An Overview of the Process in Conducting Research in Social Sciences Using Discourse Studies Perspective

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Abstract
This theoretical paper aims to give an overview of the research process involved in researching Social Sciences using the Discourse Studies perspective. Discourse Studies (DS), Discourse Analysis (DA), and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been emerging disciplines in recent times which tend to be interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary and almost all the disciplines in social sciences and some under natural sciences can benefit from them immensely. The paper attempts to build a robust theoretical framework and give future researchers useful guidelines who may want to utilize the principles and practices under DS, DA, and CDA to reach valid findings and give strong recommendations while researching in their disciplines. It will help the researchers contribute to the existing body of knowledge under the umbrella of the fast-emerging disciplines of DS, DA, and CDA by analyzing data to reach striking findings for the maximum benefit of their studies' stakeholders.
Keywords: Research Process, Discourse Studies, Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences

Introduction
This theoretical paper aims to give an overview of Discourse Studies (DS) as an interdisciplinary field and discuss empirical approaches in discourse analysis (e.g., conversational, pragmatics, quantitative, and qualitative strands). Subsequently, it will discuss how Discourse Studies (DS), Discourse Analysis (DA), and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as disciplines are becoming more eclectic. It highlights how the researchers are increasingly combining their approaches, methods, and techniques in their research and how researchers from other disciplines can benefit using the DS perspective. This paper discusses the significance of research in discourse studies and the multiple levels of the discourse process. It then sheds light on the possible processes involved in researching social sciences under the umbrella of discourse studies focusing on the role of text-talk-visual in the meaning-making process in humans' lives in their social contexts.

"Talk lives in a man's head, but sometimes it is very lonely because, in the heads of many men, there is nothing to keep it company— and so the talk goes out through the lips"— **West with the Night (Beryl Markham, 1983).** Our talks are tools available to all humans that lead to discourse. The moment our talks go out through lips, they encounter society. Here the linguistic content meets the social context. Imagine the complexity of a situation where one finds it hard to make sense of a talk where they are not sure who is talking or what the general topic is. Thus, it is the term discourse that takes us to the use of language above sentence-level and considers the context of its use (Flowerdew, 2013). As discourse is the use of language in its context, discourse analysis (DA) is the examination of language form, function, and meaning making in humans' lives. It refers to any stretch of spoken, written, and visual language. Though it is arguably most associated with linguistics, now it has adopted an interdisciplinary approach and can be employed to a diverse range of fields like sociology, psychology, anthropology, communication studies, business studies, educational studies, law, media, philosophy, politics, and many others in addition to linguistics. In short, DA is involved

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and is useful in any discipline where meaning-making efforts are made by seeing the relationship of text form and its function.

The question, what brings meaning to any text?, opens up the manifold contribution of Discourse Studies (DS) as an interdisciplinary field and a core to research in many dimensions. Primarily, in discourse studies, discourse works as a unit that defines meanings of social interactions and communication among participants. It potentially works as a social practice of participants communicating through linguistics and other semiotics in a specific context. Researchers in the field often endeavor to prove the role of discourse as a constitutive agent for social realities, structures, and subjectivities. Thus, DA's significance gains new heights because of its utility for past, present, and future generations.

Discourse Analysis (DA) can be conducted in any field of activity today where humans are engaged in interaction and communication using the language. Our language does not have a fixed or objective meaning as our Discourses are always connected with other Discourses, which are produced synchronically and subsequently. There are a host of situational factors that colors our discourse/s. Thus, an analyst's job becomes very demanding when he or she wants to show how interpretations of contexts are made, unmade, and transmuted across history and social interaction. Discourse Studies tend to provide solutions to problems to make our shared journeys much more straightforward. Every human has a mental filter that is different from those around him. Whenever he or she acts, speaks, or writes, the discourse spins in the process across time and context. Discourse changes the governments, goes to war, makes peace, and runs businesses. In such circumstances, the discourse analyst deepens the understanding of such conversations using proper frameworks to give rise to new Discourses— even better ones, to make better sense of the world and a better sense of other human beings producing such Discourses. Thus, 'why discourse' and 'who cares' have become important questions today. Our expectations go beyond abstract concepts like syntax and semantics and focus on real language, real participants, and real situations. Now, the analysts must deliver more than flowery descriptions and sophisticated theories because the thing in question is not just language but also beyond that sphere. Hymes' (1972) Communicative Competence also heavily relies on the notion that there are rules of use without which grammar rules would be useless. Thus, the goal in Discourse Studies is to *read between the lines* to understand layers of meanings added by institutional and social aspects like power imbalance, gender, conflicts, racism, and cultural background.

