

Course Title: Discourse Analysis
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What is Critical Discourse Analysis?

(Based on, Kim, K., (2025), *Critical Discourse Analysis in Translation Studies: An Introductory Textbook*, Routledge.)

Text of any Size

- ▶ Another key feature of discourse is that it can consist of texts of any size, written or spoken, as long as they are authentic and considered in context (Bax 2011).

To clarify the concept, scholars often relate discourse to text, a more concrete linguistic notion:

- ▶ Van Dijk (1977) described text as an “abstract theoretical construct” underlying discourse.
- ▶ Chafe (2003) noted that both terms are concerned with language beyond isolated sentences.

In this sense, a discourse or a text refers to a unit of language larger than a single sentence, emphasizing its continuity and contextual use.

Definitions

- ▶ Salkie (1995) defines a text—or discourse—as “a stretch of language that may be longer than one sentence.”
- ▶ Stubbs (1983) also emphasized that discourse refers to larger linguistic units above the sentence or clause level, whereas a text can be very short. For instance, brief signs like Exit or No Smoking do not qualify as discourse due to their brevity.
- ▶ Zellig Harris viewed discourse as the manifestation of formal regularities across combined sentences (Widdowson 1995), implying it must be longer than a single sentence.

Definitions: Other Points of Views

- ▶ Scholars such as Widdowson (1995, 2004) and Bax (2011) challenge this restriction, arguing that meaningful units smaller than a sentence can function as texts when interpreted within context.
- ▶ Examples include signs like: i (tourist information), WC (toilet), or an airplane symbol on a motorway, as well as abbreviations like BC, PC, P, and BBC.
- ▶ These short texts carry meaning because they are authentic, contextually understood, and linked to extra-linguistic reality. Widdowson emphasizes that a text is inert unless activated by its contextual connection.

Criticism

- ▶ As early as 1995, Widdowson questioned the distinction between discourse and text, criticizing Harris (1952) for causing confusion by using the terms inconsistently.
- ▶ Harris limited discourse to language patterns above the sentence level, focusing on language itself rather than its use (Widdowson 1995, 160).
- ▶ Later, Widdowson (2004, 2007) clarified that discourse is “the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation,” whereas text is “its product,” serving to mediate meaning across discourses.

Supporting View

- ▶ Supporting this view, Bax (2011) argued that excluding short texts from discourse analysis is unhelpful, as even brief texts can constitute comprehensible discourse. In a digital world where meaning is conveyed through multiple modes—visuals, signs, emojis—a broader definition of discourse is practical.
- ▶ Accordingly, this book adopts Bax’s definition: discourse refers to texts of “any size, written or spoken, so long as they are authentic and considered in context” (2011, 24–25), while text is understood, following Halliday and Hasan (1985, 10), as “language that is functional.”

Discourse studies = discourse theory + discourse analysis

Terms like:

- ▶ Discourse studies
- ▶ Discourse theory
- ▶ Discourse analysis

are frequently used without precise definitions. Although a full historical account is beyond the scope of this book, understanding CDA's foundations clarifies its central focus.

Discourse studies comprise:

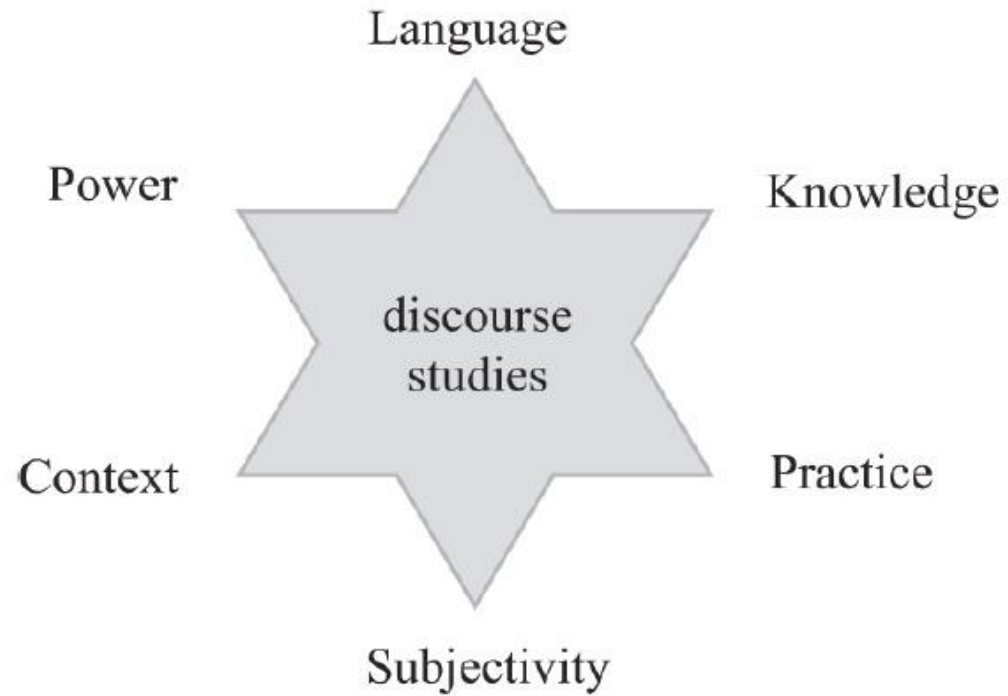
- ▶ Discourse theory—the development of theoretical frameworks
- ▶ Discourse analysis—the application of methodological approaches—with the key distinction being where each places its emphasis.
- ▶ Scholars such as Angermüller, Maingueneau and Wodak (2014) have examined these differences extensively, tracing the evolution of discourse studies in the US, France, the UK, and Germany, and clarifying the subtle distinctions between the objectives of discourse theory and those of discourse analysis.

