5 Discourse Analysis

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5.1 Who Does Discourse Analysis, and Why?

Discourse analysts do what people in their everyday experience of language do instinctively and largely unconsciously: notice patternings of language in use and the circumstances (participants, situations, purposes, outcomes) with which these are typically associated. The discourse analyst’s particular contribution to this otherwise mundane activity is to do the noticing consciously, deliberately, systematically, and, as far as possible, objectively, and to produce accounts (descriptions, interpretations, explanations) of what their investigations have revealed.

Since the study of language in use, as a goal of education, a means of education, and an instrument of social control and social change, is the principal concern of applied linguistics, indeed its raison d’être, it is easy to see why discourse analysis has such a vital part to play in the work that applied linguists does, and why so much of the work that has been done over the last few decades on developing the theory and practice of discourse analysis been done by applied linguists (Widdowson, Candlin, Swales, for example) or by linguists (notably Halliday and his followers) for whom the integration of theory and practice is a defining feature of the kind of linguistics that they do.

Much of the work, but not by any means all. A great deal of discourse analysis is done by linguists who would not call themselves applied and much by scholars in other disciplines – sociology, psychology, psychotherapy, for example – who would not call themselves linguists. Discourse analysis is part of applied linguistics but does not belong exclusively to it; it is a multi-disciplinary field, and hugely diverse in the range of its interests.

For many the interest in discourse is beyond language in use (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, p. 3) to “language use relative to social, political and cultural formations . . . , language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals’ interaction with society.”
That this is no overstatement may quickly be demonstrated by indicating something of the range of discourse-related books published in recent years: discourse and politics (Schäffner & Kelly-Holmes, 1996; Howarth et al., 2000); ideologies (Schäffner, 1997), and national identity (Wodak et al., 1999); environmental discourse (Hajer, 1997; Harre, Brockmeier, & Muhlhausler, 1999); discourse and gender (Walsh, 2001; Wodak, 1997; Romaine, 1998); discourse of disability (Corker & French, 1999) and the construction of old age (Green, 1993); applied discursive psychology (Willig, 1999); professional discourse (Gunnarson, Linell, & Nordberg, 1997) and professional communication across cultural boundaries (Scollon, Scollon, & Yuling, 2001); the discourse of interrogation and confession (Shuy, 1998); academic discourse (Swales, 1998); discourse in cross-cultural communication (Hatim, 2000) and translation (Schäffner, 2002); discourse in everyday life (Locke, 1998; Cameron, 2000; Delin, 2000) and, at some remove from the everyday, divine discourse (Wolterstorff, 1995).

Jaworski and Coupland (1999, pp. 3–6) explain why so many areas of academic study have become so gripped by enthusiasm for discourse analysis in terms, firstly, of a shift in epistemology, “a falling off of intellectual security in what we know and what it means to know . . . The question of how we build knowledge has come to the fore, and this is where issues to do with language and linguistic representation come into focus.” They point, secondly, to a broadening of perspective in linguistics, with a growth of linguistic interest in analysis of conversation, stories, and written text, in “the subtleties of implied meaning” and in the interaction of spoken language with non-linguistic communication. And, thirdly, they note how, in the changed political, social and technological environment in which we now live – the postmodern world of service industry, advertising, and communications media – discourse “ceases to be ‘merely’ a function of work; it becomes work [and the] analysis of discourse becomes correspondingly more important.”

5.2 Defining Discourse

Discourse analysis may, broadly speaking, be defined as the study of language viewed communicatively and/or of communication viewed linguistically. Any more detailed spelling out of such a definition typically involves reference to concepts of language in use, language above or beyond the sentence, language as meaning in interaction, and language in situational and cultural context. Depending on their particular convictions and affiliations – functionalism, structuralism, social interactionism, etc. – linguists will tend to emphasize one, or some, rather than others in this list. (On the origins and implications of the language in use vs. language above the sentence distinction see for example Schiffrin, 1994, pp. 20–39; Pennycook, 1994a, p. 116; Widdowson, 1995, p. 160; Cameron, 2001, pp. 10–13.)

To illustrate this point, let us imagine four linguists preparing to work with the following small sample:
Linguist 1 sees a text – the verbal record of a speech event, something visible, palpable and portable, consisting of various bits of linguistic meaning (words, clauses, prosodic features, etc.). This linguist is mainly interested in the way the parts of the text relate to each other to constitute a unit of meaning.

Linguist 2 sees beyond the text to the event of which it is the verbal record. Linguist 2 is most likely the person who collected the data; and who made the following note describing some features of the situation in which the exchange took place:

[sunny Sunday afternoon, Edinburgh Botanic Garden, two girls, both aged 7 or 8, on a path; one of them has kicked the ball they are playing with into the bushes]

This linguist is mainly interested in the relationships between the various factors in the event: the participants, their cultural backgrounds, their relationship to each other, the setting, what is going on, the various linguistic choices made, etc.

Linguist 3 sees the text and the event but then beyond both to the performance being enacted, the drama being played out between the two girls: what has happened, who is responsible, how the girls evaluate these facts (relate them to some existing framework of beliefs and attitudes about how the world – their world – works), how they respond to them, what each is trying to achieve, their strategies for attempting to achieve these objectives, etc. This linguist is mainly interested in the dynamics of the process that makes the event happen.

Linguist 4 sees the text, the event, and the drama; but beyond these, and focally, the framework of knowledge and power which, if properly understood, will explain how it is possible for the two children, individually and jointly, to enact and interpret their drama in the way they do.

We may, not unreasonably, imagine that our four linguists are colleagues in the same university department. Each recognizes the validity of the perspective of each of the others, and the fact that, far from there being any necessary conflict or “incommensurability” between them (but cf. Pennycook, 1994a), the perspectives are complementary: all are needed for a full understanding of what discourse is and how it works.

As implied by the above, I do not think there is much to be gained from attempts to achieve a single definition of discourse that is both comprehensive and succinct. (For a list and discussion of such definitions, see for example Jaworski & Coupland 1999: 1–7.) Here instead is a set of definitions in the style of a dictionary entry for “discourse”:

A: You THREW it so you GET it
B: MOI↓ra + I’ll call my MUM
discourse
1 the linguistic, cognitive and social processes whereby meanings are expressed and intentions interpreted in human interaction (linguist 3);
2 the historically and culturally embedded sets of conventions which constitute and regulate such processes (linguist 4);
3 a particular event in which such processes are instantiated (linguist 2);
4 the product of such an event, especially in the form of visible text, whether originally spoken and subsequently transcribed or originally written (linguist 1).

5.3 Ways and Means

Each of our linguists will draw, in their own particular fashion and to different degrees, on the theories and techniques of a number of source disciplines for the study of language in use – especially linguistics, psychology, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, sociology, and anthropology. They will tend to favor one or more of a variety of approaches to conducting their research that have developed from these various sources. They are summarized in Table 5.1 and then briefly discussed under four main headings: rules and principles, contexts and cultures, functions and structures, and power and politics.

