

# The Study of Text from Discourse Analysis Perspectives: Theory and Practice

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## ABSTRACT

The present enquiry explores insights of *analysis discourse* in the study of text focusing on its contextual, macro-organisational and cohesive level. We propose discourse analysis model as it examines text at the three-sided stated levels: schematic knowledge, macro-organization, and cohesion respectively as this triangular focus is a solution to the failure of contemporary teaching practices of foreign language (hereafter FL) that focus more on systematic knowledge neglecting the areas of language. The aim of this investigation is to exploit findings of discourse analysis in FL classroom in general and text creation in particular, suggesting teaching procedures, activities, and varieties of texts to educators and researchers.

**Keywords:** Discourse Analysis, text, Foreign language Schematic knowledge Macro-organization, Cohesion.

## ملخص

يستكشف هذا البحث منهجيات خطاب التحليل في دراسة النص مع التركيز على المستوى التداولي أي العلاقة بين الأشكال النصية و السياق، البنيوي و الاتساق. نقترح نموذج تحليل الخطاب يتفحص النص بمنهج ثلاثي ذات الأبعاد: المعرفي، البنيوي والاتساق. هذا التحليل الثلاثي الأبعاد هو حل لطرق التدريس للغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية السائدة حاليا، والتي تركز الجانب النحوي و الانشائي المنهجية واهمال جوانب العميقة للغة. الهدف من هذا البحث هو شرح منهج تحليل النص و استعمال هذه المعطيات النظرية بشكل تطبيقي في تدريس اللغة، مع اقتراح مجموعة من التمرينات و التقنيات للاستاذة والباحثين.

كلمات البحث: تحليل الخطاب - النص، واللغة الأجنبية- المستوى المعرفي - المستوى البنيوي و الاتساق.

# Introduction

One of the disciplines that evolved during the 1980s as a reaction against sentence-based approaches is Discourse Analysis (DA). DA is mainly concerned with the analysis of language above and beyond the sentence level. Although the first version of DA, as one can notice in Harris (1952) was purely based on the description of the recurrent linguistic elements in long texts. Later on, the analysis of discourse was undertaken from different angles, as a social event, pragmatic, functional, or critical angle. Currently, DA has a prominent interest in ELT and ELT research. The stretch of language above the sentence is considered as the basic framework for language teaching and interaction. In such a way, the analysis of discourse from whatever point of view relies heavily on investing knowledge (linguistic, cultural, contextual, etc). The present study then aims at finding answers to the following questions: 1. How text is approached from DA analysis perspectives? 2. How is DA findings exploited in SL classroom?

## I. Literature Review

### 1.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary research domain is so well institutionalised and defined as the study of language. However, the researcher finds it reasonable to dwell for a bit on the different conceptualizations of discourse analysis, and to delineate for the reader the nature of DA and the key concept context.

The frequently cited definition in the literature on DA is 'the study of language use' (Trappes-Lomax, 2004). Different implications of this broad definition could be figured out. Van Dijk, (1997) confined it to the examination of language above the sentence level, focusing on the way textual units are hung together. Put another way, the purpose of the analysis is to look for such features: relationships, arrangements, and connectedness which are merely textual.

The definition does not provide any specifications of nature of, concerning what aspect of language uses involved. A more reconcilable, and specific view on DA is provided by Brown and Yule (1983) when they draw the line of discourse analysis as: "The study of discourse is necessary, the study of language uses. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve human affairs." (

p. 1). Brown and Yule's view of DA complies with the functional perspective wherein how purposes and functions are realised through the system of discourse.

Trappes-Lomax (2004) refers to the first thrust as 'language as text' (structural perspective) and to the second 'language as event' (i.e. functional perspective). In addition to these, he points out to two other views: the first is language performance orientation (interactional) that sheds lights on what is happening, who and how i .e the dynamics of the process users make that usually takes place in spontaneous and direct interactions. The second is language as a framework of knowledge and social power that helps to understand the interpretation of discourse users' relations in the way they use language.

The different conceptualisation on DA is due to the fact that the study of discourse necessitates overlapping language studies namely, psychology, and, social sciences. However, they are common in their focus on language use and context (Dijk,1997; Gee, Hendiford, 2013; Yule, 2010; Flowerdew, 2013).

