



Discourse in Perspectives: A Linguistic Study

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Abstract

Discursively, this paper examines critical perspectives on “discourse”, which is the focus of “discourse analysis”. Discourse reveals the communicative potentials of human language across domains. A conventional instrument of communication, language is not exhaustive in its communicative potential. The literature of discourse analysis is replete with front-burner postulations on the nature of language, discourse, human communication, social structures and value systems. A study of such postulations is worthy of scholarly attention as it can explain their implications, relevance and functionality when language is used either for cohesive or divisive roles in society. Language anchors the relationship between humans and socially realistic phenomena. In this regard, discourse is a framework for elucidating the bottom-line issues of “language in use” in the real world of humans: the universe of discourse. Hinging on Critical Linguistics, this study concludes that across texts and genres, discourse is: construction of knowledge, social phenomenon, sense and reference, ideology, linguistic convention, action, context of speech and context of situation.

Keywords: language, linguistics, discourse, discourse analysis, perspectives, Critical Linguistics.

1. Introduction

Discourse is a fascinating language phenomenon as it is about humans, and the dimensions in which they put language to use. The fact that language has positive and negative connotations implies that studies on discourse and discourse analysis are instrumental in explaining issues of cohesion and integration in multifaceted domains of society. This study is significant as it provides insights on convergent and divergent perspectives in the literature of discourse and discourse analysis. Classical and contemporary, the views establish what discourse means in theory and practice, within the purview of language and linguistics. The experiences that language conveys via the instrumentality of discourse transcend individuals; they are collective, normative and communal. This study examines language-laden dynamics and complexities of discourse – the frameworks for construing discourse in theory and practice. Essentially therefore, this study investigates the communion between theoretical linguistics and applied linguistics, to explain discourse as language in use.

2. Language and Linguistics

A means of communication, language is regarded as a human heritage; human beings are widely believed to possess language, rather than other creatures. It is a means of transmitting thoughts and culture. Language is historically connected to the Latin expression *Lingua* which means “tongue”. In each human language, there are words, sounds and syntax. Sounds of animals are not generally accepted as language. Bloomfield (1933) presents insights on language in relation to sounds and their meanings. Scholars agree that language has certain features: it is a system; it involves the use of symbols; it is arbitrary; it is a vocal phenomenon; it is dynamic; it is a vehicle of culture; it is a social phenomenon; it is living; and it is a symbol of individual and collective identity. To communicate with language, the vocal symbols (sounds) operate as organized system. A scientific and systematic study of human language, linguistics hinges on language rules theories in the explanation of the formal properties of language. Thus, the universal properties of language are brought to the fore. Methodologies in linguistic studies include: fieldwork, formal analysis of patterns in data, computational modeling, psycholinguistic experiments and corpus analysis. In addition, there are different fields of

linguistics: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, etc. Each of these fields has its research focus:

- a. Phonetics: It is the study of speech sounds in language;
- b. Phonology: It studies sounds as a system in language (i.e. rule-governed structural patterns of sounds);
- c. Morphology: It studies word structure;
- d. Syntax: This is the study of sentence structure;
- e. Semantics: It is the study of meaning in language; and
- f. Pragmatics: This is the study of language-use according to contexts.

Broadly speaking, there are discrete domains of inquiry in linguistic studies: historical linguistics (the study of language change); sociolinguistics (the study of the social variables that underpin language variation); psycholinguistics (the study of the roles of the brain in language production); language pedagogy (the study of how people learn language); and computational linguistics (the study of how computers process human languages).

3. Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Brown and Yule (1983, p. 1) define discourse as “language in use”. Indeed, discourse is structural and interactive. Olugbenga Ibileye (2018, p. 1) asserts that discourse is “the theoretical basis of the emergence of the field of discourse analysis, is a pervading phenomenon, which governs human lives and daily activities sometimes in an unconscious way. Discourse has been variously conceived by scholars as the authentic product of human interaction as well as being the concrete aspect of the abstractness of communication ...” Stubbs (1983, p. 1) posits that “discourse is defined as “(1) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance, (2) concerned with the interrelationships between language and society and (3) as concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication.” Being a human phenomenon, discourse reveals a speaker’s identity and his communicative intention in a given context.

