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Text and Discourse in Communication Competence

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Abstract

Text and discourse are indispensable aspects of linguistic forms. Various researches on text and discourse have been made by linguistic exponents. Discourse Analysis can be applied to any text, that is, to any problem or situation. Every text is conditioned, and inscribes itself within a given discourse. Discourse Analysis will, thus, not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enables us to understand the conditions behind a specific "problem" and makes us realize that the essence of that "problem", and its resolution. It leaves in its assumptions; the very assumptions that enable the existence of that "problem". By enabling us to make these assumption explicit, Discourse Analysis aims at allowing us to view the "problem" from a higher stance and to gain a comprehensive view of the "problem". At a semantic level, a text can be said to constitute a certain unity of meaning, which contains sequences of sentences. The linguist, M.A.K. Halliday has defined 'text' as a semantic unit containing specific textual components, which makes it 'internally cohesive' and functioning 'as a whole as the relevant environment for the operation of the theme and information system'. Here, the intension is not to say much about the description of the internal meaning of a text. The material form of the text is important for the rendering of cohesion. Textual approaches might also differ with regard to their *scope*. Grammatical cohesion has its own importance. It is a description of the devices. Devices are used to connect sentences together to form text. The difference between 'cohesion' and 'coherence' is brought out and illustrated to a consideration of discourse. Text and discourse are interrelated in terms of enhancing students' communicative competence.

Key Words: Text, discourse, language, register, grammar, cohesion and coherence

Introduction

In this paper, the researcher presents some approaches to text and discourse analyses to establish the inter relation between both linguistic forms. He pays a special heed upon aspects within textual analysis that particularly concern the work with communicative language. He, here, takes up a little concentration on the highly interesting question of the relation between documentary analysis – i.e. the confirmation of authenticity – and textual analysis. His aim is limited to presenting approaches to textual analysis inspired by discourse analysis. Alongside this presentation, He also highlights some of the problems involved in working *within* a textual horizon. He is concerned exclusively with English and with English language teaching with the help of the analyses of both text and discourse.

Discourse Analysis

It is difficult to give a single definition of Critical or Discourse Analysis as a research method. Indeed, rather than providing a particular method, Discourse Analysis can be characterized as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem. In this sense, Discourse Analysis is neither a qualitative nor a quantitative research method, but a manner of questioning the basic assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Discourse Analysis does not provide a tangible answer to problems based on scientific research, but it enables access to the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a project, a statement, a method of research, or - to provide an example from the field of Library and Information Science - a system of classification. In other words, Discourse Analysis will enable to reveal the hidden motivations behind a text or behind the choice of a particular method of research to interpret that text. Every text is conditioned and inscribes itself within a given discourse. Discourse Analysis will, thus, not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enables us to understand the conditions behind a specific "problem" and makes us realize that the essence of that "problem", and its resolution, and leaves us in its assumptions; the very assumptions that enable the existence of that "problem". By enabling us to make these assumptions explicit, Discourse Analysis aims at allowing us to view the "problem" from a higher stance and to gain a comprehensive view of the "problem" and ourselves in relation to that "problem". Discourse Analysis is meant to provide a higher awareness of the hidden motivations in

others and ourselves and, therefore, enable us to solve concrete problems - not by providing unequivocal answers, but by making us ask ontological and epistemological questions.

Text Analysis

Let us think what the text is. There are some of the questions that the researcher tries to answer in a comprehensive manner. At a semantic level, a text can be said to constitute a certain unity of meaning, which contains sequences of sentences (other unities are morphemes, lexemes, and syntaxes). The linguist M.A.K. Halliday has defined 'text' as a semantic unit containing specific textual components, which makes it 'internally cohesive' and functioning as a whole as the relevant environment for the operation of the theme and information system. In Halliday's functional approach to semantics, the textual component determines the channels and modes through which a message (or a theme) is transmitted. To put it somewhat differently, we could say that the textual component (of the text) is what tells us about the kind of text.

He does not intend to say much about the description of the internal meaning of a text. The material form of the text is important for the rendering of cohesion. The material form of the book, the letter or the newspaper article, for instance, tells us that we have a textual unity. When it comes to the semiotic form, we will have to demonstrate how a text constitutes an autonomous, meaningful order. Different descriptive terms can be used, depending on the type of analysis to be conducted. Within a *semantic* analysis, the description of the internal relations between

the different segments of meaning (lexemes, words), for instance the syntactic and paradigmatic relation, are important. Roughly speaking, syntactic relations are relating linguistic entities as well syntactically as semantically ('horizontal' relation), whereas paradigmatic relations designate those entities that are only related semantically ('vertical' relation). The latter relation concerns the existence of synonyms, antonyms, homonyms (the same sound/signifier, but different meanings) etc.

Within a *narrative* analysis, on the other hand, the focus is directed at the relation between the different roles in making something happen in the text. Of course, narrative analysis does not exclude a semantic approach. It could thus be of interest to examine the different terms attached to the various roles. Another type of analysis, which has become quite influential recently, is *rhetorical* or stylistic analysis where the focus is on the figures (tropes) and argumentative forms in the text aimed at producing an effective and beautiful language.