To impose restrictions on DA we opt for, discourse analysis has got two aspects: The first involves theoretical analysis of written/spoken texts. DA involves, for example, grammar discourse analysis, text linguistics, genre analysis and communication discourse analysis that look at language use within specific institutionalised contexts. The second aspect is applied discourse analysis, concerned with the implementation of analysis (such as speech analysis and genre analysis) for pedagogical purposes, for example, teaching writing skill (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000) that is the main concern of this study.

## **1.2 The context**

The context is one of the elements that Chomskian generative grammar paid scant attention to, and it was emerged by the publication of Harris's *Discourse Analysis* in (1952), and later the notion of context in its broad sense and the ability of considering it in society was the core of Hymes' (1964) work in sociolinguistics. Currently, Context is an unseparated element in the study

of language use. It is generally defined as the environment in which the linguistic productions occur that involves “other characteristics of the social situation or the communicative event that may systematically influence text/ talk.” (p. 3).

Many researchers have become interested in the characterization of different components of the context of the situation. Most of the stated elements (Paltridge, 2006; Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000; and others) fall into three categories: 1) situational context, the physical features of the environment such as the participants, social setting; 2) background knowledge, what is previously known by the interlocutors either in terms of prior discourse or cultural, interpersonal, and 3) social knowledge.

Different accounts of the nature of these extra-linguistic components have been provided. Fairth (1957) accounts for the context of the situation based on correlation to the language events, that involves the relevant features of participants, their verbal and non-verbal actions, the effects of the verbal action and relevant objects (Fairth, 1957, as cited in Widdowson, 2004). Widdowson disagrees with the language event- correlated context, since it lacks clarification code-context relation, and there is an ‘opposition’ between language as an abstract system and context as concrete components of communicative acts.

Widdowson (ibid), on the other hand, agrees with Hymes’ classification of the context into setting and scene and he alternatively used the terms situation and context. Accordingly, the context is ‘some schema of components of speech acts’. The setting refers to ‘the time and the place of speech act and to the physical circumstances.’ The scene ‘designates “the psychological” setting, or the cultural definition of an occasion’ (Hymes, 1974, p.55, quoted in Widdowson, ibid). The first is concrete and mainly stands for the setting adopting Hymes’ definition. The second one is abstract, in this respect, the situation stands for the scene.

Halliday and Hasan (1991) provide a consistent analysis of the context of the situation to present the co-occurrence of sociolinguistic elements. The first is the *field*, the subject matter or the

nature of the social interaction. The second is the *tone*, the social relation between interactants or who are taking part. The third component is the *mode*, the rhetoric function of discourse in context.

The context has a significant role in the analysis of WD. It is a basic source that helps interpretation through the appropriate realisation of text-context relationship. According to Widdowson (2004) misinterpretation mainly occurs when a discourse maker (reader or writer) fails to make that connection. Schiffrine (1994) also regards context as the text in that both are essential sources for identifying the communicative content.

### **1.3.The Analysis of text in DA Framework**

Kaplan and Grabe(2002) put forward that the central element of WDA is "the *actual structuring of the text via some consistent framework*". texts accordingly would be viewed differently. For example (Dijk, 1997) analysed discourse as structure, as action and interaction in society, and as cognition. Hassan's accounts of cohesion in English (1976) explores the functional concerns of textual unifications. Common areas of DA that are discussed in the stated works are cohesion, coherence, and genre structure. In the coming discussion, we find it to explain different types of knowledge required for the analysis of written discourse.

### **1.3 Textual Knowledge**

Halliday and Hasan (1976) the leaders of Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) have done much research into what makes a text a text. They construct a profound theory of understanding how elements in text hang together based on non-syntactic relations (Schelppregrell, 2012). The main construct behind Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion in English (ibid) is the notion of 'texture'. Texture is an aspect of coherence that makes a text. The texture of a text has many aspects (internal or external to the text and realised through different resources).

*Cohesion* is text-internal elements that are maintained through manipulating devices or combinations of lexical and referential chains. Halliday and Hasan (ibid) called such devices 'cohesive ties'. They are "semantic relation between an element in a text and some other element

that is crucial to the interpretation of it" (p.8). Accordingly, five cohesive devices have been sorted out, namely, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions and lexical ties.