Research Process in Discourse Studies

In recent times, researches in discourse studies have moved from scholarly applications to real-world applications. Whatever the field, research in Discourse Studies, Discourse Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on the broad and general use of language within and between particular social groups to gain a more in-depth insight into the human psyche at play in communities, ethnic groups, nations, societies, cultures, and civilization at large. These disciplines shape the world view and refine the individuals' perceptions when engaged in interaction and communication with each other on all the layers— seen and hidden.

Researching Discourse Studies is like unpacking the layers of an onion. It is so because there are different features of discourse to focus on one hand and an abundance of methodological and theoretical approaches on the other hand. Discourse is a very sophisticated and complicated process. If we take the onion analogy, we must start with the first layer. The **first** layer begins with lexis and shows how Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approaches to discourse, and the theory of *Register* reveals a systematic variation in discourse according to the situation. Here we see a network of systems and choices at play. Halliday and his followers (Halliday et al., 1964) developed this theory of SFL to show what language does and how it does, in contrast to the structural approaches which merely floated at the surface or structural level. Discourse Studies make use of the model of speech function effectively. Building upon that, recently, new speech function models have emerged for a more detailed Discourse Analysis.

Taking the onion analogy along, we come across 'Cohesion' when we unpack the **second** layer. These are the linguistic features (cohesive devices) that hold the text together in discourse. Halliday, M.A.K., and Hasan (1976) classified those linguistic devices into five categories: many linguists have taken up substitution, ellipsis, reference, lexical cohesion, and conjunction, and these devices for research in discourse. While doing research, the researcher needs to keep in mind that

cohesion is different from coherence. The former deals with the formal links between clauses. Whereas the latter deals with the inclusive interpretation of a text as a unified piece of discourse.

The **third** layer is that of *Thematic Development*, which shows how the information is organized in the clauses to hold the text and talk together for textual functions. Researches in this field show that various 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approaches have been developed, which provide a means of orienting and developing new information in the text. The theme-rhyme relationships vary according to different registers having different patterns of thematic development.

The **fourth** layer comprises 'Pragmatics', and by unpacking this layer, we get to know about the communicative actions performed by language. Research in discourse does not only talk about the literal meaning. It also considers the non-literal aspects of speech. Here we distinguish what is said from what is done. We take the function away from the form, and for the function, we use a more usual term in linguistics called 'speech acts'. These acts are basic discourse units, just as words, sentences, and clauses are basic grammar units. The cooperative principle, politeness, and implicature are also crucial domains of pragmatics, and they vary in discourse from speaker to speaker and culture to culture, making discourse studies even more exciting.

The **fifth** layer exposes another approach to discourse called Conversational Analysis (CA), where we look at structures creating order in conversation and other forms of spoken communication. Here, the focus shifts to the sociological inquiry by working inductively on some empirical data of naturally occurring talk to describe social interaction not from the outside but the inside, i.e., from the user's perspective.

The **sixth** layer unveils 'genre,' which relates to staged goal-oriented activities shared by communities under study. Genres are either acquired or taught. In the field of Applied Linguistics and Educational Linguistics, genre refers to different communicative events associated with settings in focus, for example, academic lectures, recipes, religious sermons, political speeches, and business reports, etc. They are analyzed using different discourse tools and approaches. In the modern era, corpus-based approaches (discussed in detail in the next section) are also used to analyze a large amount of text automatically. It is done to reveal patterns that may not be visible to the naked eye. Another advantage of this type of approach is that it can identify the cumulative effect of discourse.

