ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This paper provides an overview of the pervasive term of discourse analysis, going back to its roots and approaching its latest meanings.The term discourse analysis was introduced in 1952 by Zelling Harris in his attempt to relate oral communication and writing. He tried to describe how language characteristics were distributed in different styles of texts. Since then, a lot of definitions have been given to discourse analysis.Consequently, the paper tackles the problem of the discourse analysis in a period of a shift of paradigm from the classic discourse analysis to innovative approaches of discourse studies.

Keywords: discourse analysis, didactic discourse, discourse studies, critical discourse analysis, education

One of the classic definitions of discourse analysis is the one given by Cook, namely, discourse analysis "examines how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social and psychological context become meaningful for their users." (Cook, 1989: IX). Guy Cook was one of the first linguists whose interest directed towards discourse analysis applied to education. Traditionally, language teaching referred to grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary but he managed to demonstrate the relevance of DA in language learning and teaching.

Another definition which I consider relevant is the one given by Brian Partridge, namely: "discourse analysis focuses on the knowledge about language beyond the word, clause or sentence and it is needed for successful communication." (Paltridge, 2006:2). He aims to prove that there is a definite influence on language from the part of the relationships between the dialogue participants. He also examines how discourse analysis gives birth to different views on the world and identities.

A definition, that has become almost a classic one, belongs to Van Dijk who considers discourse analysis a cross-discipline which comprises the "analysis of text and talk of the humanities and social sciences." (Van Dijk, 1997:1) He argues that discourse is a form of *language use* whose components are ordered in larger units in the process of communication.He has identified the desire of discourse analysts to include in the discourse analysis components such as: who uses language, where, why, how and when. Consequently, the discourse goes beyond the grammatical study of syntax, having in view different interactional components.

Professor Stephanie Taylor, notices that discourse analysists are from various domains and they try to analyse various aspects of general relevance. She claims that discourse analysis is concerned with language use as a social phenomenon and therefore necessarily goes beyond *one* speaker or *one* newspaper article to find features which have a more generalized relevance." (Taylor, 2013:3).

A lot of linguists have talked about discourse as a method of analysing language, but, however, some others connect discourse to social perspectives, claiming that discourse analysis originates in sociology and even philosophy. Wood and Kroger considers DA as being "a perspective on the nature of language and its relationship to the central issues of the social

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sciences." (Wood and Kroger, 2012:12). DA offers possibilities of data collection and analysis, as well as some general theoretical assumptions for other sets of studies.

Deborah Schiffrin defines discourse as "he use of language above and beyond the sentence, namely how people use language in texts and context." (Schiffrin in ed. Fasold, 2013:169). A lot of linguistics before her have discussed language only in terms of sentences as the largest language units, but one should also include in the act of communication the participants, both speaker and hearer, as well as the context. She also suggests that there are quite clear differences between structural and functional approaches to analysing language, as presented previously by anthropologist Dell Hymes (Hymes, 1974:79):

Structural Approach Characteristics	**Functional Approach Characteristics**
Focus on grammar	Focus on structure of speech
Analysis of language structure before the language use.	Analysis of language use before language structure.
Assumption that the most important function of language to describe things through prepositions.	Assumption that language has also stylistic and social functions.
Study of the elements of language in isolation.	Study of the elements of language within context.
Uniformity of speakers, hearers, actions and events.	Diversity of speakers, hearers, actions and events.
Language are seen as independent from society.	Languages have social functions, too.

Broadely speaking, the function of the Discourse Analysis is to analyse grammar and lexis in order to convey some rules that are characteristic to different situations of communication. As opposed to the conventional grammarians, discourse analysts are interested in various factors: roles of the participants at the communication acts, ways of opening a conversation, media language, class interaction, speaking on the phone, etc. Through discourse, people can:

- Represent the world;
- Convey communicative intentions;
- Organize thoughts;
- Arrange information so it is accessible to others;
- Engage in actions and interaction;
- Convey their identities and relationships.

