

## **DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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It is difficult to give a single definition of Critical or Discourse Analysis as a research method. Discourse Analysis can be characterized as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem. 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. Expressed in today's more trendy vocabulary, Critical or Discourse Analysis is nothing more than a deconstructive reading and interpretation of a problem or text. Discourse Analysis will, thus, not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enable us to understand the conditions behind a specific "problem" and make us realize that the essence of that "problem", and

its resolution, lie in its assumptions; the very assumptions that enable the existence of that "problem". 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. The purpose of Discourse Analysis is not to provide definite answers, but to expand our personal horizons and make us realize our own shortcomings and unacknowledged agendas/motivations - as well as that of others. In short, critical analysis reveals what is going on behind our backs and those of others and which determines our actions. Discourse Analysis and critical thinking is applicable to every situation and every subject. The new perspective provided by discourse analysis allows personal growth and a high level of creative fulfillment. No technology or funds are necessary and authoritative discourse analysis can lead to fundamental changes in the practices of an institution, the profession, and society as a whole. However, Discourse Analysis does not provide definite answers; it is not a "hard" science, but an insight/knowledge based on continuous debate and argumentation. There are several principles and conventions which we follow in discourse (texts or conversations). When speaking in English we usually sequence words so that we move from something known (already mentioned or obvious from the context) at the beginning of the sentence to something new at the end: (in this examples, known information is underlined, new information is bold)

information obvious new information  
 from the context  
 “Do you know where **John** is?”  
 “He’s in **the garden.**”  
 information new information  
 already mentioned

When writing in English we usually organize the information in the same way that we do in speaking. Starting sentences with information which relates back to something already mentioned helps the text to “flow” more smoothly and makes it easier for the reader to understand it.

In English we prefer to put long and complex phrases at the end of the sentence. English prefers sentences to be “light” at the beginning and “heavy” at the end. Long complex clauses also often contain new information, so this principle and the information principle reinforce each other.

*A striking feature of the central areas of the capital are **the elegant classical squares which were originally laid out by aristocratic developers in the eighteenth century.***

Sentences with a heavy clause at the beginning can seem clumsy and be difficult to understand:

***The elegant classical squares which were originally laid out by aristocratic developers in the eighteenth century** are a striking feature of the central areas of the capital.*

But the information principle is more important in text than the end-weight principle, so we can put a heavy clause at the beginning of a sentence if it contains familiar information linking it to the preceding text:

London has many public parks and squares which date from previous centuries. ***The elegant classical squares which were originally laid out by aristocratic developers in the eighteenth century*** are a striking feature of the central areas of the capital.

In English we can show part of a sentence or clause contains the most important point or 'focus' by moving the important point to the beginning or end of the sentence-these are the two positions which appear most important to a reader or listener.

In this example Jim and nightclub are the focus – they seem the most important issues:

Jim invited Lucy to the nightclub.

If we want to put the focus on an item that doesn't naturally come at the beginning or end of the sentence (e.g. Lucy) we have to manipulate the grammar to bring the item to the front focus position. This is called 'fronting'. For example, we can use cleft sentences:

**It was Lucy** that Jim invited to the nightclub.

**Lucy** was the girl that Jim invited to the nightclub.

Similarly, we can give focus to something by moving it into the end focus position:

The girl that Jim invited to the nightclub was **Lucy**.

We sometimes need to break the principles of word order to create effects of emphasis and contrast. Because word order in English is usually fixed, we can emphasise something by moving it to an unfamiliar position. This is often done with adverbial expressions, objects and complements, and *that* and *to* infinitive phrases.

e.g. Priscilla invariably rejected impoverished suitors. (Her only ambition was **to marry for money**)- **To marry for money** was her only ambition.

Thus, *Discourse Analysis* articulate a three-dimensional framework for studying discourse, "where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice".

## **Bibliography**

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