*Reference* is a linguistic unit that directs the readers to refer back to what is already mentioned to understand particular element in the text. It establishes two identical meaning through two different linguistic elements in different positions in the text. The relationship between such elements and their incidents is twofold: a) *endophoric reference*, the incident is inside the text. It is divided into two categories: *anaphoric reference*, the linguistic item refers backwards to its incident, and *cataphoric reference*, the linguistic item refers forward to its incident. b) *exophoric reference*, the incident is outside the text that is usually referred to the context of the situation (situational reference), or to the participants' schematic knowledge (homophobic reference) (Halliday and Hasan, *ibid*).

*Substitution and Ellipsis*. the first is an item or a phrase that is replaced by another one. The linguistic elements used to substitute are a nominal group, namely: *one- does- so* respectively. As to ellipsis is 'substitution by zero' (p.142, *ibid*).

*Conjunction*. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* (2017), a conjunction is a word that joins two phrases or sentences. unlike reference, they do not require exophoric or anaphoric referential relation, rather they establish certain semantic meaning in their own. Thus their meaning is not available elsewhere in the text like that of substitution. Conjunctions are classified according to their meanings into four categories according to Haliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday and Mathiessen (2004). These are additive, adversative, causal, and temporal

*Lexical Cohesion* involves exploitation of the second area of language, namely lexis. Semantic relation between lexical items has different facets: A) hyponymy involves a superordinate relationship between specific words, e.g *table*, *desk*, and *chair* all are hyponymy to the noun *furniture*. B) meronymy is "a part-whole relationship" such as *limb* and *roots* are meronomies of the superordinate *tree*. C) antonymy has the semantic meaning of opposites. **D)** lexical chain or

ordered set represented in the subsequent relationship between the items that extends at the discourse level. They are words usually appear together called collocation as they have 'mutual expectancy between due to their frequent occurrence in a given environment, such as the key-open\_door.

*Theme* was defined by Halliday and Mithiessen (2004) as " the point of departure" they define the concept in terms of its initial position in the sentence. The theme is created by means of passives, reversals, fronts, the expletive 'there', the What-cleft and the It-cleft sentences. They have certain functions and implications, for example, *Existential there* Is used to give more information. The subject of there-clause is usually indefinite noun phrase to introduce a new topic or new information (Flowerdew, 2013).

## **1.4 Macro-Organization Analysis Of Texts**

The macro organization of the text depends heavily on elements that have been already discussed. Three perspectives on the analysis of how information is distributed in discourse, namely thematic analysis, information structure, and prepositional relation.

### **1.4.1 Thematic Analysis**

focuses on theme and rheme relations since they affect the whole discourse in that it results "[...] some form of organisation whereby it fits in with, and contributes to, the flow of discourse" (ibid). The flow of discourse is maintained due to the phoric relation between what is given and what is known (Brown and Yule, 1983).

### **1.4.2 Information Structure.**

According to this perspective theme considered as a device to focus on information packaging in discourse. Such analysis facilitates to the receiver what is given that is theme (that reflects what the reader and writer know, or the knowledge that is shared), and rheme shows new information (Halliday and Mithiessen, 2004). Theme-rheme relationship is a matter of relating old

information with a new one since the more informative part or what is known moves information forward (Olshtain and Celce-murcia, 2000).

### **1.4.3 Propositional Relation**

Approaching the text from semantic relation point of view help recognize WD patterns. In other words, discourse “ [...] involves semantic relations between sentences, hence, relations between propositions expressed by these sentences” (Van Dijk,1980, P. 53) that would realise, for example, cause-consequence, reason-phenomena, comparison-contrast discourse pattern.

### **1.5 Non-linguistic knowledge in Discourse**

In addition to textual knowledge, there are other sorts of knowledge of different nature. Language users aim to achieve a particular goal by language use, and the receivers as well focus on the intended meaning. The perception of intended functions in WD depends on the *context* (see section 2). Thus, there are two types of meanings to utterances: context-free meaning or semantic meaning and contextual based one. Discourse interpretation and creation is a matter of processing underlying intentions (Widdowson, 1978).

