

The Study of Discourse Analyses Yesterday and Today

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Abstract: The origin and development of discourse analysis was the main concern of the article. We traced the development of the study of discourse from 1950s to some recent approaches to discourse analysis. There is no doubt that developments in this field are still evolving as more scholars get involved in the study of discourse as a social phenomenon.

According to scientific researches there are two main approaches to the study of language from 1930s to 1950s were Saussure's structuralism and Chomskyan theory. These approaches were more preoccupied with the study of langue rather than parole. In other words, they focussed on the study of the internal functioning of grammars which were seen as closed systems independent of the possibilities which could be observed in everyday use of language. However, some other scholars in the field of linguistics argued that there are certain meanings and aspects of language that cannot be understood or embraced if its study is limited to the syntactic analysis of sentences. One of the disciplines which emerged as a result of this is discourse analysis.

Although Discourse Analysis (DA) as a term was first used in 1952 by Zellig Harris in a paper he published titled Discourse Analysis, the study of the functional use of language for persuasive effectiveness dates back to 2000 years ago. In this sense, we can view Classical Rhetoric as a precursor of contemporary stylistics and structural analysis of discourse because of its interest in the organization, specific operations and performance of public speech. The study of Rhetoric was however backgrounded with the emergence of comparative and historical linguistics in the 17th century. During the early 20th century, most linguistic approaches developed in the study of language reflected intellectual activity directed towards a strict treatment of the different levels of linguistic systems as separate, autonomous, self-contained domains. Linguistics was largely concerned with the analysis of single sentences.

However, alongside this major research path throughout most part of the century was an interest in discourse in other circles. For example, members of the European Structuralist Prague School articulated their theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (Tannen, et al, 2015). Another example is Harris' effort at the study of the distribution of linguistic elements in extended texts and the links between the texts and their social situation. Although, this paper could not be said to reflect the present discourse analysis enterprise as we know it today, yet it was part of the efforts towards developing the study of language beyond the sentence. Harris (Zellig, 1952 cited in Paltridge, 1988) made a significant observation that:

“connected discourse occurs within a particular situation – whether of a person speaking, or of a conversation, or of someone sitting down occasionally over the period of months to write a particular kind of book in a particular literary or scientific tradition”.

In all, one could conclude that structural analysis of culture and the further development of structural linguistics in Europe led to the birth of modern discourse analysis in the middle 1960s. The last quarter of the 20th century thus witnessed a blossoming of the status and field of discourse analysis. Symposia devoted to discourse analysis began to spring up around this time and

international journals such as *Discourse and Society*, *Discourse Studies*, *Journal of Pragmatics* were birthed.

If we look at the Earliest Studies of Discourse Analysis they were done by people in other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and ethnology. For example, Hymes' influential book titled *Language in Culture and Society* published in 1964 gave much attention to forms of speech, communication and forms of address and later developed into the analytical orientation of *Ethnography of speaking*. Another approach to the study of discourse which was influenced by the social sciences is *Ethnomethodology* whose proponent was the famous Sociolinguist, Harold Garfinkel. An example of Ethnomethodological approach to research is *Conversation Analysis* which is mainly concerned with the study of speech in its social setting. Researchers using this approach observe and describe the sequential patterning of conversation. The key figures in this school of thought are Emmanuel Schegloff, Harvey Sacks and Gail Jefferson. The linguistic philosophers – Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Grice (1975) were also influential in the study of language as social action, as reflected in speech act theory and the formulation of conversational maxims.

The first major attempt to analyse discourse from the perspective of linguistics came from John Sinclair and Michael Coulthard, both from the University of Birmingham. They developed a model for the description of teacher-pupil talk, based on a hierarchy of discourse units. British discourse analysis was also greatly influenced by Michael Halliday's (1973) systemic-functional and social-semiotic framework which emphasised the social functions of language and the thematic and informational structure of speech and writing. Other scholars from American School also examined types of speech event such as storytelling, greeting rituals and verbal duels in different cultural settings (Gumperz and Hymes, 1972).

When it comes to mention about recent developments in the field of Discourse Analysis we come to understand that it is a rapidly growing and evolving field. Current research in the field now flows from academic disciplines that are different from one another. Included in discourse research are disciplines in which the models for understanding and analysing discourse first developed such as linguistics, anthropology and philosophy. Other disciplines such as communication, cognitive psychology, social psychology and artificial intelligence among others are also applying and of course extending the discourse models and methods to solving problems within their own academic domains. One of them is *Discursive Psychology* which emerged within *Social Psychology*. This approach to discourse study is interested particularly in the way 'psychological' notions (for example, 'memory') are generally produced in discourse and particularly in conversation. *Discursive Psychology* as pioneered by Michael Billig (1987), Jonathan Potter (1996) and Derek Edwards (1997) rejected individual psychological notions such as attitudes and rather sought alignment with ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and social constructivism. Another evolving approach to the study of discourse is *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*, originally introduced in a seminal book: *Language and Control* (1979), written by Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress, Bob Hodge and Tony Trew, and later developed by Norman Fairclough (1989) in the UK, Ruth Wodak (1989) in Austria and Teun A. van Dijk (1993) in the Netherlands. *Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)* and *Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)* are also approaches to discourse analysis which have developed alongside advancements in communication and information technology.

In Conclusion, we would say that the origin of the study of discourse could be traced to Zellig Harris in the 1950s. Since then, scholars from the humanities and social sciences have studied discourse as a social phenomenon. Due to the influence of researchers' theoretical backgrounds, the study of discourse is approached from different perspectives and approaches. The new developments in the field of discourse analysis indicate that new trends and approaches to the study of discourse as a phenomenon are still unfolding and will continue to do so for a long time.

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