4. Theoretical Framework

Although this study is not a textual analysis, its theoretical framework (Critical Linguistics) gives it relevant theoretical base because the theory captures: the dynamics of language in society; individualistic dimensions of socially-structured language choice and use; the nexus between language and referential entities in the universe of discourse; extralinguistic motivations of language use; ideological underpinnings of language use; functions of language; and the ever-changing discourse contexts and situations that underscore language use.

4.1 Critical Linguistics

Peter Okpeh (2017, pp. 204-205) comments elaborately on Critical Linguistics:

Critical Linguistics started in the late 1970s with a group of scholars from the University of East Anglia who set out to advocate the need to investigate the centrality of language in the way individuals are perceived as social subjects (Fowler, 1979). Critical Linguistics according to Johnson (1999), attempts to explore relationships between language and the social conditions of that use. The word “critical”, according to him, is associated with “critique” and agrees with Fairclough’s (1985) notion “making visible the connectedness of things”, particularly exploring (more than the traditional descriptive linguist would do) the wider social connotations of language use. The critical linguist, according to him, views the world as social structures manifesting different ideologies, and studies the way language use reflects these. Based on Halliday’s (1985) system functional linguistic theory, Critical Linguistics seeks to unveil the connection between linguistic choices and ideological processes. Like in CDA, the goal of Critical Linguistics is to examine the linguistic strategies and apparatus through the use of which people are kept under dominant forces. Its basic assumption, according to Lemmouch (1987) is the need for its practitioners to analyze a large set of linguistic features in context and examine the aggregate ideological mediation of these features. In other words in analyzing a text, one should not look at isolated linguistic items to read off social meaning ...

Concerning the analytical goal and philosophical orientations of Critical Linguistics, Wodak (1996) outlines a number of questions, some of which are:

How does the naturalization of ideology in discourse come about?

Which discursive strategies legitimate control or naturalize the social order?

How is power linguistically expressed?

How are consensus, acceptance and legitimization of dominance manufactured?

Who has access to which instrument of power and control?

Who is discriminated against and what way?

5. Critical Perspectives on Discourse

This section of the paper examines critical perspectives on discourse.

5.1 Discourse as Construction of knowledge

Human beings demonstrate cognition in using language to achieve communicative goals. They explore speaker-hearer shared knowledge (mental states) in articulating their views in discourse. Commenting on cognition, Chilton (2005a, p. 23) opines that “cognitive pragmatics is defined as a study of mental states of the interlocutors, their beliefs, desires, goals, and intentions (cf. Bara 2010: 1) produced and interpreted by human individuals interacting with one another ... If language use (discourse) is, as the tenets of CDA assert, connected to the construction of knowledge about social objects, identities, processes, etc., then that construction can only be taking place in the minds of (interacting) individuals.” With the emergence of pragmatics, emphasis shifts to speaker-meaning. Speakers deploy discrete speech acts to establish their stance and arguments in discourse. Speech acts are essentially social acts in the construction of knowledge: declaring, asserting, informing, persuading, ascribing, etc. See Bach and Harnish’s (1979) speech act taxonomy for more examples of speech act categories. The emergence of pragmatics marks the replacement of “linguistic competence” with “communicative competence”. The functional dimension language use implies that language constructs knowledge by addressing socially-realistic phenomena. A major task before a discourse analyst is to explain the instrumentality of linguistic and extralinguistic components that convey textual message(s). Gillian Brown and George Yule (1983, p. 25) assert that “the discourse analyst ... is interested in the function or purpose of a piece of linguistic data and also in how that data is processed, both by the producer and by the receiver. It is natural consequence that the discourse analyst will be interested in the results processing experiments in a way which is not typical of the sentence-grammarians. It also follows that the work of those sociolinguists and ethnographers who attempt to discuss language in terms of user’s purposes will also be of interest.” Indeed, the references that speakers make to social values are essentially actions. Immersed in ideology, discourse remains a means of constructing knowledge in the universe of discourse where diverse social structures (institutions) and value-systems abound. This claim is evident in CDA-related research. Wodak (2007, p. 209) rightly notes that “CDA takes a particular interest in the ways in which language mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions.”