### **1.6 Schematic-driven Knowledge**

The discourse makers figuration of discourse requires processing certain types of knowledge outside the text, namely schematic knowledge which is a pre-existing knowledge in the language user's mind. It involves two types of knowledge: First, content schemata (Croll, 1983) or ideational (Widdowson, 1990) involves" knowledge of conceptual content or topic area." (p. 104). Second, interpersonal schemata (Widdowson, 1990) represents customary ways in which we engage with the second person. That is to say, the conventions, norms of the interaction of the particular sociocultural world. For Croll (1983) formal schemata constitute background knowledge about the formal, rhetorical organisational structure of different kinds of texts (1983, PP. 83-84).

## **1.7 Pragmatic-driven Knowledge**

As "the denial of relational proposition leads to inconsistency and explicit mention of these propositions leads to redundancy"(Unger, 1996, P.176), Widdowson (1978) explains how to discourse examined in terms of the illocutionary act. It ties discourse when " the relationship between the illocutionary acts which propositions, not always overtly linked, are being used to perform." (Widdowson, 1978, p.28). Unlike knowledge of cohesion whereby "the overt relationship between propositions expressed through sentences," (Ibid, p.29).

## **II. Discussion**

### **2.1 Statement of the Problem**

One of the disciplines that evolved during the 1980s as a reaction against sentence-based pedagogy is Discourse Analysis (DA). DA is mainly concerned with the analysis of language above and beyond the sentence level. Although the first version of DA, as one can notice in Harris (1952) was purely based on the description of the recurrent linguistic elements in long texts. Later on, the analysis of discourse was undertaken from different perspectives, as a social event, pragmatic, functional, or critical angle, however, findings of the analysis of discourse from are not exploited in practice. The study attempts to bridge the gaps between theoretical insights to the analysis of text and practical issues in SL classroom such as the case of writing.

### **2.2 Pedagogical Framework of DA insights**

A common perception particularly striking about ESL writing teachers "...is that the teachers overwhelmingly view themselves as language teachers rather than writing teachers; they attend primarily to surface-level features of writing. This section is " ..an attempt to think out the possible pedagogical procedures which will lead the learners towards the ability to handle discourse." (Emphasis is added, p.IX) to exploit knowledge illustrated previously and to focus on ways of enacting them, starting from the top to the bottom level.

## 2.2.1 Top-down Processing

Discourse is framed by means of language knowledge and schematic knowledge. Top-down elements in discourse go beyond the first. The outside-text knowledge analysis affects all levels of WD production.

The reader is one of "knowledge of other standard formats in which information is conveyed" (Brown and Yule, 1983). It is mainly the writer's responsibility to consider readers in mind since "we write so that someone else can read and comprehend the message (Olshtain and Celce-Murcia, 2000, p.142). Some helpful questions in this context are suggested so as to consider readership needs carefully: What is the reader likely to know about the subject? What will the reader want to know about the subject? How should I organize the information I have so that is easily understood by the reader? Can I use some special gimmick to make the written passage more interesting and more appealing to the reader? (P.156). Cook's (1989) it is important to form a general hypothesis on the nature of discourse. Possible questions are:

1. Who or what sort of person is the sender of the message?
2. What sort of person is the sender addressing?
3. Where are the addresser and the addressee?
4. What is the purpose of the discourse?
5. Is [it] complete discourse or an extract?
6. What type of discourse is [the text] (e.g letter, recipe...)?
7. What is the meaning of the following (some keywords from a text understudy)?
8. Which of the participants in the event was most successful? (P.80).

According to Cook (ibid), such Top-down questions aim to enable students to predict the content, answer factual questions, identify the sender and intended receiver, discuss issues raised.

The overall structure of discourse is related to the propositional development of discourse (Widdowson, 1978). Classroom interaction is shifted to discussing the following issues that these questions raise: what are the inherent constraints of language uses that make an argumentative text argumentative? What are the regularities of language uses that are common in all argumentative discourse?

Thematic analysis spells out the global meaning of discourse beyond grammar and linguistic traditions. We need to ask a question like "What was she speaking/writing about? Questions that sum up the most important information. Since topics define the overall 'unity' of discourse and typically expressed through discourse segments such as headlines, summaries or conclusions (Van Dijk, 1997). There are many activities which deal with the propositional organization of discourse:

- Information order processed like a dialogue (question and answer) by imagining the interlocutor (Cook, 1989, P.64).
- Cross text comparison of different text-types (Olshtain and Celce-Murcia, 2000).
- Comparison of thematic selection in different text types (Flowerdrew, 2013).
- Planning when writing such as writing outline or flowchart that supports students.
- Using text as a model students alter, expand, shorten, or elaborate (Olshtain and Celce-Murcia, 2000).
- Identifying signalling items related to the macro patterns. For example, McCarthy (1991) analysed key vocabulary indicating Problem-Solution pattern, include words like a *dilemma*, *hinder (ance)*, *answer*, *result*, *(re)solve*, and the like.
- destroy-restore activity, he/she first alter information structure of a particular discourse. Students reorder and restore it (Cook, 1989).