All the layers mentioned above work in close harmony with each other forming different levels of communication. Whether we take words, phrases, grammar, structures, genre, conversational codes, or verbal-nonverbal aspects of speech, the analysis varies across all these different levels, but the core remains the same even when the content varies according to the context. Every layer is analyzed with a different methodology and approach, but the main idea persists, and that is to have a deeper understanding of the whole process of discourse, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Research in discourse is a predominantly qualitative and interpretative method of analysis. Though the analysts use different approaches and techniques for conducting discourse analysis, there are some necessary steps that one needs to follow whenever one undertakes this process of research in Discourse Studies (DS) (Lou, 2019). In the *first* step, it is necessary to define the research question/s deduced from the well-worded title expressing clear dependent and independent variables, and then the content is selected for analysis. It ranges from large volumes of material to small samples, depending on the research's time, space, aims, and research objectives. The *second* step involves collecting information and relevant theory on the context to build up a theoretical framework leading to the undertaken study's conceptual framework. The researcher gathers factual details of when and where the content was created. In this way, the literature review is conducted, the theoretical framework is constructed, and the previous studies' research gaps are highlighted. In the *third* step, one looks for themes and patterns in the content, and the data collected through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches. Various elements of the material like words, sentences, paragraphs, and overall structures are carefully examined concerning the themes, patterns, and attributes relevant to the research questions formulated in the light of research objectives. In the *fourth* step, which also happens to be the last step, the researcher reviews the results, draws conclusions, comes up with striking findings, gives strong recommendations, and highlights the implications for further researches. It is possible when the researchers assign attributes to the elements of material, and they reflect on the results to examine the meaning and function of the language used. In short, the whole analysis is considered both in a broader context and a specific one established earlier to

conclude research questions. Thus, the analysis can go in both directions— micro level and macro level.

Many social theorists, philosophers, and linguists have drawn attention to the fundamental role of language in society at micro and macro levels. They bring together social theory and textual analysis to uncover the hidden assumptions to bring about social change, giving the analyst a vibrant reformist. Thus, Discourse Studies help understand and interpret language and help in decision-making by exposing the peculiarities of human behavior in specific social contexts. Be it Fairclough's (2001) model of critical discourse analysis, or Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Van Dijk's (2008) Socio-cognitive model, or Martin's (2004) recent Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA), one idea remains the same, and that is DISCOURSE! It is a nerve-wracking job for all the analysts working in all the disciplines in social sciences to understand idiosyncratic linguistic behaviors. Researchers keep looking for ways to fathom human communication's depths because we are all full of discourses that we only half understand and half mean.

Thus, the contribution of discourse studies to research in social sciences cannot be taken for granted. Despite the challenges, research in Discourse Studies (DS) makes significant contributions like:

- It enables the researcher to analyze critical discourses that bring change, and it shows how the understanding meaning of a discourse shapes our behavior.
- It shows the importance of context.
- It considers the multidisciplinary perspectives that lead to new insightful dimensions.
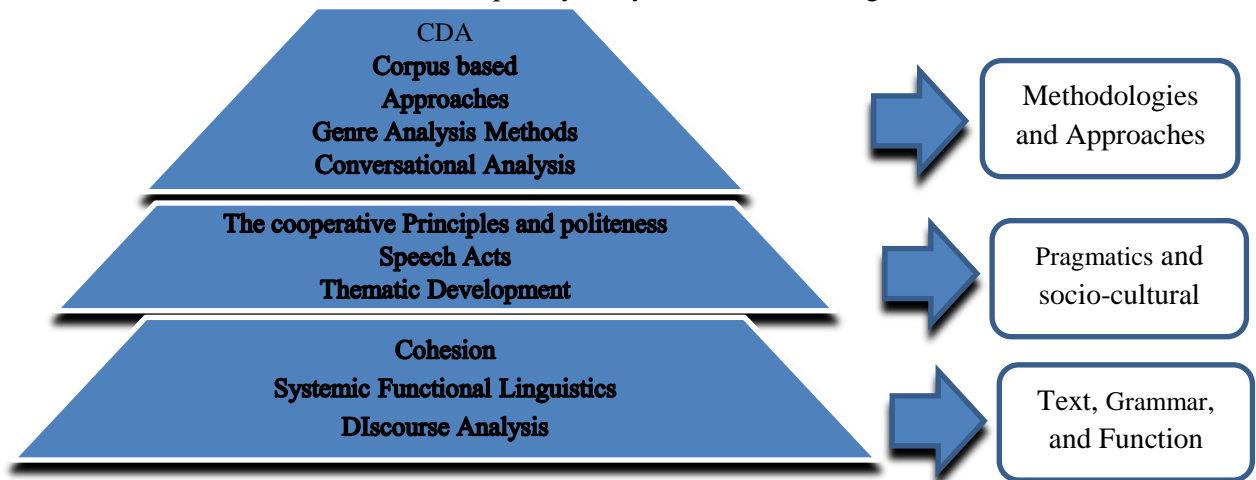
John Flowerdew (2013), in his book 'Discourse in English language Education,' lays stress on the value of Discourse Studies (DS) in research and education and defines it as a broader and comparatively emerging field than Discourse Analysis (DA). He defines discourse studies as a study of language in its context, above the sentence level. He takes Discourse Studies away from the mere analysis of language; instead, it is also concerned with its theory and application across different fields. Discourse studies, as a discipline, predominantly related to linguistics, but it is essential to other fields, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1 (Flowerdew, 2013)

