The Role and Use of Discourse Analysis to Language Teaching context

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Introduction

The basic purpose of this paper is to describe the Role and Use of Discourse Analysis to Language teaching context. The paper first deals with the concern of ontological and epistemological philosophies of knowledge. Second, it goes on discussing discourse and discourse analysis. Then, the basis of discourse analysis in relation these philosophies of knowledge is driven. Next, the paper describes the brief historical overview of discourse analysis. After that, the detail background of language teaching in relation to discourse analysis will be discussed. Here, the paper explains how communication approach to language teaching was introduced in the history of language teaching, and why special attention was given to discourse analysis within this approach. Finally, the paper describes the significant roles and uses of discourse analysis to language teaching context.

Literature Review

For Richards, (2003), ontology is the assumptions we make about the kind and nature of reality and what exists. Furthermore, for Snape and Spencer (2003 ontology is the study of 'being' and is concerned with 'what is', i.e., the nature of existence and structure of reality. Therefore, the concern of this tradition is to check whether all phenomena have the same nature, or if social realities are objective in nature or the result of individual cognition. Epistemology according to Snape & Spencer (2003), on the other hand, is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it, or how it is possible to find out about the world. The epistemological premises then are concerned with how knowledge can be acquired, communicated to other human beings, and the relationship between the knower and the world to be known.

Discourse and discourse analysis

Discourse has been defined in different ways by different writers. As to Bourdieu (1997:73) for example, discourse is a continuous stretch of language rather than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit, such as a sermon, argument, joke or narrative. This indicates that discourse is linguistic structure beyond the sentence. According to And routsopoulos (2011:47), discourse is defined as language-in-use, i.e spoken and written language that is naturally used in social context.

Discourse analysis has also been defined in different ways by different scholars. Jiang (2012), for instance, has defined discourse analysis as the study of the relationship between language and its context through shedding the light on language form and functions, spoken interaction and written texts. According to this definition, discourse analysis identifies linguistic features that characterize different genres as well as social and cultural factors that aid our interpretation and understanding of different texts and types of talk.

Hai (2004: 37) has also defined discourse analysis as the analysis of language beyond the sentence. This contrasts with types of analysis which are mainly concerned with grammar, word meanings, sounds, and rules for making meanings. Inconsistence with this Rymes (2008:12) has defined discourse analysis as the study of how language-in-use is affected by the context of its use. Here, he has provided definition of discourse analysis through concentrating on the context in which it is used.

Therefore, discourse analysis not only the surface level of linguistic analysis but also aims at setting the linguistic event in a communicative context with the intention of explaining and understanding the production and reception of texts. It gives due attention to the underlying conditions for a statement to be interpreted as meaningful and rational. Discourses analysis, thus, is the study of rationality.

Similarly, according to Constructivism tradition, for example, every (1998) argues that what science takes to be knowledge of the world is always located within an institutionally and socio-culturally determined community. According to this, our experiences, our tools such as language, and our culture are filters that shape and help to define the reality that we construct.

This indicates that discourse analysis is part of the **Constructivism approach.** Its aim is to reveal the ontological and epistemological premises which are embedded in language. In this case reality is not fixed but rather dynamic (i.e. the ontological basis of discourse analysis), and it is constructed through deep reading. This is to mean that knowledge is subjective which can be personally experienced (i.e. the epistemological basis of discourse analysis).

Historical overview of Discourse Analysis

The focus of discourse analysis in the linguistic traditions was very narrow until 1970s. The attention was only given on providing good description of grammar and pronunciation of utterances at the level of the sentence. At that time, considerations of meaning in general and how language meaning and society inter-relate, that is, language in active use in social contexts in particular had not received any serious attention of the linguists.