5.2 Discourse as Social Phenomenon

In the literature of sociolinguistics, speech forms are established on the basis of sociolinguistic variables: gender, social status, age, ethnicity, etc. This implies that we can view discourse in terms of its discrete features in natural human communication. Umar Fauzan (2022, pp. 34-35) reports extensively on gender and discourse:

The term “gender” is sometimes misunderstood by some certain people by considering it as the same as sex. In fact, they have different definitions. Sex is designated based on biology, whereas gender is socially and psychologically constructed by the process of interactions in the family, social and education settings. In other words, gender is not something we have, but something we do, something we perform. Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. It means that sex is something that is brought with when a person is born. From some certain characteristics someone can be classified as male or female ... gender can be seen as something that is created by humans socially and psychologically according to their beliefs and rules when they contact or communicate each other ...

Gender is referred variously across areas of social science. In a specific social setting, the culture legalizes values, expectations, meanings and patterns of behavior and communication of its society ... Women are assumed in home-making, care-giving and subservient roles. Conversely, men are represented as leaders and breadwinners. Furthermore, in many cultures, women take the name of their husbands after getting married, sons have more freedom to play outside the house and daughters have to be more at home to take care of younger siblings. Additionally, it shows that at some certain schools or academies the gender-based positions are offered for the student recruitment so that they will be able to fulfill requirement of future work positions. Due to daily practices, such gender issues are considered normal or even are not realized as the forms of gender identities.

Related to gender in language, Sidiqi mentions that “in linguistics, the term refers to the grammatical categories that index sex in the structure of human languages. Feminist theorists of the 1960s to 1970s use the term “gender” to refer to the construction of the categories “masculine” and “feminine” in society. This construction was related to biological sex in contested way.” However, the connection between gender and language can be found long before the start of women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Perhaps it appeared one century before this issue was raised as a scholarly study. The different ways of talk between men and women were expressed in worldwide proverbs which represented women’s verbosity in expressing language and contents of women’s talk rebutting ...”

To understand gender-based discourse better, studies on feminism are instructive. Particularly from the 19th century, articulate, feminist writers struggle to end gender-based discriminations. Their struggles translated into numerous publications that reveal the linguistic peculiarities of gender-driven discourses across domains of society: home, politics, education, etc. For example, Umar Fauzan (ibid.) posits that “feminist language researchers then also argued that the power of men can be seen in the language in various things. The argument was men had more power to control languages because most philosophers, orators, politicians, grammarians, linguists, and lexicographers were men ... sexism was encoded into language by men. Even a researcher argued that it was important to promote women as users and innovators of the world web, so that it will not increase men’s supremacy over women in internet language use.” Social perspectives of discourse explain why norms of society operate as discursive practices, and are invoked in discourses as discrete themes: race, ethnicity, gender, etc. In communicative situations therefore, the participants are engaged in effective transmission and interpretation of the social relevance or topic relevance of utterances. See Sperber and Wilson (1986) for tips on the concept, “topic relevance”. Elite Olshtain and Marianne Celce-Murcia, cited in Deborah Schiffirin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (2001, p. 716) posit that “when using language for communication, we are faced with two major types of processes: transmitting our ideas and intentions to an addressee or interpreting and understanding the text or message produced by an interlocutor. The first places the initiator for the discourse at the production end of the continuum while the second places the interpreter at the reception end. When producing discourse, we combine discourse knowledge with strategies of speaking or writing, while utilizing audience-relevant contextual support. When interpreting discourse, we combine discourse knowledge with strategies of listening or reading, while relying on prior knowledge as well as on assessment of the context at hand ...” Human society is a place where social institutions give discourse participants means of picking referents from the universe of discourse. Strawson (1950) notes that “‘referring’ is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do.” The spread of research in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals socially realistic attributes of discourse.¹