(Schiffrin in ed.Fasold, 2013:169)

According to Van Dijk, discourse analysis is interested in:

- Discourse as a verbal structure and he claims that the analysis can be done at the level of form, style, rhetoric;
- The use of discourse and interaction in society, focusing on speech acts, interaction and use of language;
- How people understand discourse;
- Discourse and society, having in view gender, ethnicity, culture.

Gillian Brown and George Yule also talk about the functions of DA. They emphasize the significance of the Discourse Analysis, as being the "analysis of language in use," or "what language is used for" and they propose two other terms: a *transactional* function, which deals

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with the content and the *interactional* function, to explain the social interaction. Language is used to convey meaning and they consider that we should call the language which is used to convey meaning as *primarily transactional language*. It is assumed that while using this primarily transactional language the writer/speaker has in mind the efficient transference of information. (Brown an Yule, 1983: 8)

The interactional function refers to the use of language as means to establish and preserve human relationships. A great deal of the oral communication has to do with the interactional function of DA, but, also written communication can be interactional if we consider letters or notes.

There is a close relationship between discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. In 1960's the word sociolinguistics was popularized under the general terms sociolinguistics and sociology of language. Both concepts were initially used indistinctly, but, eventually, differences in meaning were assigned to each. Sociolinguistics involves the relation between languages and society whereas sociology involves explanations and predictions about the language of a group of people. Sociolinguistics became popular due to the various gender studies, minority language studies, etc. On the other hand, sociology is a field of human science which concerns the study of social relations, social stratification and social interaction. However, the two terms seem to be very closely related.

Like other subjects, sociolinguistics, in Hudson's view, is both empirical and theoretical. The so-called "armchair" approach to sociolinguistics can be productive, he claims, if it is based on systematically collected facts. It also fosters an analytical framework containing terms such as, language (a body ok knowledge and rules), speech (actual utterance), speaker, addressee, topic, etc. Personal experience is also of vital importance when analysing language in relation to society. (Hudson, 2001: 88).

Brian Paltridge is one of the linguists who emphasize the fact that discourse analysis concerns the link between both spoken and written iterations and the contexts. Discourses differ according to social identities and culture-specific factors. Discourses involve, feelings, interacting, gestures etc.

Van Dijk explains that discourse plays an important role in our society, not only to achieve communication, but also to unite members of same communities and give them a form of identity. The analysis of the discourse can show characteristics of a particular group of people and even to categorize them. (Van Dijk, 1997)

However, most linguists claim that discourse analysis is part of Pragmatics. Pragmatics deals with the study of linguistic communication trying to make each message become successful. The Message Model is a well-known one, in which a message is encoded by the speaker and sent to be decoded by the receiver. We can also add other elements to this model, elements such as attitude, background, social factors, etc.

Paltridge considers that Pragmatics "looks at the ways in which people typically perform speech acts in spoken or written discourse" and the reasons they choose to perform that particular speech act. (Paltridge, 2006:52). The *context of situation* is the relation between what is said and what is understood. The same conversation in a restaurant can have different meanings to different participants to the dialogue. There are some very important aspects in the interpretation of discourse, such as *the situational context*, meaning what people know about a respective subject, the background knowledge context, i. e. what people know about the world and the *co-textual context*, i.e. what they "know about what they have been saying." (Cutting in Paltridge, 2006:54).

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Most of the approaches to Discourse Analysis are well covered by The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis, a book edited by James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, two university professors, specialised in discourse studies. Besides the above mentioned functional and structural approaches, we will briefly concentrate upon other recent approaches.

Multimodal DA (MMDA)seeks "to elaborate tools that can provide insight into the relation of the meaning of a community and its semiotic manifestations." (Gunther Kress in The Routledge Handbook Gee and Handford. Handbook of Discourse Analysis., 2012: 37). MMDA considers that language, oral or written, is a means of representing meaning. That implies that meanings as revealed by DA are only "partial" meanings. The meaning as a whole consists in the meanings made by "all the modes of the text."

