**Discourse and Text**

**Ahmed Qadoury Abed**

PH D Candidate

Generally speaking, the term ‘discourse’ (which is widely called discourse analysis) is the Cinderella , if not to the position yet of princess,of recent theories of language analysis and description(Hoey,1983:1f), since discourse analysis over these thirty years has become “a major growth industry in modern language study ,and several hundred books are published on the subject every year”(Hoey,1991:3). This is represented in the fact that the term ‘discourse analysis’ is nowadays applied to a broad and heterogeneous range of approaches to language which share a solid resemblance in their focus on the linguistic characteristics, organizational patterns and communicative functions in context of naturally-occurring spoken or written text (Malmakjær,2010:133fff). It has been argued that the centre of gravity of linguistic study has shifted over the past thirty years from the sentence to the text, that is, from syntax to discourse; this shift reflects an increasing acceptance that linguistics should be concerned with describing and explaining language in use(ibid.:137).

Our purpose now is to understand the kind(s) of relationship(s) between the two terms ‘discourse’ and ‘text’, where answers should be given to the following basic questions:

* What is ‘discourse’?
* What is ‘text’?
* Are they identical? If yes, are they used interchangeably?
* If no, what are these differences between them? And what is the domain of each one of them?

Coulthard (1985:7) states that discourse analysis “*not enough if it is defined as the utterances or sentences that are well-formed grammatically”.* Coulthard’s opinion is completed by Schiffrin who (1987:20) defines discourse in two ways; *“first is a particular unit of language (above the sentence), or we can say that it can be discussed as a structure. Second is a particular focus (on language use)”*.

Stubbs tends to define discourse based on its function. He (1983:1) defines discourse analysis as “*the study that attempts in organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and even the larger linguistics units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts”*. Although actually he states that discourse analysis is very ambiguous, but he emphasizes that discourse concerns with language in use in social contexts, especially in the interaction between the speakers. In addition, he states that discourse can be in the form of written or spoken.

Brown and Yule (1983: ix) supports this opinion stating that discourse analysis examines how human use language to communicate. In particular, it examines how addressers construct linguistic messages for addressees and how addressees work on linguistic messages in order to interpret them. The examples of spoken discourse are debate, conversation, lessons, and interviews. While, the examples of written discourse are newspaper, advertisement, students’ writing assignment and movie script. In conclusion, the term of discourse analysis in their opinion is the study of language in use for communication, either in spoken or written.

Halliday & Hassan (1976:1) provided the most appropriate and adaptable definition of ‘text’. They consider it as written or spoken stretches of the text; i.e., a text as stretch of written or spoken language which proposes that language follows a linear sequence where one line of text follows another ,which in turn creates a context of meaning Contextual meaning at the paragraph level is referred to as ‘coherence’ while their internal properties of meaning is referred to as ‘cohesion ’state that the term ‘text’ is used in linguistics to refer to “*any passage, spoken or written ,of whatever length, that does form a unified whole*”. They go further to expand this statement to include “*any specimen of our own language constitutes a TEXT or not … The distinction between a text and a collection of unrelated sentences is in the last resort a matter of degree…”.*The following categories are mentioned to justify their definition:

* *A text may be spoken or written*
* *Prose or verse*
* *Dialogue or monologue*
* *A single proverb to a whole play*
* *A momentary cry for help to all –day discussion on a committee.*
* *A text is a unit of language in use*
* *It is not a grammatical unit,like alause or a sentence*
* *It is not defined by its size*

Widdowson(2007:4) states that a text can be defined as *“an actual use of language, as distinct from a sentence which is an abstract unit of linguistic analysis. We identify a piece of language as a text as soon as we recognize that it has been produced for a communicative purpose”.* Halliday & Hassan (1989:10f) go further to define texts in many frames: a semantic unit “ *it is really made of meanings*”; text as product and as process “*we need to see the text as product and the text as process and to keep both these aspects in focus”*;and as a social exchange of meaning *“text is a form of exchange; and the fundamental form of a text is that of dialogue, of interaction between speakers”.*

Discourse analysts have concentrated on the distinction between written texts and spoken texts since both are the double-faced natural representation of a text on the one hand , and particular representatives of text and discourse , respectively , on the other (see Brown & Yule, 1983:Ch.1).This distinction may be represented by the distinction between sentence and utterance (ibid.).