5.3.1 Rules and principles of language in use

Under this heading are grouped approaches which seek to understand the means by which language users – presumably universally, though this is always open to empirical contradiction – make sense, in the light of various contextual factors, of others’ utterances and contrive to have their own understood more

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or less as they intend. Included here is work in pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 1993; Thomas, 1995; Yule, 1996; Grundy, 2000) on:

- speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969);
- context; deixis and reference; shared knowledge (presuppositions) and frameworks of interpretation (schemata);
- cooperativeness in interaction: the "cooperative principle" and its "maxims" (Grice, 1975) and procedures for determining relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995);
- indirectness, indeterminacy and implicature and how these derive from particular ways of performing speech acts and manipulating the "maxims";
- politeness or tact (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kasper, 1997). Politeness theory deals with the concept of face, with acts which are potentially damaging to face, and with the linguistic stratagems used for limiting such damage, when it is unavoidable. It is informed not only by linguistic pragmatics but also by social psychology and linguistic anthropology.

Work in conversation analysis (CA) (see Chapter 10, this volume), notably on rules of turn-taking and topic-management, and the sequencing rules governing relations between acts, is also included here. Note that the "rules" that CA is interested in are understood as members’ (not analysts’) rules: norms of behaviour, discoverable in the recurring patterns of the action itself, to which members orient in order to manage and make sense of what is going on. In this respect CA differs from pragmatics. It also differs in its insistently empirical concern with the minutiae of the textual data.

5.3.2 **Contexts and cultures of language in use**

Here are grouped approaches which focus on the sensitivity of ways of speaking (and writing) to situational and cultural differences. Ethnography of communication (Gumperz & Hymes, 1986; Duranti, 1997, Saville-Troike, 2003):

- offers a framework for the study of speech events, seeking to describe the ways of speaking associated with particular speech communities and to understand the role of language in the making of societies and cultures;
- involves both insider-like ("emic") understanding of culturally specific ways of communicating (both verbal and non-verbal) and of the various beliefs and attitudes which connect with these ways; and outsider objectivity, encapsulated in Hymes’ well-known "SPEAKING" acronym – an "etic" framework of speech event components: setting and scene, participants, ends (purposes, outcomes), act sequences, key (attitudinal aspects), instrumentalities (norms and styles of speech), norms of interaction and interpretation, and genre (the discourse type).
The knowledge that members of communities have of ways of speaking includes knowing when, where and how to speak, what to speak about, with whom, and so forth. The idea that we need, in addition to a theory of grammatical competence, a theory of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) arises from this fact. Speakers need knowledge not only of what is grammatically possible but also of what is appropriate and typically done.

Interactional sociolinguistics (Schiffrin, 1994; Gumperz, 2001) aims at "replicable analysis that accounts for our ability to interpret what participants intend to convey in everyday communicative practice" (Gumperz, 2001). It pays particular attention to culturally specific contextual presuppositions, to the signals – "contextualisation cues" such as code- and style-switching, and prosodic and lexical choices – which signal these, and to the potential for misunderstanding which exists in culturally complex situations. It shares with CA a keen attention to detail and a focus on members’ procedures, but differs from it in its interest in processes of inferencing and in the consequences of contextual variation and cultural diversity (for example, Tannen, 1984a).

5.3.3 Functions and structures of language in use

Grouped here are text-friendly models of language and grammar-friendly approaches to text.


• sees language not as an autonomous system but as part of the wider socio-cultural context, as “social semiotic”; the aim is “to look into language from the outside and specifically, to interpret linguistic processes from the standpoint of the social order” (Halliday, 1978, p. 3);
• sees grammar as meaning potential – a “potential” that is functionally determined by the need of speakers and writers to simultaneously represent experience (the ideational function), manage their relationship with their co-participants (the interpersonal function) and produce dialogue or monologue, whether spoken or written, which is cohesive and coherent (the textual function); the realization of these meta-functions can be discerned both at the micro-level of clause structure (e.g., systems of transitivity) and at the macro-level of context (register features of “field,” “tenor,” and “mode”);
• provides a comprehensive theory of text analysis and genre (Martin, 2002).

Sharing much of the theoretical basis of SFL, Birmingham school discourse analysis originated in the analysis of classroom discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). This revealed a hierarchical model of discourse structure (lesson, transaction, exchange, move, act), whose most widely exploited insight has been the regular sequence of moves within a teaching exchange: Initiating move (from the teacher), Responding move (from the pupil), Feedback move
This “IRF” pattern can be detected in other domains, including not only other unequal-power institutional domains such as doctor–patient consultations but also casual conversation (Stubbs, 1983; Tsui, 1994; Eggins & Slade, 1997, pp. 45–7). In the latter case, the third move (renamed follow-up) is likely to involve some kind of interpersonally motivated evaluation, for example a positive gloss on a respondent’s declining the initiator’s invitation.

Text-linguistics (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981; Levinson, 1983, p. 288 for the distinction between this and “speech act (or interactional)” approaches;) is not so much a single approach to discourse as a somewhat indeterminate set of interests or predispositions. These include:

- focus on text, generally defined as language “above,” “beyond” or “longer than” the sentence, and especially on the structure of texts and on their formal (syntactic and lexical), or surface, features;
- achievement – and the role of various kinds of lexis in signalling these (Hoey, 1991); on cohesion generally (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976); on rhetorical patterns of textual meaning such as general-particular and problem-solution (Hoey, 1983, 2001); and on text structure seen in terms of hierarchies of textual relationships (Mann & Thompson, 1987);
- a particular concern with the analysis of written texts (see, for example, Connor & Johns, 1990; Mann & Thompson, 1992).

5.3.4 Power and politics of language in use

“Critical” approaches to discourse analysis do not hold a monopoly on interest in the power and politics of discourse. Pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches necessarily share this concern. For example, in Searle’s speech act theory “having the authority to do so” is one of the felicity conditions for issuing an order; in Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory, difference in power between speaker and hearer is one of the factors in choosing a strategy to manage a face-threatening act; and the mere fact that most forms of discourse analysis invoke, in one way or another, the relationship between language use and social structure ensures that issues of power must always be on the agenda.

What distinguishes critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; van Dijk, 2001; Luke, 2002) in its approach to language and power is that it:

- aims to lay bare the “hidden effects of power,” the kind of effects which may stigmatize the vulnerable, exclude the marginal, naturalize privilege and, through the simple contrivance of presenting ideology as common sense, define the terms of reference of political debate and subvert resistance;
- draws on critical, poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial theory, on Foucault’s anti-essentialist philosophy of knowledge/power and Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic capital, among others, as well as on various of the ways and means of discourse analysis listed above, especially SFL;
• concerns itself with issues of identity, dominance and resistance, and with seeking out evidence in text – especially (to date) media and advertising texts, and political documents and speeches – of class, gender, ethnic and other kinds of bias;

• distinguishes crucially between two senses of the word discourse: what Gee calls “discourse” and “Discourse”: the former refers to instances of language in use, actual speech events; the latter to (far more abstract) ways of using language: configurations of things that can (in particular cultural and institutional contexts) be spoken about, ways of thinking and speaking about them, and ways of behaving in relation to them.

