. A text can be coherent even without many cohesive ties. For instance, if someone says, "The telephone is ringing," and another person replies, "I'm in the bath," the second statement is a coherent response because we understand the implied meaning: "I can't answer the phone because I'm busy."*

Context: *Discourse analysis emphasizes that meaning is not just in the words themselves but is heavily dependent on the context in which they are used. This includes the social setting, the relationship between the people communicating, and the shared background knowledge they have. For example, the phrase "What's up?" has a different meaning and function when said to a friend versus a superior.*

Turn-Taking: *In spoken discourse, this refers to the patterns and conventions of who speaks when. It includes how speakers start, continue, and end their turns in a conversation. Analysts study how people signal their desire to speak or yield their turn to others.*

Discourse Markers: *These are words or phrases that help organize a conversation and show the relationship between what is being said. Examples include "so," "well," "like," "I mean," and "you know."*

Why Discourse is Studied

Linguists study discourse to understand how language works in real-life situations. Unlike traditional linguistics, which might focus on the rules of grammar for isolated sentences, discourse analysis looks at how people use language to:

Communicate effectively: How do we convey a message that is both coherent and appropriate for the situation?

Construct social reality: How do our choices in language reinforce or challenge social roles, power dynamics, and cultural beliefs? This is a key focus of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a subfield that examines the link between language, power, and ideology