These definitions of both ‘discourse’ and ‘text’ have shown the two possibilities. Discourse and text are of interchangeable use since :

* Both focus on the formalist nature of language “a particular unit beyond the sentence or the clause”, whether written or spoken. Thus, the ability of the speaker to stretch a given discourse can be said to constitute a text.
* Both focus on the functional purpose of language ;i.e., language is viewed as a kind of social practice (language in use).

The other possibility is clear whenever the physical nature of each one of them is concerned : written vs. spoken. Widdowson emphasized this conclusion stating that:

*When we are engaged in face-to face interaction, this challenge can, of course, be made directly and will be immediately textualized as a constituent part of the ongoing discourse. …But with other kinds of spoken language, there is …complete control of text production. And this…is also the case with written text* (2004:13)*.*

Even he himself later supports the first possibility stating that what he had tried was “*for making a conceptual distinction between discourse and text”*(ibid.:14) , which he confessed to be *“unsatisfactory , and misleading”.*

Brown & Yule (1983:23f) state another distinction between ‘discourse’ and ‘text’; a distinction between ‘process’ and ‘product’. This is clear in these following extracts:

*Although there are claims that cohesive links in texts are used by text-producers to facilitate reading or comprehension by text-receivers… the analysis of the ‘product’, i.e., the printed text itself, does not involve any consideration of how the product is produced or how it is received .We shall describe such an approach as deriving from a* ***text-as-product*** *view. (p.24)*

And discourse as process as in

*…the view taken in this book is best characcterised as a* ***discourse-as –process*** *view…We shall consider words, phrases and sentences which appear in the textual record of a discourse to be evidence of an attempt by a producer (speaker/writer) to communicate his message to a recipient (hearer/reader).(ibid.)*

The third distinction is in Widdowson (2007:6f) where discourse is identified as a complex of communicative purposes wheras text as abstract realization:

*We can refer to this complex of communicative purposes as the discourse that underlies the text and motivates its production in the first place.But at the receiving end readers or listeners then have to make meaning out of the text to make it a communicative reality.In other words, they have to interpret the text as a discourse that makes sense to them. Texts, in this view, do not contain meaning but are used to mediate it across discourses.*

This indicates that the term discourse is taken to refer to both what a text producer meant and text receiver perceived ; the same idea earlier stated by Hoey (1991:212) where the term ‘discourse’ means both interaction and text.

**Reference**

Brown, G. & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press.

Coulthard, M.( 1985). *An* *Introduction to Discourse Analysis,*(2nd ed.). London:

Longman Inc.

Halliday,M.A.K. & Hassan,R.(1976 ). *Cohesion in English* .London:Longman.

Halliday,M.A.K. & Hassan,R.(1989). Language,Context, and Text:Aspects of

Language in a Social –semiotic Perspective,(2nd ed.).Oxford: Oxford

University Press.

Hoey,M.(1983). *On the Surface of Discourse*.London: George Allen & Unwin.

Hoey,M.(1991).*Patterns of Lexis in Text*.Oxford:Oxford University Press.

Malmakjær,K. (ed.)(2010).*The Routledge Linguistics Encyclopedia*,(3rd ed.).

London: Routledge.

Schiffrin, D. (1994). *Approaches to Discourse.* Oxford : Blackwell.

Stubbs, M. (1983). *Discourse Analysis :The Sosciolinguistics Analysis of*

*Natural Language*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Widdowson,H.G.(2004). *Text, Context, Pretext*. London :Blackwell.

Widdowson,H.G.(2007). *Discourse Analysis*.Oxford: Oxford University Press.