
UNIT 3 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

The unit enlightens knowledge upon the basic concept of discourse analysis in the field of research. Talking about the term –‘discourse or content analysis’, in a lay man’s language, the word ‘discourse’ refers to ‘talk’, which refers to the ways in which people describe or explain their experiences. The term ‘discourse analysis’ has its origin since 1960s, and is prominently being used in interdisciplinary fields. It basically refers to the explanation of the researchers or analysts in form of talks or texts. It may be a talk or text of historical incidents or any kind of social activity like- the discourses of academic activity, the discourses of the family, domesticity or of the gang.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

With the help of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of discourse analysis;
- define discourse analysis;
- explain different assumptions, theories and approaches of discourse analysis;
- describe the steps and implications of the discourse analysis;
- explain the concept and significance of critical discourse analysis; and
- explain the concept and significance of content analysis.

3.2 DEFINITION OF DISCOURSE/CONTENT ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis has been defined in different ways. Some of the basic definitions are as follows:

In the words of Hammersley, M. (2002) It is a study of the way versions or the world, society, events and psyche are produced in the use of language and discourse. The Semiotics, deconstruction and narrative analysis are forms of discourse analysis.

Bernard Berelson defined content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications” (Berelson, 1974). It can also be defined as an analysis of speech units larger than the sentence and of their relationship to the contexts in which they are used.

Basically the discourse analysis identifies the linguistic dependencies which exist between sentences or utterances. Anyhow, it is really difficult to define the concept of discourse analysis. Instead of categorising it under the different kinds of research methods, it can be alleged as one of the creative ways of approaching and thinking about a problem. Alternatively, it can be said to be a way of providing a tangible answer to problems based on scientific research. Eventually the method of discourse analysis will help in unveiling the hidden motivations behind a text or behind the choice of a particular method of research to interpret that text. Expressed in today’s more trendy vocabulary, Critical or Discourse Analysis is nothing more than a deconstructive reading and interpretation of a problem or text.

Self Assessment Questions

Fill in the blanks:

- i) Discourse analysis identifies the which exist between sentences or utterances.
- ii) The term ‘discourse analysis’ has its origin since
- iii) The discourse analysis may be in form of a of historical incidents or any kind of social activity like
- iv) Critical or Discourse Analysis is nothing more than a reading and interpretation of a problem or text.

3.3 ASSUMPTIONS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Theoretically discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach and has been widely used by the social scientists and cognitive psychologists. Some of the basic assumption of this approach can be outlined as follows:

Psychologists assume that the human behaviour can only be studied with objectivity that is, without involvement of any biasness or subjectivity of the researcher as well as the subject/people under study. However, this has been disputed – people, including researchers, cannot be objective. A researcher is

very likely to hold some position (expectation, belief, or set of cultural values) when they are conducting their research.

Those expectations may be revealed while interpreting and explaining the events and experiences.

The approach also assumes that, reality is socially constructed. It is assumed in a scientific research that ‘reality’ can be categorised. The constructs generally used by psychologists like – personality, intelligence and thinking are explained as real and naturally occurring categories or events. However, the assumption ignores the fact that it is language which gives a shape to the categories and constructs we use. Since language is a social and cultural thing, our sense of reality is socially and culturally constructed.

It is also assumed that, people are the result of social interaction. In the scientific approach it is assumed that many of the constructs used are ‘inner essences’. That is to say that personality, anxiety, drives, and so on exist somewhere within our heads and our bodies and are revealed only when the individual socially interacts with others. However, it may be the case that many of these so-called essences are actually the products of social interaction.

3.4 APPROACHES OR THEORIES OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

There are numerous “types” or theories of discourse analysis. The various discourses has been explained or categorised on basis of several theories and approaches. Some of them are:

Modernism: The theorists of modernism were guided by achievement and reality based orientation. Thereby they viewed discourse as being relative to talking or way of talking. They emphasised that the discourse and language transformations are needed to develop new or more “accurate” words in order to describe new inventions, innovations, understandings, or areas of interest. Both language and discourse are now conceptualised as natural or real products of common sense usage or progress. Modernism gave rise to various discourses of rights, equality, freedom, and justice

Structuralism: The structuralism theorists squabble that the human actions and social formations are related to language and discourse and they can be implicated or considered as systems of related elements. The approach believed that the individual elements of a system only have significance when they are considered in context to the structure as a whole. The structures can be defined as self-contained, self-regulated, and self-transforming entities. In other words, it is the structure itself that determines the significance, meaning and function of the individual elements of a system. Structuralism has made an eminent contribution to the world of language and social systems.