5.3 Discourse as Sense and Reference

Speaker-meaning implies that what can be meant in an utterance is not exhaustive. There is often an idea captured when the contextual underpinnings of utterances are considered. In this sense, the proposition expressed is viewed beyond the normative properties of language. Speakers rely heavily on the semantic repertoire of language to deviate from “reference” to “sense”. Although sense is an abstraction, linguistic competence in an Operative Language (OL) – a term evolved and explained in Acheoah (2015) – is a facilitator of the process of decoding the sense of an expression. All meaningful expressions in a language have sense, but do not necessarily have reference. Being “language in use”, discourse is immersed in the study of meaning; invariably, sense and reference are crucial in such a study. Gillian Brown and George Yule (ibid.) note that “within the presupposition pool for any discourse, there is a set of discourse subjects and each discourse is, in a sense, about its discourse subjects. Because it is part of the shared assumptions of the discourse participants that these discourse subjects exist, they do not need to have their existence asserted in the discourse.”

5.4 Discourse as Ideology

This paper contends that ideological perspective of discourse transcends the notion of “meaning as idea” (as in the Ideational Theory of Meaning); it is a stronger dimension of the ideational representation of meaning. Charles Ogbulogo (2012, p. 24) asserts that the Ideational Theory of Meaning holds the view that “the meaning attached to words can be separated from the word themselves. This means that meaning originates in the mind in the form of ideas. Words are just sensible signs for the convenience of communication. Language is therefore, a mechanism for expressing thoughts and thought is viewed as a succession of conscious ideas. The Ideational Theory is mentalistic. Thus, the meaning of a word is the mental image or idea of the word or the expression generated in the mind of the speaker or hearer.” Dahunsi Toyese Najeem (2016, p. 174), notes that “the central focus of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to see ideology as inherent in language use, and to see language use as a reflection of certain ideologies, beliefs, perceptions and affiliations.” Consolidated and articulate stance by individuals on such conflicting perspectives is essentially ideological. For example, the phrase “Gender Mainstreaming” establishes feminism as being ideologically-driven. Gender Mainstreaming is an articulate framework for feminist activism. Given the fact that discourse is ideology, feminism is tinted by discrete objectives, resulting in different classification of feminists: humanist feminists, racial feminists, socialist feminists, separatist feminists, liberal feminists, democrat feminists, and so on. These nomenclatures are linked to the idea that informs each of the struggles. For fascinating submissions on ideological dimensions of discourse, see Liss M. et al. (2000), Sarah Delaney McDougall (2012), Patton Tracey O. (2001), Harro Bobbie (2000), McRobbie Angela (2004), Devajit Mohajan and Hardhan Kumar Mohajan (2022), Peters K. Jackson D. & Rudge T. (2000), Sanjit Chakraborty (2017) and Wood Julia T. (1994).