Gunther gives the example of two big signs on two buildings which give directions to drivers towards the car parks of two hypermarkets. Since there are no dictionaries to look up for "direction to the parking lots", these signs are of great importance. Their layout, colours, writing, images and font are five modes to create an "ensemble of modes" which shapes the meaning intended. The multitude of modal resources leads to selection according to some DA aspects, such as position, identity, taste, etc. If we adapt this approach to the signs in a school classrooms or on the halls of a school, we can consider that the signs are part of the didactic discourse, replacing teachers' words, such as: "do not run", "do not smoke," etc.

To sum up, MMDA assumes not only language and society analysis, but also some other elements which contribute to the general meaning: rhetoric, design, modes.

The Narrative Analysis. The importance of Narrative Analysis has become clear. Its scope is to analyse narratives from different angles and methodologies, according to disciplinary priorities. Joanna Thornborrow theorized narrative as a discursive activity and illustrated some key aspects of the narrative analysis.

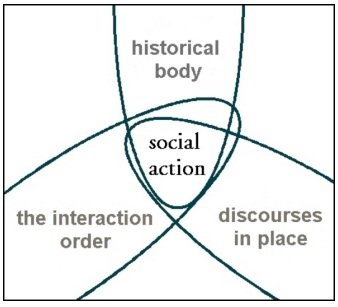
She began with a discussion about the narrative form, based on Labov and Sacks and she continued by emphasising the involvement of the narrative discourse in the social life and action. Narrative proves to be a primary discursive resource in all its forms, no matter if it means small talk, short stories, media stories or institutional work.

Another approach to DA is the one developed by Ron Scollon and his colleagues. This approaches concentrates upon the relation between discourage and action and how these develop in social situations. **Mediated Discourse Analysis** researchers take *social action* as being the primary entity, entity which is in the hands of a social actor and in connection with some "mediational means", such as culture, history, interaction. Focusing on social action, means that the emphasis is not on the social action, nor on the background or the social groups, but on a point these are "brought into engagement." (Scollon in The Routledge Handbook Gee and Handford. Handbook of Discourse Analysis., 2012: 70).

For a better understanding of this approach, Scollon and his wife came up with a visual representation to explain how discourse, interaction and historical body were all mediated by social action.

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Fig.1. The material entities constitutive of a mediated action (reproduced from Scollon and Scollon 2003)



DA is presented as an "active force" while linguists "have a role to play in society because they are adept at using and interpreting language and language is the means of setting, consolidation or undermining socio-political positions." (Scollon in The Routledge Handbook Gee and Handford. Handbook of Discourse Analysis., 2012: 75).

Conversation Analysis is defined as „an approach to the study of human interaction in society. Its name might be taken to imply a concern with informal and purely sociable talk, but the approach encompasses interactions of all sorts, ranging from informal to formal, from sociable to task-focused, and from face-to-face to synchronous technologically mediated interactions such as telephone talk and videoconferences." (Clayman and Gill in The Routledge Handbook Gee and Handford. Handbook of Discourse Analysis, 2012: 90).

It starts with generating data, by recording transcribing data. Natural occurred dialogues are recorded and transcribed to be analysed. To analyse them, analyst use a set of markers, such as brackets, numbers, punctuation marks, etc.

Conversation Analysis improves especially the oral discourse, and even though it is time-consuming, the resulted conclusion are usually very straight-forward and relevant. Its aim is to identify methods to construct conversation between people after analysing different conversations and using transcription conventions.

Corpus-based DA. To start with, a corpus is defined as a collection of written or oral text to be analysed. Analysts usually look at the occurrence of particular patterns and draw conclusions in specific circumstances. A corpus can be general or it can contain specific texts, such as academic texts, historical texts, etc. When constructing a Corpus, Platridge draws attention to the importance of taking in consideration authenticity of texts, size, as well as representativeness for the corpus.

Corpus-Based DA has three main approaches adapted by Lynne Flowerdew from Hyland (2009:20), areas that sometimes can overlap:

- Textual: approaches that focus on language choices, meanings and patterns in texts, including the notion of genre and the problem-solution pattern;
- Critical: an approach that brings an attitude of criticality, such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), but also draws on other methods, e.g. systemic functional linguistics (SFL);
- Contextual: analyses that adopt a more sociolinguistic approach to the corpus data, where situational factors are also taken into account. This approach draws on conversation analysis, speech act theory and pragmatics.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has an important contribution to social analysis, focusing on the relationship between discourse and the social elements such as identities, status, power, institutions, etc. CDA "can be understood as a normative and explanatory critique."