Role of Text and Discourse in Communication

It is a known fact that language teachers have paid little heed upon sentences with regard to discourse. "They have tended to take their cue from the grammarian and have concentrated on the teaching of sentences as self-contained units"(Widdowson-pp.89).The language teacher's view of what constitutes knowledge of a language is as same as Chomsky's view ,i.e. a knowledge of the syntactic structure of sentences and of the transformational relations which

between them. This knowledge 'provides the basis for actual use of language by the speaker – hearer '(Chomsky 1965:9).The basic idea is that once the basis is given , the learner will not find any predicament in dealing with the actual use of language.

Here, the researcher produces a good deal of evidence to suffice the idea of how language is to use . Students entering higher course with experience of seven or more years of instruction in English at the lower course level have difficulty to perform communicative skill. It is believed if the student is given sufficient grammatical knowledge which would be converted into sufficient performance when necessary situation arises. If the language is taught in such a way to enhance communicative skill, this procedure of teaching gets its own validity.

According to Widdoson, H. G. (1985) a knowledge of how the language functions in communication does not automatically follow from a knowledge of sentences. This role for English needs a new orientation to its teaching. If it is accepted the need to teach language as communication, we should not think of language as sentences. We must think of discourse, and best to teach it. Language teaching materials have in the past been largely derived from the products of theoretical sentence grammars. We now need materials which derive from a description of discourse; material which will affect the transfer from grammatical competence, a knowledge of sentences, to what has been called communicative competence (Hymes,1971, Campbell and Wales 1970), a knowledge of how sentences are used in the performance of

communicative acts of different kinds. Widdoson, H.G (1985) says that grammatical competence remains in a perpetual state of potentiality unless it is realized in communication. Hymes says that there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. So, we are in a position to understand that the nature of rules must be brought out by the theoretical studies of discourse.

According to the observation of Harries 1952,language does not occur in stray words or sentences, but in connected discourse' , and he sets out to discover what the nature of this connection might be by applying his well – tried distributional method . By means of transformational adjustments to surface forms , he is able to establish equivalence classes of morphemes and to show that in many cases two otherwise different sentences contain the same combination of equivalence classes, 'even though they may have contain different combinations of morphemes' (Harris 1952:373).

Harries has discovered a patterning in the discourse in terms of chains of equivalences. His aim is not to characterize discourse as communicative one ,but to use it to exemplify the operation of the language code in stretches of text larger than the sentence. He himself recognizes the limited scope of his analysis:

> All this, however ,is still distinct from an interpretation of the findings, which must take   meanings of morphemes into consideration and ask what the author was about to when he produced the text. Such interpretation

is obviously quite separate from the formal findings , although it may follow closely in the directions which the formal findings indicate. Harris 1952: 382

The notion is common among linguists of the transformational – generative persuasion.

Chomsky states:

> There seems to be little reason to question the view that investigation of performance will proceed only so far as understanding of underlying competence permits. Chomsky 1965: 10

Here, the belief is that a native speaker's knowledge of the sentences of his language can be accounted for in terms of invariant rules of algebraic kind. It is believed that once the 'correct' grammar consisting of such rules is written, it will offer a basis for the study of performance as a whole. Both Labov (1970) and Hymes (1971) have suggested that it is likely that an enough description of the formal operation of language is dependent on an investigation into certain aspects of performance, and recent developments in generative grammar. Their words give a strong support to the suggestion.

Harris has made many a number of steps in the description of discourse. Hence the question arises whether it is possible without considering speech events and social contexts. Harries thinks of discourse in purely formal terms as a series of connected sentences whereas Labov thinks of how language forms are used to perform social actions:

Commands and refusals are actions ; declaratives , interrogatives ,imperatives are linguistic categories -- things that are said , rather than things that are done. The rules we need will show how things are with words and how one interprets these utterances as actions : in other words ,relating what is done to what is said and what is said to what is done. This area of linguistics can be called 'discourse analysis' ; but it is not well known or developed. Linguistic theory is not yet rich enough to write such rules , for one must take into account such sociological , non linguistic categories as roles, rights and obligations. Labov 1969 : 54 – 55.

Now we get two different kinds of inquiry. Both are of the same name. A terminological distinction gets examined . Widdoson says that the investigation into the formal properties of a piece of language , such as is carried out by Harries , should be called text analysis . Here, the purpose is to find out how a text carries the operation of the language code beyond the limit of the sentence. This text is defined as 'sentences in combination'.

Let us now make use of the label 'discourse analysis' to refer to the investigation .Such sentences are put to communicative use in the performing of social actions .This type of text is defined as ' the use of sentences'. Having distinguished these two areas of inquiry , Widdoson wants to consider what value their respective findings might have for the teaching of language both as text and as discourse. He says, "If we are to teach language in use , we have to shift our attention from sentences in isolation to the manner in which they combine in text on the one hand, and to the manner in which they are used to perform communicative acts in discourse on the other"(Widdoson 1985 : 93).