CDA sees language as “everywhere and always” political (Gee, 1999, p. 1). By politics Gee means “anything and anyplace where human social interactions and relationships have implications for how ‘social goods’ are or ought to be distributed,” and by social goods “anything that a group of people believes to be a source of power, status or worth.” When we speak or write we “always take a particular perspective on what the ‘world’ is like. This involves us in taking perspectives on what is ‘normal’ and not; what is ‘acceptable’ and not; what is ‘right’ and not... But these are all, too, perspectives on how we believe, wish or act as if potential ‘social goods’ are, or ought to be distributed.”

CDA is a political enterprise in the additional and crucial sense that it is motivated by a particular political agenda – non-conformist, anti-elitist, neo-Marxist, anti-neo-liberal; it seeks not just to understand the social world, but to transform it.

5.4 Some Issues of Approach, Focus, and Method

By approach I mean the adoption of one, or a combination, of the ways and means of discourse analysis outlined above. By focus I mean particular attention to certain aspects of the total discourse reality, either on grounds of theoretical preference or on grounds of perceived relevance to particular issues of practical problem solving. By method, I mean decisions relating to data collection and analysis, quality and quantity, subjectivity and generalizability, etc.

To some these issues are interdependent: a particular focus or approach will imply some particular choices and dilemmas relating to method. To some extent, however, they are separable: there are general issues of research method in discourse analysis which arise whatever the chosen focus or approach.

The latter connect largely to the fact, noted above, that discourse research is basically and predominantly qualitative: basically, in that the description of some newly or differently identified kind of language-in-use phenomenon, understood as far as possible from the participants’ point of view, is usually the starting point, even if some counting up of types and tokens follows on
from this; predominantly, in that very little quantitative research is actually done. (Lazaraton, 2002 looked at publications in applied linguistics journals over the last five years and found very few purely quantitative studies.) The main exceptions to this statement are the variationist studies of discourse, especially narrative, associated with Labov, a growing body of corpus-based discourse studies (see Conrad, 2002 for an overview), and some discourse-related work in second language acquisition.

Discourse research is mainly qualitative because it is inherently interpretive. It sets out “to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). There is no “raw: data – qua discourse – for the analyst to work with. There is, of course, the “text-as-record” (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 6) but even this (in the case of spoken discourse) is subject to a certain amount of “cooking” in the process of transcription (see Ochs 1999 for a discussion of this issue) and part of what the analyst has to do is to re-imagine (i.e., interpret) the actual discourse of which the text-as-record is a very impoverished trace. Discourse analysis thus shares with other forms of interpretive research in the social sciences the many challenges of being qualitative while also being “disciplined.”

Qualitative research methods (see for example Holliday, 2002), designed as they are to deal with the complexities of meaning in social context, are naturalistic (not controlled), observational (not experimental), and more focused on problems of validity than on those of reliability and generalizability. Data will be “real, rich, deep” rather than “hard and replicable” (Lazaraton, 2002; and see Pennington, 2002 on dilemmas for discourse analysts in determining what is or is not to be data). Questions about how to deal with subjectivity, how to relate to human subjects ethically, and how, in general, to be methodical and principled in the approach to data and its analysis, while not being blinkered by a priori theorizing, must always be at the forefront of researchers’ concerns (Milroy, 1987; Cameron et al., 1992).

One way of dealing with subjectivity is through multiplicity of approach. This is usually referred to as triangulation and is especially characteristic of ethnographic approaches. Triangulation is generally understood to refer to the use of different types or sources of data (for example a participant’s account in addition to the analyst’s account) as a means of cross-checking the validity of findings, but may also refer to multiple investigators, multiple theories, or multiple methods (Denzin, 1978).

Another is through explicitness of criteria. An example is Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) set of four criteria for any model of discourse: (1) there should be a finite descriptive apparatus, (2) there should be clear criteria for labeling data, (3) the whole of the data should be describable, and (4) there should be at least one impossible combination of symbols. The difficulty of defining and applying such criteria no doubt explains why, almost 30 years later, Lazaraton (2002) identifies solving the problem of evaluative criteria for qualitative discourse research as the key to ensuring that all published research is quality research.
A third way is mechanization. This involves the use of concordancing and other programs to analyze large corpora of textual data. “When correctly instructed, computers make it more difficult to overlook inconvenient instances, and are to that extent a move towards descriptive neutrality. We select what to look for but should then accept as evidence what the computer finds” (Stubbs, 1994, p. 218; Stubbs, 1996).

When all else fails vigorous debate may help to stimulate reflection and to clarify contentious issues. An example is the debate between Widdowson and Fairclough (Widdowson, 1995, 1996; Fairclough, 1996) on CDA (a set of procedures “not essentially different from literary criticism,” in Widdowson’s view), with particular reference to the meaning of “interpretation” in discourse analysis and the implications of ideological commitment. The nub of Widdowson’s argument is that “critical” means committed and implies a partial (both biased and selective) interpretation of text, while “analysis . . . seeks to reveal those factors which lead to a divergence of possible meanings, each conditionally valid . . . [and] recognizes its own partiality.” CDA is thus a contradiction in terms. Fairclough argues, in reply, that Widdowson is confusing two meanings of interpretation: interpretation-1, “an inherent part of ordinary language use, which analysts, like anyone else, necessarily do, [i.e.] make meaning from/with spoken or written texts”; and interpretation-2 (which elsewhere Fairclough calls explanation), “a matter of analysts seeking to show connections between properties of texts and practices of interpretation-1 in a particular social space, and wider social and cultural properties of that particular social space.” Interpretation-1 is part if the domain of interpretation-2. Fairclough also notes that the political positionings and priorities of CDA are not inevitable: “a CDA of the right is quite conceivable, directed for instance at left-wing or feminist texts.”

Moving to issues of “focus,” Figure 5.1 summarizes five factors, displaying these in a particular configuration with “interaction” at the center and the four others aligned so as to suggest two principal dimensions in the description of language in use: one (Instrumentalities–Text) oriented more to the linguistic aspects of discourse, the other (Function–Context) more to the social. All the factors are, of course, interconnected. Placing interaction at the center, linked to each of the other factors by double arrows, is intended to represent the reality that, whatever aspect of discourse we may for practical or theoretical reasons focus our attention on, ultimately it must be understood in terms of interaction.

5.4.1 Interaction

It is with the concept of interaction that discourse (for the analyst) comes to life. Entrances are made, intentions are formed, topics are introduced, turns are taken, actions are performed, reactions are prompted and in turn reacted to; understandings are checked, contributions are acknowledged, breakdowns occur, repairs are contrived; exits are negotiated. People are at work, doing things with meanings (producing them, interpreting them, negotiating them),
co-creating an event whose trajectory may be clear to none of them until it is complete, and perhaps not even then.