Postmodernism: Unlike the approaches of the modern theory, the postmodern theorists examined and investigated the variety of experience of individuals and groups and emphasised more on differences over similarities and common experiences. Postmodern researchers insisted more upon analysing discourses as texts, language, policies and practices. In the field of discourse analysis, the

most prominent figure was Michel Foucault. Foucault (1977, 1980) has defined discourse as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.” He emphasised that the discourse analysis has a significant role in social processes of legitimating and power. Discourses can help researchers in emphasising the construction of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. He later added that discourse is a channel through which power relations (for example– power relation between boss and subordinate, professor and students) produce speaking subjects and that power is an in evitable or unavoidable aspect. Foucault (1977, 1980) argued that power and knowledge are inter-related and therefore every human relationship is a struggle and negotiation of power. Discourse according to Foucault (1977, 1980, 2003) is related to power as it operates by rules of exclusion. Post-modernism was one of the mid- to late 20th century development and believes that the human mind is free from the constraints of tradition, belief, faith and tries to explore the furthestmost horizons of human development.

Feminism: Feminists explained discourse as events of the social practices. They investigated the complex relationships that exist among power, ideology, language and discourse. They emphasised on the concept of ‘performing gender’. According to them gender is a property, not of persons themselves but of the behaviours to which members of a society ascribe a gendering meaning.

Self Assessment Questions

Fill in the blanks

- i) The theorists of modernism were guided by
- ii) The term ‘discourse analysis’ has its origin since
- iii) The postmodern theorists examined and investigated the
- iv) Critical or Discourse Analysis is nothing more than a reading and interpretation of a problem or text.
- v) The approach also assumes that, reality is socially constructed. It is assumed in a scientific research that ‘reality’ can be

3.5 STEPS IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The method of discourse analysis evaluates the patterns of speech, such as how people talk about a particular subject, what metaphors they use, how they take turns in conversation, and so on. These analysts see speech as a performance. The analysts or the researchers of the discourse analysis believe that the speech performs an action instead of describing a specific state of affairs or specific state of mind. Much of this analysis is intuitive and reflective, but it may also involve some form of counting, such as counting instances of turn-taking and their influence on the conversation and the way in which people speak to others.

The researchers collect and interpret information in the following steps:

- i) *Target orientation:* First of all, the analysts need to know their target or focus of study. Since beginning, they need to think about the ways by which they will analyse and interpret data after collecting the information.

- ii) *Significance of data:* Once the relevant information is collected, the researchers need to judge or examine the value of the collected data, especially those which may have come from more than one source.
- iii) *Interpretation of the data:* As the research progresses the analyst needs to try to understand and interpret the data so that the researchers as well as others can gain an understanding of what is going on.
- iv) *Analysis of the findings:* Finally, the researcher needs to undertake the mechanical process of analysing, interpreting and summarising the data collected. On basis of the analysis of the information, the findings can be summarised and concluded. There are many qualitative analysis programs available to social researchers that can be used for a variety of different tasks. For example, software could locate particular words or phrases; make lists of words and put them into alphabetical order; insert key words or comments; count occurrences of words or phrases or attach numeric codes. With the help of the software's, the analysts or the researcher can retrieve text, analyse text and build theories. Although a computer can undertake these mechanical processes, it cannot think about, judge or interpret qualitative data.

3.6 RELEVANCE/ IMPLICATIONS/ SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

With the usage of talks, languages and texts the analysts or the researchers can easily understand the connotations behind historical events as well as current social practices.

Some of the other relevance or significance of this approach are:

Discourse analysis enable us to understand the conditions behind a specific “problem” and make us realise that the essence of that “problem”

Discourse Analysis helps us in gaining a comprehensive view of the “problem” and helps ourselves to relate with that “problem”.

It helps the researcher in understanding hidden motivations within ourselves and researchers as well and therefore enable us to solve concrete problems.

Though critical thinking about and analysis of situations/texts is as ancient as mankind or philosophy itself, and no method or theory as such.

It helps in meaningful interpretation of the people and the world.

It also aids in “deconstructing” concepts, belief-systems, or generally held social values and assumptions.

Discourse Analysis can be applied to any text that is, to any problem or situation and requires no guidelines to be followed.

Self Assessment Questions

State whether the following are true or false.

- 1) Discourse analysis enables us to understand the conditions behind a specific “problem”. ()
- 2) On basis of the discourse analysis of the information, the findings can be summarised and concluded. ()

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|---|
| 3) Once the relevant information is collected, the researchers need not judge or examine the value of the collected data. () |
| 4) Discourse analysis does not lead to meaningful interpretation of the people and the world. () |
| 5) Discourse Analysis can be applied to any text or problem. () |

3.7 ISSUES OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

No doubt the method of discourse analysis has been well appreciated and it is being used by several disciplines, yet the approach or the methodology of this analysis lacks reliability and validity on certain grounds, like-

- i) Since the method of discourse analysis lacks a proper format or guideline, the processing of data through this approach is controversial.
- ii) Further, the interpretation of the information collected through this data is again questionable, as it may involve the subjectivity or biasness of the researcher or the analysts.
- iii) As there is no hard data provided through discourse analysis, the reliability and the validity of one's research/findings depends on the force and logic of one's arguments. Even the best constructed arguments are subject to their own deconstructive reading and counter-interpretations.
- iv) The validity of critical analysis is, therefore, dependent on the quality of the rhetoric. Despite of the above controversies and arguments, the method is well appreciated and withholds a good position and has certain concrete applications.