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(Fairclough in The Routledge Handbook Gee and Handford. Handbook of Discourse Analysis, 2012:9).

It describes realities and also assesses them and explains their mechanism of existence. CDA concentrates upon the link between the material events and the semiotic (i.e. the discourse) and, therefore, has an interdisciplinary character.

The critique developed by CDA is normative and explanatory, having in view values as well as causes. What distinguishes CDA from other forms of social analysis is "its emphasis upon social realities as humanly produced constraints." (Fairclough in The Routledge Handbook Gee and Handford. Handbook of Discourse Analysis, 2012:10). CDA will oscillate between structure analysis strategies analysis in the structuring process, or the order of discourse and the relationship between these two aspects receive permanence in the discourse order.

As stated before, CDA is also a trans-disciplinary method. Bringing disciplines and theories together will result in a methodological development. Methodology is understood as "a transdisciplinary process of theoretically constructing *the object of research*." Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 in The Routledge Handbook Gee and Handford. Handbook of Discourse Analysis, 2012: 13). There are a few steps in this methodology: step 1, identifying the object of research, step 2, identifying obstacles to addressing the social wrong, step 3, considering if the social order needs that "wrong" and finally, step 4, finding ways to surpass the obstacles. In fact, CDA, in Fairclough view, focuses on the interdiscursive analysis of texts, analysing "genres", "discourse" and "styles".

In order to describe a genre, Terry Locke considers that the following categories are important: The context of culture, the context of situation, the purpose, the typical content, the features (layout, diction, punctuation, syntax, structure). For instance, adapting an extract from the National Romanian Core Curriculum for the English class, the 10th grade, theoretical profile, which was emitted through the Minister's Order No. 4598 / 31.08.2004, we will have the following description:

- Context of culture: the curriculum is an official document emitted by the Ministry of National Education.
- *Context of situation*: The content of the curriculum deals with issues addressed to educational contexts.
- *The purpose*: The curriculum is devised to regulate the way the students will acquire new competences of communication.
- *Typical content*: all curricula have the following structure: General Competences (4), Attitudes and Values (4), Specific Competences, Related Contents and Methodological Suggestions.
- *Features*:

Layout: There are headings and sub-headings, text justification, classification of competences and tables to correlate competences with forms and contents.

Diction: formal
Punctuation: follows general conventions
Syntax: tendency to be formal, too
Structure: Starts with general competences, narrowing down to specific competences and contents.
(Adapted after Locke, 2004:21-22).

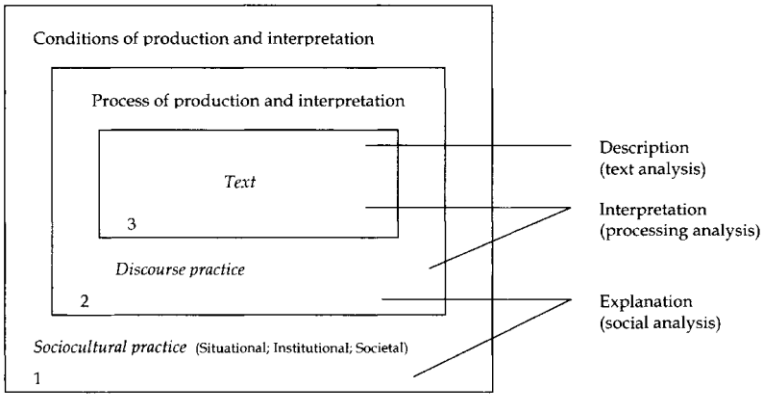
However, when it comes to a hypertext, meaning an internet medium, Locke suggests architecture, composition, verbal diction and syntax, graphics, aural elements (effects, music)

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and thematic organisation and cohesion (Locke, 2004: 23), which can be used in the present research study to analyse discourse of e-learning education platforms.