Discourse Studies according to: Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak

- ▶ According to Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak (2014, 5), discourse studies comprise both discourse theory and discourse analysis. They note that discourse theory is often linked to poststructuralism, focusing on “the symbolic constitution of society through the circulation of written texts” from a macrosociological perspective.
- ▶ In contrast, discourse analysis is associated with pragmatics, examining language use and social practices, including the analysis of oral conversations as situated practices.

- ▶ The authors emphasize that these approaches are complementary rather than strictly separate, highlighting their intersections: discourse theorists often rely on discourse analysis, while analysts with ethno-methodological or pragmatic backgrounds have engaged with poststructuralist theory.
- ▶ This interaction is evident in CDA-informed translation studies. For instance, studies analyzing translation patterns to uncover discourses emerging from consistent translation choices are informed by poststructuralist concerns with:
 - ▶ Power
 - ▶ knowledge
 - ▶ Subjectivity

The following illustration, adapted from Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak (2014, 6) and Angermuller (2015, 513) summarise this point.



Discourse Theory: Description

Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak (2014, 6) describe Discourse Theory as:

- ▶ Centering on the interplay of power, knowledge and subjectivity. Society, its actors, social inequalities, and symbolic and cultural orders are not fixed; they are continuously made and unmade through discursive practices.
- ▶ Discourse does more than represent what people do, think, or are—it can also constitute reality in a particular way. Discursive practices reflect the complex relationship between power and subjectivity, regulating who is entitled to speak, from which position, and with what effect.
- ▶ Not everyone has equal opportunity to be visible, participate in exchanges, or influence what is recognized as reality within a community.

The dialectical relationship between discourse and society

- ▶ The relationship —where discourse both shapes and is shaped by social practices—is central to CDA research in discourse and translation studies.
- ▶ CDA often aims to uncover how certain discursive practices are constructed by society or how circulating discourses influence changes in social practices. For example, Kim (2012) analyzed Korean media discourse on migrants (1990–2009) to identify dominant societal attitudes, illustrating how discourse reflects social behaviors.
- ▶ In another study, Kim (2014) examined US mainstream media coverage of North Korea to reveal how discourse constructs a world divided into pro- and anti-US groups, showing how discourse helps constitute social reality.
- ▶ Similarly, Gu (2018) demonstrated how Chinese government interpreters reinforce pre-existing ideological discourses about China's past actions by analyzing the discourses produced during the Premier's press conferences.

Power

- ▶ As illustrated by studies such as Kim (2014) and Gu (2018), power is a central element in discourse theory.
- ▶ CDA examines who holds the power to shape which discourses are disseminated and how this, in turn, (re)shapes social reality.
- ▶ For instance, politicians' public speeches carry more authority than those of private individuals and media institutions wield greater influence through the circulation of information.
- ▶ Powerful institutions exercise control over the information they distribute, as seen in media gatekeeping, where content is filtered or censored. In sum, discourse studies analyse discourse with careful attention to how power structures influence its construction and dissemination.

CDA-informed translation studies also recognise the role of power, which is why Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak (2014, 6) identify: (Power- Knowledge – Subjectivity) as the three central elements of discourse theory.

- ▶ This perspective motivates some translation scholars to examine how large institutions, such as news media organisations, exercise power by constructing and disseminating discourses (e.g., Kang 2008).

Discourse analysis, as a framework, examines:

- ▶ Language
- ▶ Practice
- ▶ Context

Discourse analysis recognises that discourse emerges from the interplay among these three components: No single component can be considered in isolation.

- ▶ As Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak (2014, 6–7) explain, discourse analytical approaches may focus empirically on one component while accounting for the other two theoretically, but all three must be integrated, distinguishing discourse studies from other approaches.

They define the components as follows:

- ▶ Language: the semiotic material, including formal patterns, conventions, and resources, encompassing written and oral texts as well as audio-visual materials (images, films, etc.).
- ▶ Practice: The ways, in which language is appropriated and processed, covering all interactions between participants.
- ▶ Context: the setting, situation, or knowledge available to discourse participants, which can be situation-dependent or transcendent, and individual or shared by larger collectives.

CDA: Context and Translation Shifts

- ▶ CDA-informed examinations of translations must account for context when analysing language use in translation and interpreting.
- ▶ For example, Kim (2018) studied three (re)translations of the same text published in 1999, 2006 and 2014, highlighting how (shifts in translations, editorial decisions and contextual voices) were shaped by (ideological, sociological and political factors).
- ▶ Her study showed that:
(re)translations (language) are reframed (practice) and temporally repositioned (context) to reflect the dominant values and ideas of the target culture and to address the immediate interests of the audience, resulting in changes to the discourse presented in the text.

Translation Shifts

- ▶ These translation shifts and the interventions by agents cannot be fully understood when texts are examined in isolation. Because translation is socially and temporally embedded, context is crucial for identifying discourse.
- ▶ Consequently, many case studies in translation studies adopt a CDA-informed discourse analysis approach, focusing on:
 - ▶ Translation (semiotic material/language)
 - ▶ The shifts and re-appropriations that occur during translation (practice)
 - ▶ The historical, socio-political and linguistic conditions influencing them (context).