5.5 Discourse as Linguistic Convention

Effective communication is partly the product of linguistic competence. Choice of words and structures accounts for writers' ability to capture the discourse features of particular kinds of texts (genres). Language and style are therefore unique in political speeches, religious sermons, doctor-patient interactions, buyer-seller conversations, etc. Linguistic conventions foster textual cohesion and coherence. Deborah Schiffrin, cited in Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (ibid.) submit that "the production of coherent discourse is an interactive process that requires speakers to draw upon several different types of communicative knowledge that complement more code-based grammatical knowledge of sound, form, and meaning per se. Two aspects of communicative knowledge closely related to one another are express and social: the ability to use language to display personal and social identities, to convey attitudes and perform actions, and to negotiate relationships between self and others. Others include a cognitive ability to represent concepts and ideas through language and a textual ability to organize forms, and convey meanings, within units of language longer than a single sentence." Diane Blakemore, cited in Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (ibid.) posits that "coherence relations are structural relations which hold in virtue of formal properties of utterances." See Susan Hunston (2013, p. 618) for insights on language-driven organization of discourse texts. Scholars use the labels "textual chains", "intertextuality", "interdiscursivity", "orders of discourse" and "hybridity" to capture structural feature of discourse. As a matter of linguistic convention, text type and language choice are expected to align with acceptable standards, although speaker-meaning can be a basis for deviation from linguistic norms. In addition, text type determines formal features or conventional layout of discourse. The uniqueness of language and formal features of texts is a means of establishing their characteristics and categorization as discourse genres. Umar Fauzan (ibid.) reports that "the concept of text type was first introduced by German linguist, Peter Hartman in 1964 and has been considerably revised since then. At the moment text types are defined as limited sets of samples of actual text with specific shared characteristics, such as the physical form, the characteristic structure (i.e. the use of limited means), the situational conditions (including the medium of the texts) and the communicative function of the texts. It is worth mentioning here that while genre seems to be more common in literature (cf. literary genre), text types can be found in studies of non-literal specialized texts, which make use of conventional linguistic resources and layout, but differ in content (e.g. journal abstract, notice, maintenance manual, announcement). Thus, the definition of text types, the number of which is limited, is based on text-internal data whereas definitions of genre, which evolve historically by chance, follow various text-external and text-internal criteria alike (e.g. letter and its many sub-classes). Sometimes, the term "mode of discourse" is used synonymously with text type, even though it is restricted to the characterization of texts according to pragmatic properties, or speaker's purposes ..."

5.6 Discourse as Action

The conceptualization of discourse as action is essentially about speech-act potentials of utterances in discourse. The functional perspective of language can be understood in the use of speech acts. Consider the utterances below uttered by an advertiser of herbal products (henceforth U.1 – U.3):

U.1: Sometimes when you talk, people close their mouths because of the pleasant aroma from your mouth.

Illocutionary acts: ascribing, condemning, persuading.

Pragmatic Comments:

The advertiser ascribes negative qualities to the referent "mouth" by implying that it emits offensive odour. The expression "pleasant aroma" is indirect, and condemns the condition of any sufferer of the disease. The advertiser is aware that people do not like to be publicly subjected to shame. People want to integrate with their fellow humans and any social stigma such as offensive smell from one's mouth can hinder social integration. This consciousness informs the advertiser's illocutionary strategy. Acheoah (2014) evolves novel types of illocutionary strategies that are deployed in discourse to achieve intended perlocutionary acts. Most of the strategies are non-literal and indirect. By exploring the action-potential of language in discourse, the advertiser condemns mouth odour, thereby persuading the audience to consider buying the product. In discourse, speech acts are "focused acts" targeted at audience for speaker-based communicative ends.

U.2 My brother, my sister, your mouth is not latrine. Stop disgracing yourself. God did not create you so.

Illocutionary acts: asserting, advising, informing, persuading.

Pragmatic Comments:

The literature of pragmatics contends that speech acts are so versatile that performing one speech act presupposes performing others. For example, in a particular context of speech, "to advise h" (hearer) is "to suggest to h". The intractable nature of speech act verbs is a major reason why scholars acknowledge that there is need for more investigation of illocutionary acts. The performance of multiple illocutionary acts in U.2 is therefore neither arbitrary nor incidental. By asserting that "... is not latrine", the advertiser spurs the addressees to claim their rightful personality of

dignity and self-esteem. Acheaoh (2015) uses the term “Object Referred” (OR) as a candidate for meaning in discourse. To intensify the degree of stigmatization related to mouth odour, the advertiser uses the expression “latrine” as Object Referred. The decoders (audience) process the topic relevance of the utterance within the limits of the implicatures that are tied to the Object Referred. Offensive mouth odour can be linked to “disease”, “penury”, “ignorance and “lack of personal hygiene”. The reverse is the case when one’ mouth does not emit offensive odour; apparently, advertisers portray discourse as action by manipulating speaker-hearer shared knowledge.