Keeping in view Discourse Studies (DS) as the core in the research field, one of the challenges for anyone entering the field of Discourse Analysis is a plethora of different features in discourse to focus upon, on the one hand, and abundance of theoretical approaches and methodologies, on the other hand. There is a research need to unfold the relation of discourse with other fields, in the light of methods and approaches relevant to the research. Moreover, interdisciplinary, a distinctive feature of discourse, marks the evolution of research in this field. It provides discourse analysis, a heterogeneous epistemological framework for the investigation of discourse as a signifying system in researching
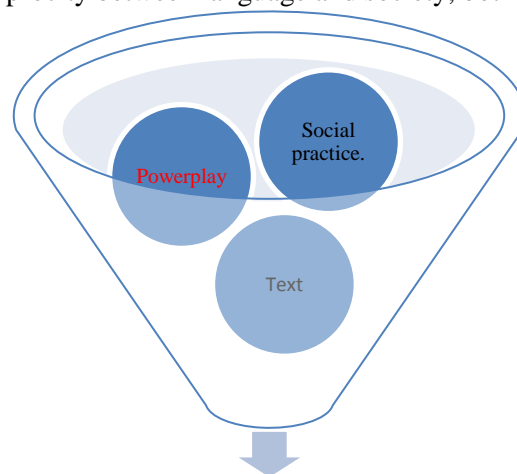
Discourse Studies. Flowerdew (2013) has developed a synthesis with different theoretical approaches and methods for discourse analysis concerning other fields, which we, personally, see a hierarchical manifestation of discourse as an interdisciplinary study, as illustrated in figure 2.

CDA
Corpus based
Approaches
Genre Analysis Methods
Conversational Analysis

The cooperative Principles and politeness
Speech Acts
Thematic Development

Cohesion
Systemic Functional Linguistics
DIscourse Analysis

Methodologies and Approaches

Pragmatics and socio-cultural

Text, Grammar, and Function

Discourse in English Language Education (Flowerdew, 2013) Figure: 2

Following the top-down approach, one may begin with critical discourse analysis as a core tenet in research and Discourse Studies (DS). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) may be visualized as a set of approaches and research methods across the board. Though, all approaches to CDA do not work exclusively but, of course, they are interrelated between and within Discourse Studies. The idea of identifying different approaches is useful in understanding what unites them and what separates them from theoretical issues. Many researchers adopted theories and methods from CDA's lens. Some tried to arrange the approaches along a cline from inductive to deductive to show *theoretical attractors* mentioned in Wodak and Meyer (2001), while others as, Hart and Cap (2014), attempted to show the relationship between different approaches and their methodological attractors.

Furthermore, Hart and Cap (2014) suggested two significant axes along which approaches can be arranged as cognitive/functional and content/structure. As far as these approaches are concerned, the multi-stage analysis may involve analyzing both content and structure at different stages or may include both cognitive and functional dimensions. Moreover, since CDA is a transdisciplinary approach to discourse drawing 'social' and 'linguistic' theory, it has been a significant influence not only on linguistics but also on business, media studies, politics, and even tourism. It reflects the interplay of power as a central theoretical issue and text as its primary analysis unit. According to Fairclough, there is a reciprocity between language and society, both interplaying with each other.

Social practice.