3.8 CONCEPT OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The emergence of television, broadcastings and media has given a way to the out growth of the implications of discourse analysis. The method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is nothing but one of the type of discourse based research. It is one of the method which tries to study the current social and political activities like, the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and are discussed in the social and political context. With the help of this research, the researcher explicitly (that is, overtly) tries to realise, experience, and ultimately overcome social inequality and injustice occurring within the society. The researcher focuses on the powerful groups of the society, especially the leaders, social groups and institutions who have a good control over one or more types of public discourse. Thus, professors control scholarly discourse, teachers educational discourse, journalists media discourse, lawyers legal discourse, and politicians policy and other public political discourse.

3.9 IMPLICATIONS OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In order to understand, create awareness, expose and fight against the social unjust, the researcher or the critical discourse analysts takes full use of media and broadcasts. The method has the following implications for the individuals, groups, institution and society:

- i) The method allows the researcher as well as the research to be an “active agent” while attempting to expose “inequality and injustice”.
- ii) As the researcher critically tries to evaluate the social conditions, the method emphasises on both the structure and the social context of media texts .This enables the media critic to “denaturalise,” or expose the “taken-for-granted” of ideological messages as they appear in isolated speech when combined with methods of discourse analysis.
- iii) The discourse analysis is also being used critically (CDA) in applied linguistics which has led to the development of a different approach to understand the messages spread by the media.
- iv) With the help of critical discourse analysis language can be used as an interdisciplinary tool and can be used by scholars with various backgrounds, including media criticism.
- v) Undoubtedly, the method of critical discourse analysis helps in having a cross cultural study of the social activities with the help of media texts.
- vi) The method of critical discourse analysis critically tries to examine the dimensions of theoretical and descriptive accounts of texts.
- vii) CDA is one of the best forms of discourse analysis which ideologically uses language as a type of social practice.

Self Assessment Questions

State whether the following are true or false.

- i) The method of CDA allows the researcher to act as an “active agent”.
()
- ii) Language can not be used as an interdisciplinary tool. ()
- iii) The method of discourse analysis does not require proper format or guideline. ()
- iv) The method of critical discourse analysis helps in having a cross cultural study. ()

3.10 CONCEPT OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Another form of discourse analysis is content analysis. It is one of the method which is used in summarising any form of content only after having a deep study of the actual content. This enables the researcher to more objectively evaluate and understand the situations. For example, an impressionistic summary of a TV program, can not help in analysing the over all aspects of the content of the program.

Content analysis, tries to analyse written words. The results of content analysis are numbers and percentages. It starts with the process of selecting content for analysis, then preparing the content for coding. After the content is coded, it is counted and weighed. Later, conclusions are drawn on the basis of the weighing. After doing a content analysis, the researcher can make a statement such as “27% of programs on FM Radio in November 2009 mentioned at least one aspect of antiterrorism, compared with only 3% of the programs in 2006”.

The content analysis therefore serves two basic purposes:

- i) It helps in removing much of the subjectivity from summaries
- ii) It also helps in detection of trends in an easier and simpler manner.

3.11 EXAMPLES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis can be done with the help of media content (when the sources of media) is being used or audience content (when individual feedbacks are being used). Few of the examples of media content are: print media, broadcasts, and recordings. While, the audience content is analysed with the help of questionnaire, interviews, group discussions and letters to the editors.

3.12 IMPLICATIONS OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis has several implications:

- i) Content analysis enables the researcher to make links between causes (e.g. program content) and effect (e.g. audience size).
- ii) The content analysis is used to evaluate and improve the programming of the media world.
- iii) It also helps in increasing awareness and summarising the various notes or documentaries which focus on a specific issue.
- iv) It also helps in making inferences of the causes.

3.13 LET US SUM UP

It can therefore be summarised that discourse analysis is one of the techniques which uses language in form of talks and texts to analyse human behaviour and social situations. Discourse analysis and critical thinking is applicable to every situation and every subject. The new perspective provided by discourse analysis allows personal growth and a high level of creative fulfillment. The method does not require any set guidelines or framework. Rather it can help in bringing about fundamental changes in the practices of an institution, the profession, and society as a whole. However, Discourse Analysis does not provide definite answers; it is not a “hard” science, but an insight/knowledge based on content analysis and critical thinking.

Yet the method is being used as an interdisciplinary a cross cultural approach to create and experience the social and political practices.

3.14 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- i) What do you understand by the term- discourse analysis?
- ii) Explain different assumptions, theories and approaches of discourse analysis.
- iii) How can you say that the discourse analysis is a systematic process? Give your answer with respect to the steps of discourse analysis.
- iv) Explain the concept and significance of critical discourse analysis.
- v) Explain the concept and significance of content analysis.

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