Fairclough propose three dimension of the discourse and discourse analysis. The first one is **sociocultural practice** and denotes the background things that have created the discourse, the second one is **discourse practice** or how the text was produced and its connection with other texts, and the third one is **text**, referring to reader's position, cohesion, grammar, vocabulary, and text structure. The three dimensions are well represented in the following diagram:

Fig. 2. *Fairclough's dimensions of discourse and discourse analysis. (Locke, 2004:42).*



When analysing a print text, Paull Gee (1996) proposes other headings to analyse a text, namely, *prosody, cohesion, discourse organisation, con-textualization signals and thematic organisation.* If we take as an example the same didactic discourse i.e. National Curriculum mentioned before as part of our corpus of analysis, we will have the following brief description:

1. *Prosody*

The Curriculum is a unitary written document which guides for the teachers in the process of teaching-learning and evaluating process. It assumes the rational practice of language in reception, production and interaction areas. It also presents the process of forming and developing linguistic competences, as well as attitudes and moral values.

2. *Contextualization signals*

The present curriculum was devised by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2004 and it is directed to teachers of English- language 1, language 2 and language 3, with separate sections for each. There is also a so-called "differentiated curriculum", which allows the teachers classes to be chosen as optional courses, in accordance with the students' needs.

3. *Cohesion*

Cohesion is ensured by the "cohesive links" such as adverbs, conjunctions, ellipsis, etc. The text has a very rigid organisation, though clear short statements, and listing is the preferred way of expressing ideas.

4. *Discourse organisation* refers to the existence of several parts that together combine to have a final curriculum: General Competences (4), Attitudes and Values (4), Specific Competences, Related Contents and Methodological Suggestions.

5. *Thematic organisation*

The thematic organisation has to do with the topics of education, and different actions to be taken in order to improves the process of education: "describing", "identifying", "deduction", "selection", "writing", etc.

Overall, the effect transmitted by the analysis of this curriculum is a positive one, as it is

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clear, concise and has good impact on the reader.

Analysing an oral text, we have to analyse not only the language itself, but also the body language, the context and the paralinguistic features, such as: pauses, gaps, voice effects. Transcripts are usually of much help to enable the analysts to interpret the discourse from the point of view of *interactional control, modality, politeness and ethos, consecutiveness and argumentation, metaphor, word meaning, transitivity and theme*, dimensions proposed by Locke for the discourse analysis. He gives an example of a teacher/student interview in his book "Critical Discourse Analysis" (2004), an example that will be followed during my research.

Van Dijk was the first researcher who tried to relate social theories and cognitive ones. He proposed a three-layer pattern of the relationships among cognition, society and discourse. In his approach, the cognitive theories are the middle layer to link and mediate between language and discourse and structures of society, such as gender, ethnicity, etc. He applies his approach to analyse the racist discourse of the ruling white elites of societies, from different point of views: political, educational, academic or media. However, the weak point of van Dijk's approach is the fact that it is focused on the analysis of the reproduction rather than of the transformation.

Wodak, on the other hand, is a researcher who based his study on collecting texts over a period of tim, both spoken and written in order to analyse them in what is called the Discourse-Historical Approach. The process has three step. First, Wodak and his colleagues identify the topics and texts of a particular discourse, then they investigate discursive strategies and finally, they examine types (linguistic means) and tokens (linguistic realizations). Woday made use of five questions in his DHA analysis that refer to how persons, objects, events are named from a linguistic point of view, which are the characteristics of the social actors and objects/events, what are the arguments used in the discourse and if those particular patterns of language are "intensified or mitigated" (Lin, 2014: 217), thus making use of very concrete methods.

CDA only has a history of three decades. The conclusion of all the CDA studies, can be summarized in an integrated list adapted after Angel Lin, presented in the Annual Review of Applied Linguistics in 2014:

1. CDA tackles social problems and analyses the consequences of text and talk under social circumstances of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.
2. CDA is "problem oriented" and it has various practical applications in different domains
3. CDA is interdisciplinary and presents complex issues and problems, using a wide range of methods.
4. CDA takes into consideration different interpretations of discursive events.

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