This is discourse seen not as product (a text on a page) but as process, joint action in the making (Clark, 1996), and in consequence most difficult to capture and analyze without losing sight of its essence. The very smallest details – the falling-from-high pitch tone on which B says “Moira” for example – may be the most telling in revealing what is happening and with what intended, or unintended, effect.

The concept of discourse as interaction is present in all current ways and means of doing discourse analysis. In pragmatics, meaning is seen as “a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social, and linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance” (Thomas, 1995, p. 22). The interactional workings of intention and effect are central to speech act theory; Grice’s maxims “are essentially ground rules for the interactive management of intentions” (Widdowson, 1998, p. 13); and the mutual establishment and maintenance of rapport (the avoidance of threats to face) underpins theories of politeness and tact. Conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics provide somewhat contrasting approaches to the description of the accomplishment of interaction, the former more focused on the internal (to the text) mechanisms of turn-taking and sequencing, the latter highlighting the links between the micro-processes of the text, for example intonational and other “contextualization cues,” and the macro-world of social structures and cultural
presuppositions. IRF analysis provides a somewhat static post hoc view of the accomplished interaction as a hierarchical patterning of acts, moves, exchanges, and transactions.

The interactionality of discourse is not restricted to the spoken language. “Text is a form of exchange; and the fundamental form of a text is that of dialogue, of interaction between speakers . . . In the last resort, every kind of text in every language is meaningful because it can be related to interaction among speakers, and ultimately to ordinary everyday spontaneous conversation” (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 11). It can be argued that written no less than spoken interaction involves dynamic processes of interaction between readers and writers. Hoey, for example (2001, p. 11) defines text as “the visible evidence of a reasonably self-contained purposeful interaction between one or more writers and one or more readers, in which the writer(s) control the interaction and most of (characteristically all) the language.” The point about writer control, however, is a reminder that though monologic written interaction may be likened to spoken interaction as a dynamic process of pragmatic meaning creation (Widdowson, 1995), it is unlike it in the crucial respect of being non-reciprocal. The writer may anticipate the imagined reactions of the reader, but cannot respond to the actual ones. Much that is characteristic of written discourse is explained by this fact. As Widdowson (1979, p. 176) puts it, “the writer assume[s] the roles of both addressee and addressee [and] incorporate[s] the interaction within the process of encoding itself.” For the reader, normal Gricean principles operate: “People do not consume texts unthinkingly but process them in normal pragmatic ways, inferring meanings . . .” (Widdowson, 2000, p. 22).

5.4.2 Context

The word interaction encodes two of our focal factors: context (“inter”), the participants, understood in terms of their roles and statuses as well as their uniqueness as individuals, between whom the discourse is enacted; and function (“action”), the socially recognized purposes to the fulfillment of which the interaction is directed; what Gee (1999, p. 13) calls the whos and whats of discourse.

When you speak or write anything, you use the resources of English to project yourself as a certain kind of person, a different kind in different circumstances. If I have no idea who you are or what you are doing, then I cannot make sense of what you have said, written or done . . . What I mean by a “who” is a socially-situated identity, the “kind of person” one is seeking to be and enact here and now. What I mean by a “what” is a socially situated activity that the utterance helps to constitute.

Note that Gee talks of “projecting,” “enacting,” “seeking,” “constituting,” as if context is part of what people think and do and create rather than merely a fixed set of circumstances constraining what they may think and may do.
This idea that context is something psychological and dynamic, within the minds of the participants and part of the discourse process, is prevalent in most of the ways and means we have discussed. Hymes’ model, for example, distinguishes between setting – the physical surroundings – and scene, the participants’ understanding of the kind of thing that is going on, the “psychological setting.” Context activates prediction-making; SFL offers an explanation of how this happens:

You [construct] in your mind a model of the context of situation; and you do it in something like these terms. You assign to it a field ... a tenor ... and a mode. You make predictions about the kinds of meaning that are likely to be foregrounded in this kind of situation. So you come with your mind alert...

(Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 28)

In a discussion of theories of context in relation to the needs of teachers and learners, Widdowson (1998, p. 15) criticizes relevance theory for “dissociating inference from interaction, and therefore from the on-line context which is interactionally constructed in the actual activity of interpretation”; i.e. it is not enough for a theory of contextual meaning to be a psychological theory, it must also be an interactional theory.

5.4.3 Function

Context and function (Gee’s “socially situated activity”) are closely interconnected. Each is at least partly definable in terms of the other, so that we can recognize a context of situation by the kind of communicative functions that are typically realized in it (in church, praying; in the classroom, eliciting, replying, and evaluating) and we can recognize a function by the kind of contexts required for its performance (sentencing: the end of a trial, judge speaking, prisoner being addressed; marrying: wedding ceremony, bride or groom addressing officiating person). Utterance “helps to constitute” these activities – the variously defined “acts” of speech act theory, conversation analysis, ethnography of speaking, and IRF analysis – but they are definable independently of any particular form of expression. To explain to a person who doesn’t speak English what an apology is I need only describe the kind of situation that produces an apology, the intention behind it, and its likely effects; I do not need to mention that an apology in English may be performed with expressions such as “I’m so sorry” and “I do apologize.” Furthermore, it is only in context that speakers are able to recognize whether, for example, an utterance of “I’m so sorry” is to be taken as an expression of apology, regret, condolence, or sarcastic defiance.

As Hymes’ model makes clear, speech events and speech situations are cultural constructs, and the norms of behavior and attitude associated with them belong within particular speech communities. The context of culture defines what is conventionally possible within a speech community, expressed
by Halliday as “the institutional and ideological background that give value to the text and constrain its interpretation” (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 49). Critical discourse analysis problematizes the notion of context of culture in terms of discourses and orders of discourse, the power that lies behind these, and the ideologies that they covertly encode. This raises issues of considerable interest and importance about how interaction – the participants interacting – relates to context-function. To what extent are the participants free agents? How far does the Discourse determine the discourse? This is one of the themes of the Widdowson–Fairclough debate referred to above (and see also Pennycook, 1994a). For Widdowson, individuals do not “simply act out social roles . . . Discourse is individual engagement. It is individual not social subjects who interact with each other. Of course I do not mean to suggest that they are free agents to do what they will. They are constrained by established conventions and regulations, and restrictions are set on their initiative. But they are not absolutely controlled by them: there is always room for maneuver” (Widdowson, 1996, p. 58; my emphasis). Fairclough’s response to this is that Widdowson “assumes too liberal a view of the social as a voluntary association of free individuals.” Discourse analysis on this account is reduced to pragmatics . . . It takes on the prediscoursal theory of the subject and of context which is general in pragmatics: subjects and contexts are not constituted in discourse, they are constituted before and outside discourse – subjects use contexts to interpret discourse. This cuts discourse analysis off from exploration of the socially and culturally constitutive effects of discourse, and more generally cuts discourse analysis off from treating language as part of the social whole. (Fairclough, 1996, p. 54)

It is clear from this that it is not only language that is “always and everywhere political.” Context is too.

