The Development of Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Many researchers have been interested in analysing discourse. Discourse analysis has been a result of a number of research works from different perspectives. It has attracted attention from different disciplines since the late 1960s (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). To this end, the aim and the focus of this paper is to shed some light on the development of discourse analysis through the contributions of various approaches, specifically the works of Halliday, Crystal and Davy, Halliday and Hasan, Widdowson, Coulthard, Sinclair and Coulthard, de Beaugrande and Dressler and others.

Keywords: discourse analysis; register analysis; general stylistics; textual function; textual cohesion; text linguistics; rhetorical structure analysis; conversational analysis; discourse as communication

اهتم العديد من الباحثين بتحليل الخطاب. كان هذا نتيجة للعديد من الاعمال البحثية من وجهات نظر مختلفة. لقد لفت تحليل الخطاب انتباه تخصصات مختلفة (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

الهدف من هذا المقال هو القاء بعض الضوء على تطور تحليل الخطاب من خلال أعمال

Halliday ,,Crystal and Davy Halliday and Hasan ,,Widdowson ,Coulthard ,Sinclair and Coulthard de Beaugrande and Dressler. و آخرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب; السجل اللغوي; الأسلوبية العامة; الوظيفة النصية; التماسك النصي; اللسانيات النصية; تحليل البنية البلاغية; تحليل محادثة

Introduction

The development of discourse analysis (henceforth DA) has been a result of research works of a number of scholars such as Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964) as cited in (Coulthard, 1977; Widdowson, 1979) who attempted to analyse texts. In their works, they were not interested in how sentences related to each other in sequence, but in defining language varieties in terms of formal items occurrences. The following will expose some of the works that contributed to the development of DA.

1. Register Analysis

For Halliday (1985), "register" is a 'semantic concept' that can be defined as "*a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode and tenor*" (p. 39) and that also includes 'the expressions, the lexico-grammatical and phonological features, that typically accompany or realize these meanings' (ibid, p. 39). Widdowson (1979) says:

> *It is by their formal properties that registers are defined. If two samples of language activity from what, on non-linguistic grounds, could be considered different situation-types show no differences in grammar or lexis, they are assigned to one and the same register… (ibid, p. 91).*

It is apparent that '*register analysis*' is concerned with types of texts. The focus of register analysis was at the word and sentence level and on identifying the registers that characterised different uses of language such as academic textbooks, technical writing and so on (Richards, 2001).

Register analysis was based on classifying texts according to specific criteria as follows:

1. Field of discourse (subject matter) such as 'the war in Gaza'
2. Mode of discourse (medium): it refers to the function of the text in the event whether spoken or written
3. Style of discourse (tenor): formal, informal,…

Register analysis is, as Harris's work, a kind of text analysis. To put it differently, it has nothing to do with discourse analysis since it has not given importance to any sociological elements. Widdowson (1979) criticises register analysis framework saying that

> *…a register analysis which atomizes discourse into linguistic elements characterizes a sample of language quantitatively as a manifestation of the language system is realized qualitatively in particular instances as communicative activity. It accounts of language as instances of linguistic usage but not as instances of communicative use (p. 39).*

It is clear enough that register analysis has nothing to do with DA since it pays no attention to communicative elements. Halliday et al. (1964) classified texts based on linguistic elements depending on the formal properties they had. For example, scientific texts were classified as including more passive voice than other types of texts.

2. General Stylistics

Crystal and Davy (1969) tried to refine the work of Halliday et al (1964) by proposing 'general stylistics'. However, their work seemed to be based on classifying features of language in a formal way. They confirm that their analysis does not go beyond linguistic theory. Widdowson argues that what they did was merely breaking sentences into their formal constituent elements. No social consideration has been given importance.

3. Textual Function

Another attempt to analyse texts was the one of Halliday (1970). The latter views 'text' as the basic unit of analysis. He states clearly:

> *The basic unit of language is not a word or a sentence but a 'text'; and the 'textual' component in language is the set of options by means of which a speaker or writer is enabled to create texts− to use language in a way that is relevant to the context' (ibid, 1970, p. 160−161).*

Halliday (ibid) distinguished between cohesion and what he called, too, '*the external or situational aspects of text*'. The latter is referred to as 'coherence'. Moreover, he, following the functional school, proposed three types of 'functions' expressed through the use of language. Halliday (ibid) argues that '*The nature of language is closely related to the demands that we make on it, the functions it has to serve.*' (p. 141). These functions are: '*ideational*', '*interpersonal*', and '*textual*'. The first function is related to the content, i.e., the writer's or the speaker's experience of the world. The second function's role is establishing and maintaining social relationships. These include communication roles which are created by language. Textual function assists the writer/speaker to construct connected discourse or texts that are related to a specific context. This function enables the listener and the reader to distinguish 'text' from 'non-text' (ibid).

