

COVENANT UNIVERSITY
NIGERIA

TUTORIAL KIT
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PROGRAMME: LANGUAGES

COURSE: ENG 323

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ENG 323: Introduction to Discourse Analysis

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1. Explain of the term, 'discourse'.
2. Highlight the features of discourse.
3. What are the basic assumptions of discourse analysis.
4. What do you understand by conversation analysis?
5. Explain any five features of spoken discourse.
6. Explain what is meant by adjacency pairs.
7. Briefly explain the concept of 'reference' in discourse.
8. What does 'turn-taking' mean in conversation analysis?
9. How can you illustrate 'inference' in your analysis of a sample text.
10. What is Critical Discourse Analysis?
11. Briefly explain the concept of presupposition in discourse.
12. How is Discourse Analysis different from Conversation Analysis?
13. What are the basic functions of discourse?
14. Discuss 'context' as central to discourse analysis.
15. What does 'discourse analysis' involve?
16. What's the difference between 'utterance' and 'sentence'?
17. Explore the various kinds of context in which discourse may occur.
18. Explain what is meant by the 'social theory of discourse'.
19. Explain discourse at text.
20. Collect a simple online discourse data and do a discourse analysis of it.

ANSWERS TO TUTORIAL QUESTIONS

1. *Traditionally, discourse is language in use (Brown & Yule 1983) in practical communication, constructed in texts – spoken or written. Discourse analysis is therefore an investigation of language in use as expressed in talk and text in context (van Dijk, 1997b). Many scholars, working in the tradition of conversation analysis view discourse as conversation/conversational exchange (Stubbs 1983). According Trask (1999), the work of a Conversation analyst is that of studying the way individuals experience their everyday activities, endeavouring to deduce from observation what speakers do and how they do it. And one major aspect of this study is to investigate the nature and structure of conversation, how speakers take turns, and how this reveals speakers roles, their patterns of individual relationships, and their positions within larger institutional structures (Howarth, 2000). According to Onadeko (2000) discourse must be a “naturally occurring/spontaneous conversation or what is meant to be so rendered in written mode, which exists between at least two participants in a social context” (2000:83). It is “interactional talk or conversation in different social contexts” (Adegbija 1999:186). There is*

no consensus as to whether to include “written text” as Stubbs did. However, Cook (1989:7) concludes that “discourse is anything from a grunt or simple expletive (e.g. damn! Shit!) through short conversations and scribble notes right up to Tolstoy’s novel: War and Peace, or a lengthy legal case. What matters is not its conformity to rules, but the fact that it communicates and is recognized by its receivers as coherent.”

3. *Deborah Schiffrin (1983) proposes “assumptions of discourse analysis” as follows:
Language always occurs in Context
Language is sensitive to Context
Language is Communicative and is designed for Communication.*
5. *Conversation; Discourse Opening and Closing; Topic Negotiation; Turn + Turn taking; Discourse interruption; Speech Errors; Repair mechanism; Role sharing; Speech Events*
7. *Certain references that speakers or writers make are significant. A speaker or writer sometimes uses one thing to refer to another and expects his listener or reader to understand the connection. Often names associated with things are used to refer to people and names of people can refer to things. E.g. I lost my “Soyinka” in the accident. (Soyinka refers to a book).*
9. *Inference is “the deductive process through which something is worked out or made explicit in terms of what is unspoken or unwritten” (Wales 1989:248). The reader/hearer works out what is unsaid or intended from what is said. “I may never travel by air again, if I survive this one” implies that the speaker must have had some unfavourable experiences by air travel.*
11. *Speakers or writers usually design their message on the assumption that the hearer or reader already has a degree of the knowledge of what is being communicated. What the speaker assumes the hearer already knows about the subject and the context of the information is known as presupposition. Inference is actually based on presupposition because whether an inference is right or wrong, the hearer is acting upon relevant information about the subject.*
13. *Brown and Yule (1983) identify two functions of discourse (which are relevant to us here) (1) Transactional function. Transactional discourse genre mainly gives information either on one-on-one basis or in groups – informs; educate etc. (2) Interational function_– is to establish and sustain social relationships.*
15. *DA has been used in answering many questions about language. For instance, how do words, sentences and utterances get associated with meanings? How does language change? How do children learn to talk and how do people learn new languages? etc. Thus, discourse analysts often start with research questions, such as linguistic structure, about language change, about meaning and language acquisition. Other discourse analysts ask questions that are interdisciplinary (i.e. questions asked in other disciplines) such as social roles and relations, communication and identity. What distinguishes a discourse analyst from another research in another discipline is how the discourse analyst sets out to answer these questions, i.e. by analyzing discourse (by examining aspects of the structure and function of language use (Johnstone, 2008).*

A discourse analyst will often want to divide stretches of discourse into parts based on some criteria and then look at particular characteristics of each part. It may also involve breaking to functions. (For a detailed description of how to do 'analysis' see Johnstone 2008:4-5). In doing CDA, the discourse analyst may want to investigate how language is used (often in the media and political discourse) to express ideology, and promote oppression. For example how those in power use language to promote inequality, domination and abuse of power. (See, Fairclough, 1989, van Dijk, 1998; 2001).

17. *Physical/Environmental Context;
Situational/Socio-cultural Context
Institutional Context*

A Text might be a conversation (or discussion); television debates, an email or an extended correspondence, a narrative, a book, a newspaper report or an editorial; a webpage, blogs, facebook text etc. Either of these constitutes actual instances of discourse referred to as 'text.' Spoken texts often appear as transcripts or video-recordings. By capturing changing written texts (e.g. blogs and webpages) at a particular time, and recording and transcribing non-written texts, we transform them into physical objects; we fix their structure and give them boundaries (Johnstone, 2008). The analyst decides how to delimit chunks of data and make them texts and treat them in more traditional way as we treat written texts. The choices we make as analysts as to what we consider as text for analysis is a choice not only about what to include but also about what to exclude. Such choices about what and how much to treat as a complete unit and where to draw its boundaries is very important for the conclusions we draw. Even written texts rely on the result of decisions we make about how much we include in a text based on culture-specific expectations. The question of how much texts are enough depends on the purpose of analysis, but most analyst start with a small data in order to make qualitative claims, i.e. claims about why and how certain features occur in the data and make possible suggestions about the likelihood of the same thing occurring elsewhere. A text like a blog or a wiki must be sampled at one or more times. One of the features of these forms of discourse that makes them different from other forms of writing is that they change faster and more continuous, so treating them as if they were analogous to writing on paper may obscure one of the things that is most interesting about how online discourse works (Johnstone, 2008:20-22).