### 5.4.4 Instrumentalities

By instrumentalities (the term is borrowed from Hymes’ SPEAKING grid) I mean the resources of the language system (lexico-grammar and intonation), contextually determined or determining registers or styles, and genres.

Some discourse analysis pays, and has paid, relatively little attention to the language side of discourse – instrumentalities and their realization in text – concentrating instead on context-function. This has been criticized both from an applied-linguistics-for-language-teaching point of view (e.g., Widdowson, 1998) and also from a CDA point of view (Fairclough, 1999).

Discourse analysis needs a functional model of language, one that can show how the resources of the language system are organized to meet the needs of “whos and whats” (context-function) in actual communication. Two distinct versions of functionalism can be identified here, which we may call “function-external” and “function-internal.”
The “function-external” version is essentially an appropriateness model, derived from Hymes’ theory of communicative competence, which includes knowledge of what is appropriate use of language for a given context-function. For example, it is appropriate, in some English-speaking cultures, to say “I’m so sorry” – but not “I’m sorry” – when offering condolences (social function) to a friend; it is appropriate (in some kinds of conversational situation) to use the simple present tense when shifting to narrative mode (discourse function).

The “function-internal” version is the systemic model, whose premise, as described above, is that the lexico-grammar is organized, through the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, to meet the intrinsic needs of language-mediated communication in whatever situation. In this model, the connection to the external is made through the categories of register and genre.

At some risk of over-generalizing, one might say that function-external description is more favored in discourse analysis applied to language teaching (work of the Sydney School is an exception to this); and function-internal description is more favored in critical discourse analysis, particularly the variety associated with Fairclough. (One of Widdowson’s criticisms of CDA, in the debate already mentioned, is what he sees as its tendency to confuse the internal and external concepts of function, and assume that it is possible to “read off” discourse meanings – external – from textual encodings – internal.)

The distinction between register and genre is not always easy to grasp, but may be explained, if somewhat over-simply, as follows. Register is the means whereby contextual predictability (in terms of field, tenor, and mode) is reflected in the lexico-grammar. Genre is the set of purpose-determined conventions in accordance with which the discourse proceeds on a particular occasion. These include the staged patterning of the discourse, typical topics, and features of register. (Genre analysis thus subsumes register analysis.)

Most approaches to discourse explicitly or implicitly address the question of genre. Genre, as already noted, is one of the items in Hymes’ SPEAKING grid for the analysis of speech events. In conversation analysis, as Eggins and Slade (1997, p. 30) note, though the focus has tended to be on micro-structural issues rather than on the larger macro-structures of conversation, there is some attention to “global text structure” – i.e., in effect, to genre. Birmingham school discourse analysis, though not normally referred to as genre analysis, in fact is so; Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) original account of classroom discourse in terms of social purposes, macro-structure, lexico-grammatical choice, etc. is a notable example.

Eggins and Slade (1997) is a detailed study of the genre of, and the genres in (for example gossiping and storytelling) casual conversation, drawing on SFL as well as other approaches to discourse analysis. Their analysis of storytelling episodes draws on Labov’s account (Labov, 1972) of narrative structure in terms of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution, and coda. This must be by far the most frequently cited theory of a genre in the discourse literature. A close runner-up would be Hoey’s
situation-problem-solution-evaluation pattern (Hoey, 1983) which, though not devised as a model specifically of narrative structure and though normally applied to the analysis of written text, bears many resemblances to it. It provides, for example, a neat account of the sequence of events in the Moira incident:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>act</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>act 1</td>
<td>situation (the one created by B as a result of throwing the ball)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(unstated)</td>
<td>problem (the ball is lost or difficult to get)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act 2</td>
<td>solution (B should get it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act 3</td>
<td>evaluation (the solution is unacceptable to B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Granted what we said in our first reference to the Moira incident, B’s negative evaluation of A’s solution defines this particular encounter as, generically, a quarrel (or at least the beginning of one). If we looked not only at this instance of quarreling but at a sufficient sample, we could begin to identify the generic features of children’s quarrels in terms of their micro-functions (acts), stages, register features, etc., and to explain them in terms of some overall characterization of who engages in quarrels, in what circumstances, and for what reasons.

There are several current approaches to genre, notably SFL, English for Specific Purposes, new rhetoric, and critical (Hyon, 1996; Hyland, 2002).

Early SFL genre studies were Hasan’s (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) and Ventola’s (e.g., 1987) studies of service encounters. Later work (especially by Martin and his associates) has been on written genres (reports, narratives, explanations, etc.), and to explain them in terms of some overall characterization of who engages in quarrels, in what circumstances, and for what reasons.

The “ESP approach,” especially associated with Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), is a pedagogically oriented approach to genre, with strong roots in the teaching of English for academic purposes, especially reading and writing. The two most prominent features of this kind of analysis are the description of genre in terms of functionally-defined stages, moves, and steps (in effect Birmingham-style analysis transmuted to the written mode), and the association of genres with particular “discourse communities,” i.e., networks of expert users (for example applied linguists) for whom a genre or set of genres (research article, conference paper) constitutes their professionally recognized means of intercommunication.

The new rhetoric approach is less linguistic and text focused than either the SFL or ESP approaches; it is more ethnographic, looking at the ways in which texts are used and at the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the communities of text users (Hyon, 1996, p. 695).

Within the critical discourse framework, Fairclough defines genre as “a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of
social activity (e.g., interview, narrative, exposition)” (1995, p. 14). The distinction he draws between discourse, style and genre is explained, in relation to political language, in his account of the discourse of New Labour (Fairclough, 2000, p. 14):

Styles (e.g., Tony Blair’s style) are to do with political identities and values; discourses (e.g., the discourse of the “Third Way”) are to do with political representations; and genres are to do with how language figures as a means of government (so the Green Paper constitutes a particular genre, a particular way of using language in governing).

The critical view of genre is that such “ways,” as part of the unequally distributed symbolic capital of society, are empowering to some, oppressive to others. Oppressive, but not necessarily imprisoning. Genres are historical outcomes, and subject to change through contestation (the resistance of individuals). Widdowson’s claim, quoted above, that subjects are not absolutely controlled by conventions, “there is always room for maneuver,” represents a widely held view. Genre, like context, is “negotiated” in the process of interaction.

Where the focus of research is on instrumentalities, issues of “quantity” come to the fore. A register is a *variety* of language (like a dialect), a genre is a *type* of speech event. Neither can be described simply on the basis of single instances analyzed qualitatively. Sufficient samples of representative data are needed, and many different features of these samples, and associations between the features (for example between tense usage and stage of discourse), will be subjected to scrutiny. It follows that corpus data and methods are likely to prove particularly useful. In the article cited earlier, Stubbs (1994) outlines a research programme to include (amongst other points) *comparative analysis*, without which “we cannot know what is typical or atypical, or whether features of texts are significant, linguistically or ideologically, or not,” and *long texts*, “since some patterns of repetition and variation are only realized across long texts (such as complete books).”