4. Textual Cohesion

Other approaches to analysing texts focused on cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1976) studied grammatical cohesion. What they were attempting to do was analysing a text as a whole unit, not as separate sentences. For Halliday and Hasan (1976), 'A text is regarded as a SEMANTIC unit: a unit not of form but of meaning.' (p. 2). This view is similar to the one of Harris (1952 as cited in Coulthard, 1977). However, unlike Harris's focus on chains of equivalences, Hasan's significant work concentrated on studying and describing cohesive devices which bind sentences to form a text. Besides, Halliday and

Hasan (ibid) distinguished between internal and external aspects of textuality. The first aspect refers to cohesion whereas the second to how language connects with the situation in which it takes place in a meaningful manner.

However, though Halliday and Hasan's (1976) work has been very significant in that it includes a satisfactory description of cohesive devices, it has been criticised for analysing the text per se without considering other criteria. Brown and Yule (1983) state clearly that '*Halliday & Hasan are not concerned to produce a description which accounts for how texts are understood. They are, rather, concerned to examine the linguistic resources available to the speaker / writer to mark cohesive relationships*' (p. 204). The major criticism of this work lies in the fact that they view text as meaningful only when it is cohesive.

5. Text Linguistics

Another line of research which attempted to analyse texts is Text Linguistics. As DA, text linguistics is concerned with the study of texts both written and spoken. This approach pioneered by Northern European researchers such as van Dijk (1972) and de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). It focuses on cohesion and coherence besides other criteria of textual communication such as, *informativity*, *situationality*, *acceptability*, *intertextuality*, and *intentionality*. In other words, this approach goes beyond the study of the abstract nature of language to describe it in its social context. That is, there is a focus on both the producer and the receiver of language and the forms of language themselves. As mentioned above, de Beaugrande and Dressler suggested seven standards of textuality in studying texts (ibid) as follows:

- **Cohesion**: *it refers to the connectedness of sentences within a text.*
- **Coherence**: *this is related to how the components of the textual world are 'mutually accessible and relevant'* (p. 12).
- **Intentionality**: *it concerns the attitude of the text's producer.*
- **Acceptability**: *this concerns the attitude of the text's receiver.*
- **Informativity**: *it concerns the extent to which the given information is known or not known by the receiver.*
- **Situationality**: *this concerns what makes a text relevant to a situation of occurrence.*
- **Intertextuality**: *it concerns the factors which make the understanding of the text at hand dependent on the writer's and reader's knowledge of another text.*

Cognitive approaches such as de Beaugrande and Dressler's have influenced along with schema theory the reading view. To explain more, they have been greatly interested in the knowledge that the reader brings when reading a text. For them, the interaction between the text and the reader's knowledge results in the ability to interpret the text by means of relating sentences to one another and of combining units of meaning for the sake of creating a coherent text.

Though de Beaugrande and Dressler's approach has attracted much attention and yielded significant insights, it remains in need of communicative factors.

6. Rhetorical Structure Analysis

A similar approach to text analysis is found in '*rhetorical structure analysis*' school (Carter & Nunan, 2001). This trend is interested in the way '*units of meaning (which are not necessarily sentences) relate to one another in a hierarchy*' (p. 52). Besides, it investigates how texts are constructed on the basis of propositions. This school has been interested in the main in 'reading' and 'writing'. Winter's (1977, 1982) works on text analysis have been influential (ibid). Also, his follower, Hoey (1983) has explored how readers construct a sequence in a written text such as 'situation → problem → response → evaluation → solution'.

7. Conversational Analysis

Spoken discourse has been studied by many applied linguists and Conversational analysis is related to the works of sociologists and sociolinguists such as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) and Sacks et al (1974) as cited in McCarthy (2001). Their main concern was on analysing conversations. Scheggloff and Sacks

(ibid) focused on the way participants end conversations whereas Sacks et al (ibid) on 'turn-taking in talk' (McCarthy, 2001, p. 51). Others such as Pomerantz (1984) concentrated on the way participants agree and disagree (Cited in McCarthy, ibid). The business of conversational analysts is to '*study the local events in detail*' (McCarthy, ibid). For example:

- how pairs of adjacent utterances constrain each other (adjacency pairs such as *Congratulations→ Thanks*);
- how speakers use discourse markers (such as *well* and *you know*) to signal interactive features (Schiffrin 1987);
- how they sum up the gist of the conversation at regular intervals using 'formulations' (Heritage and Watson 1979), etc.

