

Discourse analysis, politeness

Discourse analysis is a broad term for the study of the ways in which language is used between people, both in written texts and spoken contexts. Whereas other areas of language study might look at individual parts of language, such as words and phrases (grammar) or the pieces that make up words (linguistics), discourse analysis looks at a running conversation involving a speaker and listener (or a writer's text and its reader).

It is "the study of real language use, by real speakers in real situations," wrote Teun A. van Dijk in the "Handbook of Discourse Analysis, Vol. 4."

- Discourse analysis looks at conversations in their social context.
- Discourse analysis melds linguistics and sociology by taking into account the social and cultural context that language is used.
- It can be used by businesses, academic researchers, or the government—any person or organization that wants to better understand an aspect of communication.

The context of the conversation is taken into account as well as what is said. It can include where people are speaking and involves a social and cultural framework as well as nonverbal cues, such as body language, and, in the case of textual communication, images and symbols. Discourse analysis is also called *discourse studies* and was developed during the 1970s as an academic field.

Misunderstanding relayed information can lead to problems, big or small. Being able to understand subtle subtext—to be able to "read between the lines"—or distinguish between factual reporting and fake news, editorials, or propaganda all rely on being able to interpret communication. Thus, critical analysis of what someone is saying or writing is of utmost importance. To go a step further, to take analyzing discourse to the level of a field of study is to make it more formal, to mesh linguistics and sociology. It can even be aided by the fields of psychology, anthropology, and philosophy.

Applications of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis can be used to study inequality in society, such as institutional racism, bias in media, and sexism. It can examine discussions around religious symbols located in public places. Researchers in the field can aid the U.S. government by picking apart speeches by world leaders, such as Syria's leader Bashar Al-Assad and North Korea's Kim Jong Un. It can also be used by businesses to quantify hot topics in social media discussions, among other business applications.

In the field of medicine, communication research has examined, for example, how physicians can make sure they're understood by people with limited English skills or how cancer patients cope with their diagnosis. In one study, transcriptions of conversations between doctors and patients were analyzed to find out where misunderstandings occurred. In another, women were interviewed about their feelings on the first diagnosis, how it affected their relationships, what the role of their social support network was, and how "positive thinking" came into play.

Politeness (no criticism, no interference)

The Politeness theory is a theory that appeared within the framework of pragmatic approach in linguistics. According to this theory the interlocutors use particular strategies in order to achieve successful communication. These strategies enable to create maximally comfortable environment for communication.

The key ideas of politeness theory were offered in the works by P. Brown and S. Levinson "Politeness: some universals on language usage". Relying on the works by American sociologist Erving Goffmann [Goffman 1967], the authors chose the notion of "face" as the basis of their theory. It reflects two opposite needs of a human: on the one hand, a desire to be approved of and appreciated by the interlocutor («positive face»), on the other hand, to have his/her independent point of view and relative freedom of opinion («negative face»). Therefore, politeness is understood as the ability of people to use interactive strategies depending on communicative situation. By their means the communicator is capable of making a good impression on the interlocutor and creating a positive self-image or, on the contrary, expanding his/her personal space [Holmes J. 2006].

Brown and Levinson gradually develop their concept considering every action of the communicants from a perspective of a potential threat to an individual face. According to the authors' position, a person tends to protect their own face in the communication process thus deviating from clear and direct communication. On this basis we can distinguish the strategies of positive politeness (for instance, demonstration of interest, sympathy) and negative politeness (for example, expressing pessimism, apologizing). Moreover, estimating face threatening acts three basic socio-cultural variables are taken into consideration: social distance between interlocutors, the degree of power on each other and ranking. [Holmes J. 2006].

Brown and Levinson (1987, henceforth B&L) introduced a new perspective by drawing attention to the detailed parallels in the construction of polite utterances across widely differing languages and cultures, and arguing that universal principles underlie the construction of polite utterances. The parallels they noted are of two sorts: how polite utterances are linguistically constructed, and how the polite expression of utterances is modified in relation to social characteristics of the interlocutors and the situation. At least three social factors are involved in deciding how to be polite:

- (1) one tends to be more polite to social superiors;
- (2) one tends to be more polite to people one doesn't know. In the first case, politeness tends to go one way upwards (the superior is less polite to an inferior); in the second, politeness tends to be symmetrically exchanged. In addition,
- (3) in any culture there are norms and values affecting the degree of imposition or unwelcomeness of an utterance, and one tends to be more polite for more serious impositions