Register   Analysis   and   Grammatical Cohesion

Registers are not defined in terms of what kind of communication they represent . The results of a register analysis of a selection of scientific texts will be a quantitative account of the frequency of occurrence of whichever formal elements were selected to be counted in the first place.

Register   analysis has been taken up by Crystal and Davy (1969) under the name of 'general stylistics'. Though the refinements which they introduce into the analysis , it remains the analysis of text. The following example of quotation substantiates their argument.

> … the procedures for approaching stylistic analysis are no different from those made use of in any descriptive exercise : the primary task is to catalogue and classify features within the framework of some general linguistic theory. Crystal and Davy 1969: 60.

The study of grammatical cohesion also has direct relevance to the teaching of text , as it intends to discover' the characteristics of a text as distinct from a collection of sentences'(Hasan 1968: 24).

Grammatical cohesion has its own importance. It is a description of the devices. Devices are used to connect sentences together to form text . Hasan has made a

distinction between the internal and the external aspects of 'textuality'. The first aspect deals with cohesion. The second one deals with the way language links meaningfully with the situation in which it is used. She speaks about the external aspect of textuality in terms of register. Her points appear to be that a piece of language can be recognized as text if its linguistic features can be plotted along a number of situational dimensions in such a way to assign it to a specific register , even if cohesive links are missing. Halliday says that the 'textual function' of language as having to do with 'making links with itself and with features of that situation in which it is used'(Halliday 1970 a : 143), pointing out that cohesion is one aspect of the textual function as a whole. Halliday says that this function 'enables the speaker or writer to construct texts, or connected passages of discourse that is situationally relevant '(Halliday 1970 a : 143). So we come to know that text and discourse are not kept terminologically distinct.

Text Approach

Our research is not concerned with theoretical issues , but it is about what value such an approach to text analysis might have for language teaching. This way of analysis offers information about the relative frequency of different linguistic forms in the texts that have been examined. Now let us know how this information can be used in language teaching. This approach guides us to understand as to which linguistic elements to include in a course designed for students who are to deal with the type of texts which provided the material for analysis. But it does not give any indication as to how such elements are to be presented as text. Widdoson says that the essential shortcoming of register or general stylistic analysis , as preached and practiced by Halliday et al and Crystal and Davy , is that it does not provide teachers with any directions as to how they might move from the sentence to the text. But the basic reason for adopting the findings of such analysis is to direct language teaching towards meeting the special needs of students, and to make them ready for their encounter with language in use as a medium for their subjects.

The Difference between 'Cohesion' and 'Coherence'

The difference between 'cohesion' and 'coherence' brings us to a consideration of discourse. Let us take the difference between 'cohesion' and ' coherence' as the initial point. Labov has pointed out that there are certain rules of discourse that cannot be described without reference to social context. Let us consider two pieces of dialogue:

A. You visit me tomorrow? 1
B. I can.
A. Can you visit me tomorrow? 2
B. Bus drivers are on strike.

In the first exchange ,we get a cohesive text in that B uses an elliptical form of sentence, 'Yes I can visit you tomorrow'. In the second exchange, there is no cohesion between the sentences.

The two pieces of dialogue make sense. We understand that B is saying that he is unable to visit him as the bus drivers are on strike. It appears to be justifiable that the second

dialogue is coherent as discourse without being cohesive as text.

Labov is of the view that discourse rules have to do with the sequence of actions that are performed in the issuing of utterances. He says:

> Sequencing rules do not operate between utterances but between the actions performed by these utterances. In fact, there are usually no connections between successive utterances at all. Labov 1970: 208.

The above words of Labov show that he merely thinks of spoken communication. But a higher degree of interdependency between cohesion and coherence is required in written communication. We should remember that discourse is identified in terms of communicative actions not in terms of linguistic forms.

Conclusion

Here , in this paper, the researcher tries to present two ways of looking at language beyond the limit of the sentence. One is to see as text and the other one is to see language as discourse. These two approaches towards the description of language have their purposes. These approaches might be taken another way that the latter seems to be the expanse of the former.

Widdoson is of the view that text analysis and discourse analysis are different but complementary ways looking at language in use. He has attempted to integrate features of discourse into a unitary model of grammar by writing presuppositions, and so on into the base component of a generative grammar (see, for example, Ross 1970,Lakoff 1970). Both Hymes and Labov insist that discourse must be accounted for a total linguistic description.

Hence, it is necessary that language teacher ought to incorporate text and discourse into his teaching. There are linguists who argue that there is a great deal that can be done. We can make various exercises to develop knowledge of grammar cohesion. We can think as how to use the material in terms of communicative acts rather than linguistic structures. We can teach the students how to use the foreign language to make the communication perfect. We can develop their communication skill by asking them to make sentences like predictions, descriptions, generalization and so on. This approach may train the students to get aware of how language is used to communicate the thought or ideas clearly. Communication is a skill oriented one which can be enhanced with the help of text and discourse.

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