### 5.4.5 Text

Earlier in this chapter I characterized text as the “verbal record of a speech event,” “the product of [a speech] event, especially in the form of visible text, whether originally spoken and subsequently transcribed or originally written,” and a “unit of meaning.” Text is both something produced by interactants in the process of making discourse and something consumed by linguists in the process of making analyses. These two somethings are by no means the same. The first is an inextricable part of a living here-and-now process of meaning-creation and intention-interpretation (i.e., undetachable from interaction), the second is an inert object laid out as if on a slab for dissection by the pathologist. Both are meaningful, but again not in the same way. In the first, meaning is the output of the activity of the participants (they create meaning in the process
of text-making); in the second, meaning is the input to the process of analysis (analysts take meanings and work out how they got there). The situation is further complicated by the fact that the relation between participants’ text and analysts’ text is affected by the original medium of communication. In the case of spoken discourse the thing on the slab bears only a faint resemblance to the original event. In the case of written discourse the two may seem (but in fact for the reasons I have given are not) indistinguishable.

The essential idea is that discourse analysts deal with meanings. They are interested only in forms and they are or should be interested in forms as conveyors of meaning. (The attraction to discourse analysts of a systemic model of language is precisely that its approach to grammatical analysis is in terms of the meaning potential of forms for use in texts.) The constructs that discourse analysts work with in analyzing texts – function, texture, information structure, macro-structure, cohesion, coherence, text itself – are meaning constructs. This is non-controversial, but it does not get us very far. How can we know (and agree) precisely what the meanings are that we are dealing with? (Recall the debate between Widdowson and Fairclough on the analyst’s role in interpretation.) To what extent (and in what respects) are these meanings “in” the text (so all the analyst has to do is to “read them out”), and how far are they “read in” by participants in the light of contextual factors?

In view of all these complexities, it is not surprising that the word text is a site – “critical” euphemism for battleground – of considerable theoretical importance. How you think about text will surely determine how you think about context, function, instrumentalities, and interaction. It will also have a profound impact on decisions about method.

It is, for example, partly (but significantly) issues to do with the nature of text – and how text is to be distinguished from discourse – that underlie the debate between Widdowson and Fairclough mentioned earlier. Widdowson’s view is that a conceptualization of text as a formal object (“language bigger than the sentence”), disconnected from context and therefore from interpretation as discourse, disposes critical discourse analysts to overlook the possibility of multiple interpretations of text (different discourses which may be found). “There is usually the implication that the single interpretation offered is uniquely validated by the textual facts.” (In a separate controversy, Widdowson takes corpus linguistics to task on similar grounds; Widdowson, 2000, 2001; Stubbs, 2001).

In his reply to Widdowson, Fairclough denies the charge, pointing to the way in which his own work “centers the dialectic of structure and action in an account of the subject in discourse” and emphasizes the way in which “shifting discursive practices, manifested in texts which are heterogeneous in forms and meanings, can be analyzed as facets of wider processes of social and cultural change” (Fairclough, 1996, p. 55). He counter-argues that Widdowson’s position is “unduly restrictive” especially in failing to take account of intertextuality, “the key to linking the Foucaultian tradition to the tradition in linguistics.” This notion – no text is an island – draws attention to the
Discourse Analysis figures prominently in areas of applied linguistics related to language and education. These include both language as a means of education and language as a goal of education, and both first language education and second language education. (By first language education I mean mainstream education, generally state provided, in situations where the medium of education is, typically, the L1 of most of the students. By second language education I mean both the teaching of second/foreign languages and the use of second/foreign languages as media of education. For many learners these two situations are, of course, co-occurrent.)

Figure 5.2 sets out, in accordance with these two dimensions, some of the main areas of discourse-related work in education. Each of these areas has been informed or influenced by discourse research drawing on pragmatics,
conversation analysis, ethnography, and the various other ways and means described earlier in the chapter, some of this research focusing more on the context-function aspects of discourse such as situation types and speech acts, some on instrumentalities such as register and genre, some on the structure and cohesiveness of text, and some on interactional aspects of discourse such as inferencing, predicting, turn-taking, and repair.

5.5.1 Discourse and second language education

Since the beginnings of communicative language teaching (CLT) and especially the teaching of English for specific (academic and professional) purposes, second language teaching and learning has come to be understood increasingly in terms of discourse, so that “today it is rare to find people involved in language teaching who are unaware of the significance of discourse for teaching reading, writing, intonation or spoken language, and for the evaluation of students’ communicative competence” (Pennycook, 1994a).

Hymes’ concept of communicative competence has been appropriated for language teaching purposes in a series of evolutionary reformulations (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990) so as to include grammatical, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences, all of which are in effect discourse competences, since they account for the ability of members of speech communities to put language to use. Defining the goals of language teaching in terms of communicative competence leads naturally to “an integrative view wherein the over-arching perspective of language as discourse will affect every part of the syllabus, including any conventional system components and functional/speech act components, however they are treated, whether as a series of layers of language, or as realizations within general specifications of discourse strategies” (McCarthy & Carter, 1994). Within such a perspective, learner needs, syllabus aims and content, and task goals and procedures will all be specified primarily in discourse terms. Materials (text or audio/video) are selected and presented to meet criteria of communicative authenticity. Tests are constructed to recreate as closely as possible the conditions under which language will be used in real communication in the defined target situation.

But in the context of the classroom it is not easy to be sure what is real, what is authentic. In part this is a text/discourse issue, in part an interaction/learning issue. As the former, it has been around since the earliest years of CLT in the form of the proposition that the most effective input material for learning is “authentic” – i.e., completely or substantially unmodified – instances of native speaker discourse. It has recently been given a new lease of life as a result of the impact (or at least the claims) of corpus-based language teaching publications: dictionaries, reference grammars and course materials (Hunston, 2002, pp. 192–7). The texts on which such learner inputs are based are of course “authentic” in one sense, namely that they are attested: they were
all produced by real people in real contexts for real communicative purposes. But what we have here are only the “material products of what people do when they use language . . . only . . . the textual traces of the processes whereby meaning is achieved” and what is lost is “the complex interplay of linguistic and contextual factors whereby discourse is enacted” (Widdowson, 2000). Furthermore, what was real for the original participants cannot be similarly “real” for learners, for their context is a different context, that of learning a foreign language. It seems clear (Widdowson, 2002) that the language of normal user occurrence has to be pedagogically processed so as to make it appropriate for learning, which means that learners can appropriate it for learning. And this appropriation depends on two conditions: firstly, the language has to key into the learner’s reality so that they can realize it as meaningful on their terms; secondly, it has to activate their learning – it has to be language they can learn from.

As to the other issue (interaction/learning) we note that in the language classroom acts of communication using the target language are not merely the hoped for outcome of learning but an essential means to successful language acquisition.