U.3 Roka mouth cleanser is what you need. When you get home, take it twice a day. Only three days experience, you will come for more. There are no side-effects. There is no need for overdose. Return it if you are disappointed. In fact, come and have it free of charge and you will ask for more. You remember Oliver Twist?

Illocutionary acts: informing, directing, ascribing, asking, offering, persuading.

Pragmatic Comments:

The advertiser does not only inform the prospective buyers that Roka Mouth Cleanser is the right therapy for the diseases that are possibly ravishing them, but also provides directives on how to use the medicine; as practiced in the use of orthodox medicines. The advertiser is aware of certain facts: people take overdose of medicines because they want quick cure to their illnesses; and people do not want to take medicines with severe side-effects. Built around these psychological underpinnings (encoder-decoder mental states), U.3 corroborates Fowler (1981) who opines that “linguistic structure is not arbitrary. It is determined and motivated by the functions it performs.” It is not incidental that the advertiser asks the audience if they remember Oliver Twist. Used as Object Referred in the advert, “Oliver Twist” signifies “the human nature of endless desire” as used in the source literary text, *Oliver Twist*; the advertiser compares the audience to Oliver Twist by claiming that after buying the herbal products and experiencing its efficacy, the buyers will desire to purchase more. Since the advertiser is mainly interested in selling the products, it is not proper to offer it free of charge to the public. In the performance of illocutionary acts of “offering” and “asking”, the advertiser is essentially persuading the audience to buy the herbal products. The illocutionary acts (illocutionary forces) of U.1 – 3 convey their action-potential. In adverts, speech acts are obviously used to persuade addressees. Ascriptives (as in ascribing qualities to a referent) and informative serve the purpose of making the addressees think that there are justifications for being requested to buy the herbal products. As actions, the speech acts in U.1 – 3 are “unleashed” to manipulate the addressees’ feelings about the herbal products. The entire advert as a body of discourse, involves skillful speech act selection and sequencing. There is usually a Master Speech Act that anchors all other speech acts in an extended body of discourse. In advert (U.1 – U.3), all other speech acts revolve around “persuading” (the Master Speech Act).² A speech act approach to the analysis of discourse is quite interpretively productive. For example, the Master Speech Act level of the interpretation of U.1 – U.3 is a secondary layer of interpretation that captures the extralinguistic underpinnings (environmental and diachronic contexts). This layer of interpretation produces the total interpretation that the primary layer of interpretation (which explores the formal properties of language) is bereaved of. The secondary layer of interpretation is in tandem with Austin’s (1962) proposal that the total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which in the last resort, the speech act analyst should be engaged in elucidation. See Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Savas L. T. (1994) for other useful perspectives on speech acts.

5.7 Discourse as Context of Speech and Context of Situation

The notions, “context of speech” and “context of situation” refer to the totality of circumstances surrounding an utterance. However, while “context of speech” is utterance-dependent (involving linguistic elements as in cohesive devices), “context of situation” is based on “extralinguistic” factors such as norms and value-systems (world knowledge) which already prevail in the universe of discourse (our real world), and are appropriately invoked by discourse participants in inference-making, as demonstration of speaker-hearer pragmatic cognition. In construing discourse as context or situation, the notion, “domain and role relations”, is instructive. In certain communicative events, the categories of participants, topic and language inputs are predictable as a matter of convention. Studies on doctor-patient, buyer-seller and teacher-pupil conversations capture the notion of discourse as context. Taiwo Oloruntoba- Oju (1999 p. 129) submits extensively on the notion of domain and role relations:

Domain is a broad sociolinguistic category that refers to the setting of a speech or discourse as well as the topic of discourse. Role relations refer to the relationship obtaining between interlocutors ... Domains include, for instance, home setting, school setting, work setting, etc. Certain speech situations and certain role relations are normally associated with particular settings ... The following are sample domains with corresponding speech situations and role-relations:

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Speech Situation</u>	<u>Role Relation</u>
School	Lecturing	Teacher-student
Home	Family meeting	Husband-wife, etc.

