
Discourse Analysis: Different Definitions And Approaches

Discourse analysis is the study of language in use. It rests on the basic premise that linguistic items cannot be understood without reference to the context, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, in which they are used. It draws from knowledge and methodologies from a wide range of fields, such as anthropology, philosophy, sociology, social and cognitive psychology, and artificial intelligence. Discourse analysis draws upon a variety of disciplines, including linguistics, philosophy, psychology, pragmatics, rhetoric, and sociology, to study language use. Discourse is a complex of social, psychological and linguistic phenomena subject both to the rules of grammar, which all speakers of a language know implicitly and to the general principles of discourse coherence, management, interpretation and organization, which speakers of a language also command. A large body of scientific research has developed which examines how speakers construct and how hearers interpret discourse. Within discourse analysis research, attention is typically focused on text, both oral and written and on the roles and strategies of the speaker (writers) and the hearers (readers) who participate in that text. Given this disciplinary diversity, it is no surprise that the “discourse” and “discourse analysis” have different meanings to scholars in the different fields. For many, particularly linguists, “discourse” has generally been defined as anything “beyond the sentence.” For others (for example Fasold 1990:65), the study of discourse is the study of language use. These definitions have in common a focus on specific instances or stretches of language. But critical theorists and those influenced by them can speak, for examples, of “discourse of power” and “discourse of racism” where the term “discourses” not only becomes a count noun, but further refers to a broad conglomeration of linguistic practices and ideological assumptions that together constructs power or racism. According to some scholars they defined Discourse as follows;

Discourse Analysis is “the study of how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units such as paragraphs, conversations, interviews, etc.” (Richards, Platt and Weber 1985: 84). So, D.A, then, is concerned with linguistic analysis beyond the sentence (and morphosyntax), which was the original object of study of linguistics.

Another definition describes “Discourse Analysis as the discipline which studies the relationship between form and function in verbal communication” (Rekema, 1999: 13). Thus, it does not attempt to describe solely the surface of the linguistic phenomena, but also the intentions and purposes which underlie them, sometimes from a critical perspective.

A third definition portrays it as “the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used” (Mey, 1991:5). Therefore, it also aims at setting the linguistic event in a communicative context with the intention of explaining and understanding the production and reception of texts.

A Selection of Approaches to Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis; According to Teun A. Van Dijk (2015) CDA is a discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.

Socio-cognitive Discourse studies: According to Teun A. Van Dijk(2016) socio-cognitive Discourse studied more broadly relates discourse structure to social structures, it is a particular application of a general theory or philosophy of social constructionism.

Political Discourse Analysis: According to Teun A. Van Dijk (1995) Political Discourse Analysis focuses on the analysis of “political discourse”, which is the text and talk of the politicians and any text and talk that is related to politics.

Discursive Psychology: According to Wikipedia, Discursive Psychology is a form of discourse analysis that focuses on psychological themes in talk, text and images.

Conversational Analysis; According to Wiley Blackwell (2010), Conversational Analysis is an approach within the social sciences that aims to describes, analyses and understand talk as a basic and constitutive features of human social life.

Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory; According to laclau and Mouffe's (2001), Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory is a post-structural theory that deconstructs Saussure's idea of structures. According to structural linguistics, the meaning of a sign is fixated by the net of differentiations of what the sign does not mean.