In their interactions with their peers and with their teachers, learners experience communication breakdowns which prompt negotiation of meaning, accomplished through clarification requests, confirmation checks, and requests for repetition. The resulting modifications are assumed to enhance comprehensibility of input and thence indirectly lead to acquisition itself (Tsui, 1998; Platt & Brookes, 2002).

From this it follows that opportunities for interaction, and involvement in relatively more beneficial types of interaction (if it can be determined what these are), are crucial to success. The attention of researchers thus turns to how questioning is conducted; how and by whom turn-taking is controlled; how tasks are designed in terms of the nature of the interactional demands they make on the learners and how learners “engage” with them (Platt & Brookes, 2002); and how feedback is given in response to learner output. All of these are discourse issues (as well as pedagogic ones), to the analysis of which a variety of approaches, including conversational analysis, ethnography, and genre analysis, can contribute.

Preparation for language teaching, whether in the form of teacher training courses or methodology textbooks, is most commonly organized around the main language areas (phonology, grammar, and lexis) and the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). A recent example is Hedge (2000). Textbooks on discourse for language teachers (e.g., McCarthy, 1991; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000) often follow this familiar pattern; Olshtain and Celce-Murcia (2001) and Trappes-Lomax (2002) provide recent overviews. In general this approach is probably effective in meeting the needs and expectations of practitioners, but potential disadvantages of these divisions may surface if
• grammar and lexis are presented as more separate than they really are, thus obscuring their inter-connectedness in lexico-grammar;
• the four skills are presented as more separate than they really are, thus obscuring the fact that they are often co-constitutive of actual speech events (illustrated in Figure 5.1 by the picture of the two nurses who are engaged in the skill-complex social practice of jointly reviewing a patient’s notes);
• spoken and written media are conceptualized as discrete types rather than points on a continuum;
• there is a failure to attend to general features of interpretation, on the one hand, and production, on the other, thus obscuring what is common to listening and reading and what is common to speaking and writing;
• text-making features are divided arbitrarily between the spoken and written modes (for example it is sometimes implied that cohesion is mainly a property of written text), thus obscuring those text-making features that are common to discourse of all kinds.

A discourse-based pedagogical description of phonology will focus on prosodic aspects including rhythm (especially differences between L1 and L2), the use of tonic stress placement to signal information status (given, new, etc.), and the use of tone and key to signal functional (e.g., question, statement), attitudinal (e.g., concerned, unconcerned), and interactional (e.g., turn and topic management) meanings (Brazil, 1997; Clennell, 1997; Chun, 2002).

A discourse-based description of grammar – a “discourse grammar” (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998; McCarthy, 1998) – will treat grammar functionally. It will cover not only the possible realizations in grammar of particular speech act functions such as requesting and suggesting (and their mitigation for reasons of politeness and tact), but the way in which grammatical categories such as tense, aspect and modality pattern across texts, the role of grammar in creating textual cohesion (reference, substitution, conjunction, etc.) and information structure (through devices of thematization such as adverbial placement, the use of the passive and clefting).

One particularly important aspect of the development of discourse grammar in recent years has been work on grammatical descriptions of the spoken language in the light of work on spoken corpora (Carter & McCarthy, 1995; McCarthy, 1998).

A pedagogical discourse grammar may also attend to “critical” or “political” (in Gee’s sense) aspects of lexico-grammatical choice. Through grammar we create, whenever we speak or write, “political” perspectives. An example of this is pronoun use. (B’s most potent weapon in her rebuff to Moira in our example is the word “my” in “my mum.”) As Pennycook has pointed out (1994b) “pronouns are always political in that they always imply relations of power.” Another is the use of connectives. (Moira’s “so” explicitly evokes the relevant aspect of “the way things are” in children’s play.)

A discourse description of lexis (see for example Carter & McCarthy, 1988) will cover the ways in which lexis contributes to textual cohesion (through
relationships of synonymy, hyponymy, collocation, etc.), textual structuring both spoken and written (through discourse markers), and genre (through lexical features of register). Attention to the role of lexical phrases or “chunks” in relation to functional and contextual features of discourse (Nattinger & de Carrico, 1992) has been hugely significant in recent years, contributing to the development of lexical approaches to language teaching.

In considering discourse aspects of skills teaching, “interaction” is central since it is here that we look for accounts of the different kinds of social and cognitive work required of participants depending on whether their role in the interaction is productive (speaking, writing) or receptive (listening, reading) or both alternately (oral interaction or on-line written “chat”), and depending on whether the medium of communication is speech or writing.

Effectiveness in receptive roles, in whatever mode of discourse, can be fostered by (amongst other things):

- activating appropriate knowledge structures (schemata), both formal (genre) and content (knowledge of the topic) through pre-listening/reading activities;
- foregrounding contextually relevant shared knowledge to help in predicting topic development and guessing speaker/writer intentions;
- devising tasks which promote appropriate use of top-down processing (from macro-context to clause, phrase, and lexical item) and bottom-up processing (from lexical item, phrase and clause to macro-context);
- focusing on meta-discoursal signaling devices.

Effectiveness in productive roles can be fostered by building into the cycle of task work attention to:

- salient features of context (setting, scene, the predicted state of knowledge and expectations of the reader/hearer);
- the means whereby a speaker or writer projects himself or herself as a certain kind of person, “a different kind in different circumstances” (Gee, 1999, p. 13);
- function (communicative goals); the “socially situated activity that the utterance helps to constitute” (Gee, 1999, p. 13);
- appropriate instrumentalities (features of register and genre);
- development of effective communication strategies appropriate to the mode of communication.

The teaching of spoken language skills draws on our gradually increasing understanding of the structuredness and predictability of some aspects of spoken interaction (openings, closings, adjacency pairs, pre-sequences and insertion sequences, turn-taking work), of differences between spoken genres (e.g., casual conversation, service encounters) and of conversational routines (e.g., for issuing, responding to, and following up responses to, requests, invitations, offers, compliments, apologies, etc.).
One source of potential problems for the learner is cross-cultural differences in ways of speaking. The “cross-culturally relative in communication” (Tannen, 1984b) includes “just about everything”: when to talk, what to say, pacing and pausing, showing “listenership” through gaze, backchannelling, etc., intonation, use of formulaic expressions and indirectness. Another is the inherent difficulty of the listening role, which is the one in which learners are likely to feel they have least control: speed of delivery, ellipsis, and implicitness may all contribute to learners’ problems.

In the context of the spoken language skills, the importance of strategic competence in the learner’s negotiation of meaning is readily apparent: their strategies for coping with potential or actual breakdown need to be developed, and this can be facilitated, though not without difficulty (Hedge, 2000), through appropriate design and management of communication tasks.

In teaching written language skills, recognition of the interactional and socially situated nature of the task focuses attention on contextualization: in the case of the reading skill, contextualization of the reader, their purpose in reading a particular text, and what they bring to it in terms of background knowledge and expectations; in the case of the writing skill, contextualization of the writer, their purpose in writing, and the way in which they construct their reader in terms of social role (e.g., membership of a particular discourse community), reading purpose, background knowledge, and expectations.

