

Mustansiriyah University

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

4th Year Linguistics

Main Textbook: The Study of Language, 6th Edition (George Yule, 2017)

Lecture Title: Discourse Analysis

Aim: this series of lectures aims to investigate how language users recognize well-constructed and coherent texts, how they understand more than is said, and how they successfully take part in that complex communicative activity that we call conversation.

Discourse & Discourse Analysis

- Discourse is often defined as “language beyond the sentence”.
- Discourse analysis, on the other hand, can be defined as the field of study that is typically concerned with the study of language in texts and conversation.
- Language users are capable of much more than simply distinguishing between correct versus incorrect forms and structures. In fact, they have the ability to arrive at complex discourse interpretations out of fragmentary linguistic messages.
- To do so, language users not only rely on what they know about linguistic form and structure but also on more extensive knowledge related to the use of language across different social contexts.

Cohesion

- The term cohesion refers to the linguistic devices that we use to link sentences together in order to form a well-connected text.
- Any text has a certain structure that depends on factors that are quite different from those required in the structure of a single sentence.
- The analysis of cohesive devices or ties within a text gives us some insight into how writers structure what they want to say.
- Analyzing text cohesion includes how:
 1. reference to the people and things is maintained throughout the text

2. connections are created by terms that share a common element of meaning, such as “money” (bought – saving – penny – worth a fortune – sold – pay) and “time” (once – nowadays – sometimes)
 3. temporal connectedness is maintained by means tense(s) used in the text
 4. the use connectors (such as however, additionally, etc.) can mark the relationship of what follows to what went before in the text.
- Below is an example showing how cohesion analysis can be done:

My father once bought a Lincoln convertible. He did it by saving every penny he could. That car would be worth a fortune nowadays. However, he sold it to help pay for my college education. Sometimes I think I’d rather have the convertible.

People	<i>My father – He – he – he; My – my – I – I</i>
Things	<i>A Lincoln convertible – That car – it – the convertible</i>
Money	<i>bought – saving every penny – worth a fortune – sold – pay</i>
Time	<i>once – nowadays – sometimes</i>
Tenses	past (<i>bought</i>) – past (<i>did</i>) – past (<i>could</i>) – past (<i>sold</i>) – present (<i>think</i>)

- As shown the example above, the use of an appropriate number of cohesive ties or devices may be crucial in our judgments on whether something is well written or not.
- However, by itself, cohesion would not be sufficient to enable us to make sense of what we read. It is quite easy to create a highly cohesive text that has a lot of connections between the sentences, but is very difficult to understand or interpret. Look at the following text:

My father bought a Lincoln convertible. The car driven by the police was red. That color doesn’t suit her. She consists of three letters. However, a letter isn’t as fast as a telephone call.

- The text above clearly shows that the ‘connectedness’ we experience in our interpretation of normal texts is not simply based on cohesive ties. There must be another factor that helps us distinguish connected texts that make sense from those that do not. This factor is usually described as ‘coherence’.

Coherence

- Coherence deals with different elements fit together well in a text. Coherence is not something that exists in words or structures, but something that people confer upon text. This is because it is people who make sense of what they read and hear.
- In order to fill the gaps that may exist in the text, language users may need to use their knowledge about the world to create meaningful connections that are not actually expressed by the words and sentences.
- This gap-filling process evidently presents in the interpretation of casual conversation, as shown in the example below:

HER: That's the telephone.
HIM: I'm in the bath.
HER: O.K.

- There are certainly no cohesive ties within this fragment of discourse. Using the information contained in the sentences is not enough to reach interpretation.
- How does each of participants manage to make sense of what the other says? Those participants seem to reach an acceptable interpretation by drawing on their previous knowledge about the conventional actions performed by the speakers in such interactions. The interpretation of such a conversation can be analyzed in terms of three successive actions, which can be described as follows:
 1. *That's the telephone.* (She makes a request of him to perform action)
 2. *I'm in the bath.* (He states reason why he cannot comply with request)
 3. *O.K.* (She accepts reason)
- This example shows that language users do not only rely on the cohesive ties in the text to reach understanding, but they also draw on their general knowledge about how texts and conversations are structured and used.

Conversation Analysis

- Any conversation involves different turns or exchanges for all the participants in that conversation. This means that any conversation is structured in terms of turn-taking; turn-taking refers to the way in which each speaker takes a turn in conversation. In turn-taking process, the participants wait until one speaker indicates that he or she has finished, usually by signaling a completion point, which is often indicated by a pause and a specific intonation pattern.
- Speakers can use different conversational strategies to organize turns. Speakers may extend their turns by holding the floor in order to avoid having normal

completion points (namely pauses). They can also produce filled pauses (with em, er, you know) after having almost lost the turn at his first brief hesitation. These strategies help organize turns and negotiate the intricate business of social interaction through language.

- In any conversation, the turn-taking process is partially prescribed by convention and they are called adjacency pairs. Therefore, conversations typically follow a predictable format that is chosen from a number of commonly used types. The options chosen by a particular speaker on a particular occasion depend on the social situation.

The Co-operative Principle

- An underlying assumption in most conversational exchanges is that the participants are co-operating with each other. T
- Grice, an American philosopher, proposes a principle that regulates how speaker's meaning can be inferred in communication. This principle is called the cooperative principle.
- The cooperative principle involves four maxims that underpin the natural tendency of humans to help one another in communication. Grice's maxims can be collectively summarized as a general principle: 'Be cooperative'. Grice's Maxims are:
 1. Maxim of quantity: it indicates that language users should give the right amount of information and to be sufficiently informative.
 2. Maxim of quality: this maxim indicates that language users should be truthful. In other words, do not say what you lack evidence for and avoid contradiction.
 3. Maxim of relevance: this maxim emphasizes that language users should provide relevant information when engaging in communication.
 4. Maxim of manner: it means that language users should make sure that their contribution in communication is clear and orderly.

Implicature

- Infringements of the cooperative principle show how strongly it works, because speakers assume that a superficially uncooperative statement is in fact handing over important information. This is because language users interpret what people say as conforming to the cooperative principle, even when this principle is overtly violated. Language users draw implications about meaning that are not explicitly communicated by the sentence. The implications that we draw based on the assumption that the cooperative principle is always at work are called conversational **implicatures**. These implicatures fill in the gap between the

explicit meaning (sentence meaning) and implicit meaning (utterance meaning), or in other words, between what the speakers say and what they actually intend.

Hedges

- In conversation, we can use certain types of expressions, called **hedges**, to show that we are concerned about following the maxims while being co-operative speakers. **Hedges** can be defined as words or phrases used to indicate that we are not really sure that what we are saying is sufficiently correct or complete. We can use 'sort of' or 'kind of' as hedges on the accuracy of our statements, as in descriptions such as 'His hair was kind of long' or 'The book cover is sort of yellow'.

Schema and Script

- In order to analyze the conversational implicature, we had to describe some background knowledge. The background knowledge is organized in terms of schemas or scripts. A **schema** is a general term for a conventional knowledge structure that exists in memory. For instance, we use our conventional knowledge of what a school classroom is like, or a "classroom schema," when we tried to make sense of an implicature arising in an utterance related to school.
- Similar in many ways to a schema is a script. A **script** is essentially a dynamic schema. That is, instead of the set of typical fixed features in a schema, a script has a series of conventional actions that take place. You have a script for "Going to the dentist" and another script for "Going to the movies."