However, as McCarthy (2002:5) states, the linguistic philosophers like Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Grice (1975) were influential in the study of language as social action, reflected in speech-act theory and the formulation of conversational maxims, alongside with the emergence of pragmatics, which is the study of meaning in context; Halliday's functional approach to language (e.g. **Halliday 1973**) ,which emphasized the social functions of language and the thematic and informational structure of speech and writing were dominant traditional linguistics that influenced discourse analysis to view language from a broader perspective and linguistically to go beyond the sentence to explore features not captured by sentential analysis. After these philosophies, discourse analysis further went on examining how stretches of language were critically considered in their full textual, social and psychological context and become meaningful and unified for their users.

Discourse studies after 1970s, therefore, are concerned with far wider issues of language, for example, the structure of conversations, stories and various forms of written text, the implied meanings, and how language in the form of speech interacts with non-linguistic communication. In short, this shows that the relevance of discourse analysis to language teaching and learning cannot be ignored as it encompasses everything about language.

Communicative Approach to Language Teaching and Discourse Analysis

The communicative approach to language teaching, which began in the early 1970s, has made people aware of the need to focus on communicative features of language use as an integral part of the teaching program. As Richards and Rodger (1999:113*)* stated, the goal of language teaching is to enable the learner to communicate with target language, and the method for teaching is for the learner to experience and practice relevant instances of communication. The ultimate aim of communicative language teaching, therefore, is to develop learners' communicative competence. Communicative competence, according to Trappes-Lomax (2004:125), refers to the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals**.**

As Trappes-Lomax (2004) argues, Communicative competence is made up of four competences such as linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences.

> **Linguistic or grammatical competence**: It is the ability to use grammatical structures of a language in different situations to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings.
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> **ii. Sociolinguistic competence:** It is concerned with culture and social rules that govern appropriate language use. For instance, this includes knowing in what setting we need to be more formal, how we express politeness, how we address people correctly, how we treat certain topics, any taboos, and what terms are politically correct. Addressing such area tells us how to use language and how to respond in a conversation appropriately rather than just grammatically correct.
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> **iii. Strategic competence**: It is the ability of how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language in the context.
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> *iv*. **Discourse competence**: It is the ability to organize words, phrases, and sentences and produce comprehend conversations, articles, massages and literature, and the ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts. In short, it is the ability to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole. This clearly indicates that the students need to develop discourse competence to become communicatively competent.

However, as Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, (2001: 721) argued, communicative approach to language teaching is still lagging behind in developing students' real communicative competence. As they suggested the communicative approaches to language teaching could not be succeeded unless it is coupled language teachers and other teaching professionals (curriculum developers, textbook writers, language testers) with proper grounding in discourse analysis.

Concerning the profession of ELT, Michael McCarthy (2001) further said*:*

> **……..with the pressures created by the drive towards professionalization in fields such as ELT, it has become more and more important that language teachers do keep up-to-date with developments within, and relevant to their field. One such area is discourse analysis.**

Taking discourse analysis approach towards language teaching has been drawing researchers' and practitioners' attention since the introduction of discourse analysis as a discipline in social sciences. Alireza Bonyadi (2019), for example, reviewed the current research on discourse analysis and language teaching. As the result of study indicates, three approaches, namely critical discourse analysis, Descriptive discourse analysis, and Pedagogical discourse analysis have been taken by practitioners in educational context. Similarly, Chambers (2007) also reviewed current research on the developments in language studies which have contribution to the development of current landscape in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). The results of the study show that development of research area in discourse analysis, in communicative approach to language teaching and learning and in corpus linguistics have shaped the current landscape Language for Specific Purposes.

All the above evidences indicate that discourse analysis can solve problems related to language teaching in general and problems of English language teaching professions in particular.

The role and uses of Discourse analysis to Language Teaching Context

There are various theoretical and empirical evidences that show the roles and uses of discourse analysis to English teaching context. For example, Riggenbach (1990) argues that discourse analysis, i.e. the analysis of the language beyond the sentence and language in use, is an efficient teaching approach as it activates learners' need to communicate accurately and effectively with the target language. This means when students are given a chance to analyze the classroom discourse, they feel that they could play the role of a language researcher instead of being a passive recipient of other's materials and pre-packed texts. Malika Elkouti's (2017) article also reveals that discourse analysis approaches based language teaching allow target language users to focuses on meaningful and real communication. Such real communication can, of course, be carried out in speech or in writing with a variety of communicative goals. Learners of different age groups and different levels of language proficiency should have, according to such an approach, many opportunities for natural exposure to the target language during the course of study, as well as many opportunities to use the language for meaningful purposes.