### **2.2.2 Bottom-up analysis oriented analysis (cohesion)**

The bottom-up element of WD involves local and specific features, including choosing lexical items and grammatical forms, appropriate use of cohesive devices. It is appropriate to teach

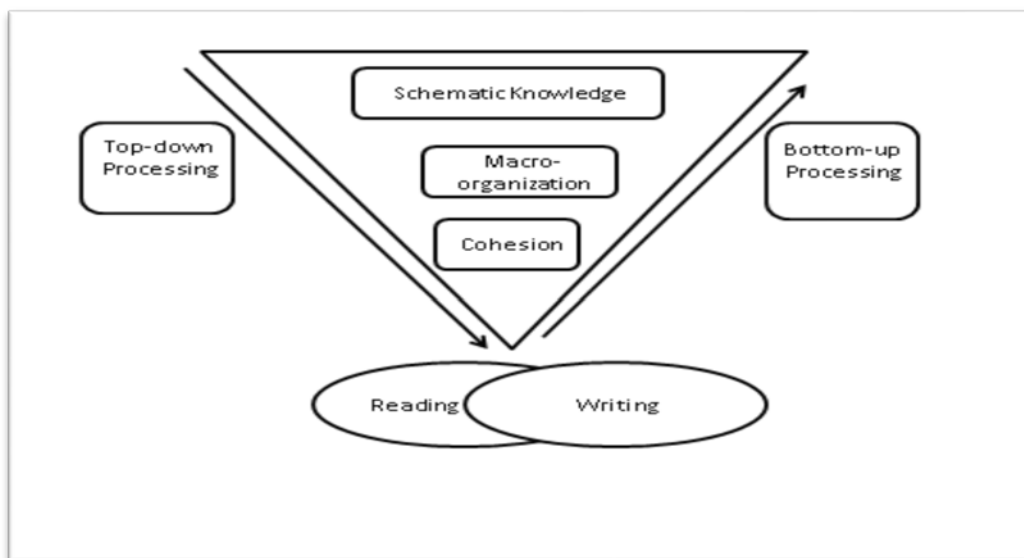
cohesive devices from wholistic view: cohesive elements are "governed by the writer's purpose, the audience knowledge and expectations, and the information to be conveyed" (Johns, 1986 p.249).

Classroom interaction would focus on the following:

1) the role of cohesive devices in discourse when examining lexical chains as cohesive devices (Olshtain and Celce-Murcia, 2000).

2) Decisions on bottom-up choices, for example, connecting pairs of sentences and filling the blanks, and jigsaw activity (McCarthy, 1991, P. 153).

To bridge the gaps between theoretical insights of text analysis and its application in SL classroom, the following model is designed.



**Table 01: A practical model of text production based on DA insights**

**(designed by the researcher)**

The main principle behind the suggested model for teaching writing skill (can be adopted or modified according to teaching situation) is that text production ability is achieved only through the exploitation of certain types of knowledge basic in effective communication. These include

*schematic knowledge, macro-organization of discourse, and cohesion.* WDA, in this respect, is considered as a systematic investigation of WD at various level.

It is implemented as a pedagogical framework to create the appropriate context for a particular communicative interaction, to raise awareness, and to expose students to discourse regularities through engaging them in a *bottom-up and top-down* processing.

## **Conclusion**

The research we conducted was generally aimed to explain how to exploit finding DA in terms of its interpretation and production. The proposed methodology presented earlier takes the advantages of the research results on teaching writing. Our approach to the analysis of text centres mainly on engaging students in acting as readers of discourse, and discourse analysts as they examine how writers construct their message for a particular readership. It adopts two types of language strategy (bottom-up and top-down), reading-writing integrated perspective, and three levels of discourse knowledge (contextual, rhetorical, and cohesive knowledge). The discourse notions that have been discussed are multidimensional and can be adopted in many teaching situations.

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