<div align="right">(McCarthy, ibid, p. 51)</div>

The work of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), representing the Birmingham school, is very significant. It was based on analysing spoken discourse (McCarthy, 2001). Their approach labelled IRF meaning *Initiation*, *Response*, *Feedback*, focused on analysing the interaction between the teacher and pupils in a classroom. According to them, the behaviour of both the teacher and the pupils was affected by many factors. The main ones are:

- The setting: typically large, teacher-fronted classes;
- The institutional roles: teacher as knower and source of input, as evaluator of pupil response and as controller of topics; pupils as receptors and respondents, communicating with the teacher, not their peers;
- The goals: transmission of knowledge of knowledge through question and answer sessions or through controlled discussion, display of key knowledge and testing of its reception. (ibid, p. 50)

McCarthy (ibid) argued that the above mentioned contextual features '*were reflected in structural features*' (p. 50). He continued arguing that sequences are sometimes predictable while they are not at other times. For instance, the following sequence '*teacher-question → pupil-answer → teacher-feedback*' was predictable while others such as the following:

- Initiation (I)   Teacher: What does 'slippery' mean?
- Response (R)   Pupil: That you can fall, because the floor is polished.
- Follow-up (F)   Teacher: Yes, you can fall, you can slip, good. (ibid)

were not.

Though the Sinclair-Coulthard model approach was very influential in that it was applicable even outside the classroom, it has been criticised by mainly Politzer (1980) as cited in (McCarthy, 2001). The latter claims that the model was inadequate in terms of objectivity in describing classroom interaction in a proper way, suggesting that a more sociolinguistic model was needed (ibid).

8. Discourse as Communication

Other approaches concentrated on the communicative aspect of discourse. Coulthard (1977) and Widdowson (1978; 1979) have studied DA. Coulthard (ibid) aimed to establish a framework that describes the communicative competence through interrelating '*linguistic form, semantic interpretation and pragmatic use*' (p. ix). It was a call for researchers to extend their area of study to include Prague, Halliday, Labov, Austin, Grice and other schools such as Birmingham.

Widdowson (1978) argues for teaching language as communication. For him, teaching language as communication implies dealing with discourse rather than isolated 'notions' or 'functions' or even isolated 'sentences'. DA, according to Widdowson (ibid), goes hand in hand with the communicative approach.

Widdowson (1979) argued that there are two approaches to the description of discourse. He explains by saying that:

> *One takes instances of discourse as the starting point and makes statements*
> *about how they are structured as units of communication of one sort or another.*
> *The other takes the sentence as its starting point and investigates its potential*
> *for generating discourse (Widdowson, 1979, p. 114).*

He continues explaining that the direction of the first approach is from '*communicative function to linguistic form*' (ibid) whereas in the second, it is '*from linguistic form to communicative function*' (1979, 114). The first approach starts with instances of discourse and moves down to linguistic units. The second starts with the abstract potential of linguistic expressions, i.e., the sentence and goes upwards. In other words, the author points out that the focus in the first approach is on the context in which linguistic forms take place. This context gives those linguistic forms their communicative value as utterances. In the second approach, the focus is on the meaning of linguistic forms since they are elements of the code and which have implication of utterances. Widdowson (ibid) illustrates the distinction between the two approaches by giving the following example:

> *Is someone laughing?* (ibid, p. 115)

If the above example is considered as a sentence, we will say that its form is interrogative which means that its function in discourse is a 'question' (asking for information). However, if it is considered as an 'utterance' in a particular context, then, circumstances of its occurrence are taken into account too. And this allows for the interpretation of its realised meaning. For Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), in the classroom context, '*Any declarative or interrogative is to be interpreted as a command to stop if it refers to an action or activity which is proscribed at the time of utterance*' (p. 32 in Widdowson, 1979). This means that '*there is no one-to-one correspondence between the signification of linguistic forms and their communicative value as utterances in context*' (Widdowson, ibid, p. 116).

9. Discourse as Language in Use

Brown and Yule (1983) studied DA. In fact, they relied on pragmatics in the interpretation of discourse whether it is spoken or written. Their focus was on how people use language for communication and, particularly, how addressers produce linguistic messages and how addressees work on those linguistic messages to interpret them (ibid). They state clearly:

> *We have adopted a compromise position which suggests that discourse analysis*
> *on the one hand includes the study of linguistic forms and the regularities of*
> *their distribution and, on the other hand, involves a consideration of the*
> *general principles of interpretation by which people normally make sense of*
> *what they hear and read (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. x).*

As they argue, analysing discourse is analysing language in use which entails the description of linguistic forms in connection with the functions and purposes these forms serve in human affairs. The authors state clearly that ''*Doing discourse analysis' certainly involves 'doing syntax and semantics*'', but it primarily consists of 'doing pragmatics' ' (ibid, p. 26).

Conclusion

To conclude, DA has inspired many researchers for decades and each of them has studied this discipline from his/her point of you. What has been mentioned above is only a drop in the ocean. All that we can say is that DA remains an interesting developing discipline, and novice researchers should be aware of the contributions of the aforementioned approaches that led to its development. In fact, new approaches to discourse analysis have emerged such as "multimodal discourse" and "specialised discourses", to mention a few.

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