Discourse analysis in the classroom would help language learners become conscious of processes in operation when producing the language they hear and use. For example speech acts, such as authentic thanking sequences by native speakers, can be examined by the language learners to see how these acts are structured. As McCarthy, M. (2001) indicates, analyzing native speaker speech may motivate learners

to think about their own language production. Upon being given appropriate opportunities to practice language use in authentic environments, language learners gain a much better and insightful understanding of the discourse patterns associated with a given genre. Through analyzing classroom discourse, both the teachers and the students can able to identify the interactional features of classroom behaviors, such as turn-taking, questioning and answering, negotiation of meaning, and feedback.

One of the goals of language teaching, therefore, is to expose learners to different kinds of discourse patterns in different interactions. Therefore, introducing of authentic materials for teaching language skills and maximizing opportunities for students' participation in classroom activities are very important for attaining this goal.

Written texts require linguistic accuracy (i.e. grammar, syntax, vocabulary) and a systematic presentation of the content; they need continuity and to be structured in a logical manner including devices that link the text together. In short, this refers to as coherence and cohesion.. Through discourse analysis, therefore, language teachers identify their students' understanding of cohesive marker and their ability to organize different written genres.

Learners can be taught English tenses through authentic pieces of discourse like a story and role play rather than providing them with individual sentences. Through discourse analysis, hence, the practitioners and learners get awareness of the relationship between pragmatics and grammar.

Discourse analysis helps the teacher as classroom action research**.** Action research is one way for teachers to monitor both the quantity and quality of students' output. Language teachers can use discourse analytic techniques as action research to investigate the interactional patterns in their classrooms and see how these patterns promote or hinder opportunities for learners to practice the target language. This process allows language teachers to study their own teaching behavior, especially the frequency, distribution and types of questions they use and their effect on students' responses. In this case, discourse analysis should provide the main frame of reference for decision-making in language teaching and learning.

Ivanov (2009), for example, conducted the a research on the   application of discourse analysis in EFL reading skill, the result showed that that discourse analysis made a paradigm shifts in teaching reading skills in that it first changed the focus from linguistic study of text to study of language in use, and bottom-up / top-down approach to interactive approach.

As implications of his study, Ivanov suggested that EFL teachers as well as syllabus designers should delineate genres that are essential and relevant to particular learners' needs and to include them in class content and textbooks.

Conclusion

Discourse analysis is part of the Constructivism approach, and it aims to reveal the ontological and epistemological premises which are embedded in language. Its focus until 1970s was only providing good description of grammar and pronunciation of utterances at the level of the sentence. After the introduction of dominant linguistic theories like speech-act theory alongside with the emergence of pragmatics and functional approach to language, discourse analysis started look at far wider issues of language, for example, the structure of conversations, stories and various forms of written text, the implied meanings, and how language in the form of speech interacts with non-linguistic communication.

It is argued that communicative approach to language teaching cannot be fully realized unless language teachers are equipped up with theoretical and practical issues in discourse analysis and reconsider their perceptions and practice about language teaching. It is believed that the pedagogical consequence of taking such an approach in language teaching would result in a teaching methodology which is highly contextualized, full of authentic instances of language uses in different social situations. Discourse analysis should provide teachers the main frame of reference for decision-making in language teaching and learning

 English language teachers, therefore, need to understand the significance of discourse competence in communication and they should design their teaching strategies from a discourse analysis perspective as it enables their students to use the language in an active process of negotiating meaning not only grammatically correct sentences but also producing functionally appropriate and effective utterances in different contexts.

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