Much of the work on reading and writing pedagogy has been in the context of English for academic and professional (especially business) purposes. Both reading and writing in a second language are complex skills, capable of causing great difficulties to learners: writing especially, because the output is a product (text) that, in addition to being satisfactory in terms of content, needs to meet reader expectations in terms of register and generic features (overall organization, metadiscourse features, use of cohesion, etc.), and also attain an adequate standard of linguistic accuracy.

The writer’s (and reader’s) principal support (“scaffolding” in Vygotskyan terms) is genre: this provides a conceptualization of writing purposes within the context of the professional goals and means of the discourse community, a framework of discourse organization (stages, moves, etc.) within which to construct or interpret a text, and guidance on the conventionally accepted and rhetorically effective exploitation of instrumentalities at the micro-level of text construction. The role of the researcher is to find ways of analyzing the real-world tasks that the student faces. These ways will typically involve a combination of genre analysis, corpus linguistic methods, and ethnography (through consulting the experts themselves). Research findings need then to be translated into classroom goals, materials, and procedures. A classic example of the latter, in the context of academic English, is Swales and Feak (1994). A recent example of the former, drawing together many of the threads of recent developments in discourse analysis, is Hyland (2000).

Hyland’s book is firmly in the writing-as-social-interaction mould. He notes (p. xi) that “there are two main ways we can study social interaction in
writing. We can examine the actions of individuals as they create particular texts, or we can examine the distribution of different features to see how they cluster in complementary distributions.” He chooses the second of these and in consequence corpus-quantitative methods feature prominently. His theorizing of writing as social interaction draws on critical insights into the relation between text and social structure as well as Gricean pragmatics and Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory; a genre is seen as not merely a text type but an institutional practice. He stresses the importance of interpersonal as well as ideational features of academic text (academic writing involves competition and argument as well as representation). He also, crucially in terms of pedagogic implications, stresses the balance between conventions and choice.

The notion of reader-writer interaction provides a framework for studying texts in terms of how knowledge comes to be socially constructed by writers acting as members of social groups. It offers an explanation for the ways writers frame their understandings of the world and how they attempt to persuade others of these understandings. But while the norms and ideologies that underpin these interactions provide a framework for writing, they are, essentially, a repertoire of choices rather than a set of binding and immutable constraints. (pp. 18–19)

The English for Academic Purposes context is one of those, mentioned above, in which the L2 may be simultaneously a goal and means of education: students studying English and at the same time studying through English. The texts that they produce in the latter role are English texts not only in the sense that they are written in English but also in the sense that, in terms of rhetorical patterning, they are the type of texts that are expected of academic writing in an English-speaking (cultural) environment. Both teachers and students need to understand how the rhetorical features of English texts differ systematically from those of texts from the students’ home culture, and reflect on what is to be done about this. There are both descriptive and knowledge/power issues here. The former have been addressed in a growing body of work in contrastive rhetoric (Connor, 1996). The latter are part of the wider body of issues currently addressed within the framework of critical applied linguistics (see Pennycook, this volume).

5.5.2 Discourse and first language education

It is, of course, not just second language learners for whom communicative competence is a goal of education. Education generally must acculturate children to new registers and genres, both spoken and written, developing their grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences along the way (Verhoeven, 1997). Children bring to their school experience of a variety of standard and non-standard dialects and communicative codes which tend to be valued differently within the commodified “exchange system” of classroom speech (Wortham, 1998). The school, in turn, brings to the children’s learning experience an organized process of classroom talk which
may promote personal involvement, co-ordinated interaction, and shared meaning (Cazden, 1988 cited in Verhoeven, 1997) or induce the transmission of standardized knowledge through a standardized structure (Wortham, 1998, p. 256). It is often claimed that the standardized structure that does most to induce standardized transmission is the IRF pattern referred to above, but a recent article by Nassaji and Wells (2000) suggests a more complex reality.

The work of Halliday, Martin, Hyon and others in the Sydney School (Johns, 2002; Macken-Horarik, 2002) addresses the issue of genre competence directly, drawing on SFL theory to produce text-based descriptions of school and institutional genres and registers. “Using these insights, practitioners have developed pedagogical frameworks in which genres and registers are related to the goals, values and ‘staged’ processes of a culture . . . As students become comfortable with particular text types, they are given an increasing amount of independence and encouraged to negotiate text structure and content” (Johns, 2002, p. 5).

Discussing the shift that he detects in applied linguistics (in Britain) toward a more ideological stance and a concern with social issues, Rampton (1995) links this with Street’s distinction between “autonomous” (neutral technology) and “ideological” (social practice) models of literacy and with an interest among its practitioners less in English language teaching overseas and more in language education in the UK. It is in this context that critical discourse analysis as a form of applied linguistics (linguistics applied to the remedying of imbalances of power and various forms of social injustice) can perhaps best be understood. Since ideologies – in this view – permeate society by disguising themselves as common sense, the way to resist them is to unmask them. Critical language awareness raising (Fairclough, 1989, p. 236) is proposed as the means to this end, and the key site for developing it is the school. The “critical” is critical. Non-critical awareness raising is criticized for delivering a knowledge only of pragmatic appropriateness, thus further naturalizing existing power relations. Learners have to decide (Clark & Ivanič, 1998, p. 217)

whether to accommodate to all or some of the dominant practices (including the discoursal and generic conventions) which they encounter or to challenge these by adopting alternative practices. By turning awareness into action – by choosing to adopt alternative practices in the face of pressure to confirm to norms – people can contribute to their own emancipation and that of others by opening up new possibilities for linguistic behavior. These new possibilities can contribute to change not only in the classroom but also in the wider institution of education and within societies as whole.

5.6 Conclusion

My objective in this chapter has been to give some indication of the multidisciplinary range of discourse analysis, to identify and describe some of its gradually emerging landmarks (the “ways and means,” the “focusing”
factors), to illustrate the range of educational issues that discourse work informs, and to point to some current movements and controversies.

Whether or not discourse analysis can yet be described as a discipline, it must certainly be recognized as a force. It has shown, and increasingly shows, that it is necessary – to our understanding of language, of society and of ourselves as human beings; it is useful – in an ever-expanding range of practical and socially beneficial activities, from the management of smoking-prevention campaigns to the evaluation of witness statements, from the design of classroom tasks to the unmasking and tackling of social injustices; and, as a mirror to our ever-fascinating selves, it is, as many students who come to it for the first time find, endlessly interesting.

See also 4 Language Corpora, 10 Conversation Analysis, 13 Stylistics, 23 Literacy Studies, 26 Language Teacher Education, 27 The Practice Of LSP, 32 Critical Applied Linguistics.

REFERENCES


Stubbs, M. (1994) *Grammar, text and ideology: computer-assisted methods*


**FURTHER READING**