Parliament	Debate on draft constitution	Speaker-other parliamentarians
Church	Sermon	Pastor-congregation

Scholars acknowledge the possibility of non-correspondence between domain and role relations as typical in human communication. Words and linguistic stretches are only discourse-laden when viewed in terms of the contextual elements that produced them. This view corroborates Jacob Mey (2001, pp. 190-191) who avers that “discourse is different from text in that it embodies more than just a collection of sentences; discourse is what makes the text, and what makes it context-bound. But discourse is also different from conversation. Conversation is what most people do naturally, do socially and, so, to speak, do all the time; it is the most wide-spread form of language use and, in a sense, the embedding of all our linguistic activities, both in our personal history and upbringing and in our daily lives. All the same even if conversation is among the most important functions of human language, it still is but one particular type of text, governed by special rules of social use. Thus, while it seems natural to use the term ‘discourse’ specifically in connection with conversation, ‘discourse analysis’ and ‘conversation analysis’ are not the same. The former includes the latter (cf. Stubbs 1983); hence, discourse analysis should not (as is sometimes done) be understood as being a particular, grammar-oriented kind of conversational analysis.” The view that discourse is context of speech and context of situation implies that it is constitutive of exophoric phenomena related to the formal properties of texts (discourse as part of a whole). The view that discourse is “part of a whole” corroborates Asher and Simpson (1994, p. 940) who opine that “discourse is “a discrete subset of a whole language.” The external elements of discourse are shared knowledge to the participants, and this makes the linguistic elements “easy to mean”. Being sensitive to external perspectives of texts, discourse can be construed as a cross-disciplinary subject. Thus, in textual analysis, the discourse analyst is cross-domain sensitive. Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (ibid.) submit that “discourse analysis is a rapidly growing and evolving field. Current research in this field now flows from numerous academic disciplines that are very different from one another. Included, of course, are the disciplines in which models for understanding and methods for analyzing discourse first developed, such as linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy. But also included are disciplines that have applied – and thus often extended – such models and methods to problems within their own academic domains, such as communication, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and artificial intelligence.” Arguably, approaches to discourse analysis are products of its cross-disciplinary and evolving nature. The literature of pragmatics is quite instructive on the elucidation of context.³

6. Conclusion

Discourse is basically actualized speech and dominantly a social perception of language use. In the elucidation of front-burner perspectives on discourse and discourse analysis, the nexus between pragmatics and discourse analysis is brought to the fore. In discourse, inference-making is not arbitrary. It is based on participants’ knowledge about societal phenomena. This study examines critical perspectives on discourse, thereby providing insights on discourse analysis, which is a systematic, rule-governed interpretation of textual properties. In the construction of meaning, discourse assumes infinite dimensions which are evident in the discrete perspectives on the subject, as presented in this study. A balanced perspective of discourse is based on textual and extra-textual properties of communication; across discourse genres, this claim is accentuated. Conclusively, this study reveals discourse as: construction of knowledge, social phenomenon, sense and reference, ideology, linguistic convention, action, context of speech and context of situation.

Notes

¹. CDA elucidates social structure in terms of power, ideologies and the sociolinguistic underpinnings of these variables in a social system.

². Adebija (1982) cited in Adebija (1999), contends that many extended bodies of discourse have one or more Master Speech Acts. The goals of a textual analyst are clear: to identify the Master Speech Act and other speech acts connected to it; to locate the contextual structures that produced the illocutionary acts; and to identify the functions of the illocutionary acts in the text.

³. Citing NOUN (2010), Butari Nahum Upah (2018, p. 19) reports features of the physical context of a communicative event:

1. Participants, e.g. boys, girls, men, traders
2. Ongoing activity, e.g. playing, chatting, debating
3. The place, e.g. church, class, stadium, diningtable
4. The time, e.g. time of the day or season.

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