

Introduction to Discourse Analysis

Introduction

- Discourse is the way people talk about any specific topic. It's also the way in which language is used to convey meanings.
- Discourse analysis is the process that helps to understand the underlying message of what is being said.

Discourse: Definition

Discourse is verbal or written communication that has unity, meaning, and purpose. In linguistics, discourse refers to a unit of language that is longer than a sentence.

So, in its simplest form, discourse is **verbal or written communication** between people that **goes beyond a single sentence**.

Importantly, discourse is more than just language.

- The term “language” can include all forms of linguistic and symbolic units (even things such as road signs), and language studies can focus on the individual meanings of words.
- Discourse goes beyond this and looks at the **overall meanings conveyed by language in context**.

“Context” here refers to the **social, cultural, political, and historical background** of the discourse, and it is important to take this into account to understand underlying meanings expressed through language.

Linguistic context	The relationship between the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.
Situational context	The relationship between the participants, the environment, time, and place in which the discourse occurs. Situational context is usually approached through the concept of register, which focuses on the interrelationship of language and context.

Cultural context	The culture and customs of epoch in language communities in which the speakers participate. Language is closely connected to the social structure and value system of society. Therefore, it's influenced by such factors as social role and status, sex, age, etc.
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Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a technique that arose in the late 20th century from the growing interest in qualitative research. The main purpose of discourse analysis is to understand the message and its implications. It can be done by studying the text's parts and the factors that influence people's understanding of it.

Discourse analysis is deeply connected with linguistics, anthropology, sociology, socio-psychology, philosophy, communications studies, and literature. It challenges the idea that we should take language for granted and instead encourages more interpretative and qualitative approaches. That's why it is used in various fields to:

- describe organizational change;
- read between the lines while analyzing policy texts;
- provide greater depth to qualitative accounting research;
- use multiple fields to synthesize information.

Types of Discourse Analysis



Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis or CDA is a cross-disciplinary methodological and theoretical approach. It focuses on the issues of power and inequalities in linguistic interactions between individuals and groups. It's closely related to applied linguistics, cultural and social studies, anthropology, intercultural communication, and critical pedagogy.

Choose a critical discourse analysis if you want to do the following:

- Study meaning and context of the verbal interaction or a text.
- Focus on the topics of identity and power.
- Examine the potential for a change in an area.
- Explore the connections between power and ideology.

Cultural Discourse Analysis

Cultural discourse analysis or CuDA is a method of studying culturally distinctive communication practices in our world. In the communication field, CuDA is most often used by scholars of Language and Social Interaction.

Choose a cultural discourse analysis if you're interested in:

- Studying culturally-specific means of communication in various local contexts.
- Seeing how people talk about identity, relations, actions, and feelings.
- Proving that the differences should be acknowledged, embraced, and celebrated in intercultural dialogue.

Political Discourse Analysis

Political discourse analysis or PDA focuses on the use of language in politics, political texts, and documents. It also includes the recipients of communicative political events, such as the citizens and the general public. Therefore, it can be said the discourse is located in both political and public spheres.

Choose a political discourse analysis if you want to do the following:

- Deal with the concepts of political power, power abuse, or domination.
- Examine the discursive conditions and consequences of social and political inequality.
- Analyze the words and actions of politicians.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis is a technique that implies looking at multiple modes of communication such as text, color, and images. It studies how they interact with one another to create semiotic meaning.

Each mode of communication plays a specific role in the analysis. A picture, for instance, can easily depict something that takes too long to describe in words. Colors are mainly used to highlight specific aspects of the general message.

Choose a multimodal discourse analysis if you plan to:

- Look at several modes of communication at once.
- Conduct a nuanced and complex analysis of visual media.
- Work with online sources and platforms.

Approaches to Discourse Analysis

There are two approaches to discourse analysis: **language-in use** and **socio-political discourse analysis**.

- **The language-in-use approach** mainly focuses on the regular use of language in communication. It pays attention to sentence structure, phonology, and grammar. This approach is very descriptive and is mainly used in linguistics or literature.
- **The socio-political approach** focuses on how a language influences the social and political context and vice versa. One of the main socio-political approaches is Critical Discourse Analysis, born out of Michel Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish*. It identifies two types of power: normalized and repressive (you can read about in [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entry on Foucault](#).)

The language-in-use framework involves identifying the technicalities of language and investigating how the features are used in a particular social context.

Example:

the English language usually uses affixes and suffixes but not infixes. If an English speaker says something similar to "that's un-flipping-believable," the questions for this approach would be "What role does the infix play?" or "What is the goal of using such an infix?"

Now let's see an example of a socio-political approach. We'll take the power dynamic between a teacher and a student as an illustration.

Example:

A teacher threatening a student with detention if they don't stop speaking in class can be classified as a repressive power. Normalized power, in contrast, isn't actively asserted. It's the power that makes students not want to talk in class. It's manifested in the subtle clues from our environment that tell students how to behave.

How to Do Discourse Analysis Step by Step

Now you are finally ready to start writing your discourse analysis. Follow our step-by-step guide, and you'll excel at it.

Step #1: Choose the research question and select the content of the analysis.

Coming up with a clearly defined research question is crucial. There's no universal set of criteria for a good research question. However, try to make sure that your research question:

- clearly states the purpose of the work;
- is not too broad or too narrow;
- can be investigated and has enough sources to rely on;
- allows you to conduct an analysis;
- is not too difficult to answer.

Step #2: Gather information.

Go through interviews, speeches, discussions, blogs, etc., to collect all the necessary information. Make sure to gather factual details of when and where the content you will use was created, who the author is, and who published it.

Step #3: Study the context.

This step involves a close examination of various elements of the gathered material.

- Take a closer look at the words used in the source text, its sentences, paragraphs, and overall structure.
- Consider 3 constructs of context: **participants, setting, and purpose**. These 3 characteristics reflect information about the individual, their emotional state, and their identity as members of a societal group.

Step #4: Review the results.

Once you've researched and examined all the sources, it's time to reflect on your results and place your analysis in a broader context.

- To establish a broader context, you may consider what events have impacted the topic you are writing about and the consequences.
- Finally, draw conclusions that answer your research question.

Step #5: Make an outline.

Before you are all set with your discourse analysis, one last step is to write an outline.