Powerplay

Text

Discourse Studies and CDA
Fairclough's three dimensional view of discourse
(Faiclough, 1989: 25, adapted)

Figure 3. Three-Dimensional View of Discourse

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Moreover, John Flowerdew (2013) exclusively discussed the role of Fairclough, Van Dijk, Wodak, Kress, and Van Leeuwen in the development of Critical Discourse Analysis as a discrete though united unit both in epistemological and ontological approaches to research, involving society and language with the central role of power. Researches in Social Sciences under the umbrella of Discourse Studies can be done on text, talk, and visual analysis with three dominant paradigms, such as positivism, critical theory, and interpretivism involving Critical Studies at its core. Fairclough (1992) played an important role by giving a three-dimensional role to the discourse which connects text directly with the society in focus, and many researchers have been working on the relationship of social action and text, talk, and visual, which can be mediated by interaction. The socio-cognitive model devised by Van Dijk (2008) has been used by many researchers to focus on the discursive reproduction of racism, issues in politics, stereotypical behaviors, and language processes through the socio-cognitive lens.

The corpus-based approach in research has emerged in recent times. It is essential to mention that this approach has been widely used in both Natural and Social sciences. A corpus is an extensive collection of the language used electronically, which can be used for linguistic analysis in Discourse Studies, and it helps maintain and analyze data on a large scale. Corpus linguistics can be both a methodology as well as a theory depending on the extent and purposes it is used for (Ibrahim & Younas, 2018). Researchers may use a corpus-based approach to investigate lexical, grammatical, fluency, and accuracy issues of language learners using quantitative and qualitative approaches apart from more macro socio-political issues. It can give them an added advantage of allaying the blame of having bias and subjectivity in their analysis and research. Likewise, Genre analysis takes Discourse Studies as an embracing term. Researchers have been incorporating genre analysis in different dimensions to investigate both academic and non-academic issues strategically. According to Flowerdew (2013), genre, broadly, refers to different communicative events associated with settings and have recognized functions and communicative functions. This conceptualization provides a base for research in business, religion, media, culinary skills, sermons, political speeches, curriculum vitae, business reports, text messages, online communication on Facebook and Twitter, bringing it all of them under the broad canopy of Discourse Studies.

Almost all the existing subdisciplines of linguistics can be best utilized in researching Discourse Studies. Let us turn to the relationship between society and language use in a specific context. Social interactions and behaviors have become significant in the conversational analysis as an integral part of Discourse Studies. The research on performative verbs, speech acts, pauses, and turn-taking in certain places can unfold many social, cultural, cognitive, and emotional factors. Pragmatics, as a discipline, has introduced many new dimensions in Discourse Studies to investigate social behaviors and psychological factors of interlocutors. New expectations of politeness and post-modern politeness are emerging fields for researchers to inculcate the new theories and methods in investigating modern man's mechanical behaviors. Conversational analysis sets a base for researchers to analyze the discourse of behavior and context.

Moreover, Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a challenging yet alluring field for researchers about discourse studies. According to Halliday and his followers, SFL is a network of systems and structural approaches to this system in specific contexts. Many researchers have been trying to look at the communicative approach to language learning and its use. There is a shift in the perspective of many researchers from a structural to functional approach. How can meaning be made through a set of systems in utterances and how external factors can affect language learning and cognitive factors in a context is a significant research area. The current aim now in Discourse studies it to describe language where it was initially found that is human interaction in context. Researchers are still investigating the relationship between Text Linguistics (TL) and Discourse Analysis (DA) and giving growth to new theories.

Conclusion

To conclude, the research conducted under the umbrella of DS, DA, and CDA has far more utility, relevance, and scope than other disciplines and research paradigms. The journey, which starts with text and reaches Discourse Studies, Discourse Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis, incorporates many theoretical approaches, methods, and techniques. It opens uncountable areas and issues for researchers to deal with and do the research probing. Since language and use of language is such a complex phenomenon. As a result, Discourse Studies as an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary,

transdisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary approach to research in social sciences has become a bigger umbrella bringing everything in its range. There are certain areas of interest for researchers to link text, talk, and visuals under discourse as separate units and link them to complete context. Some may focus on functional or formal approaches to language; others are working on cognitive linguistics. What is essential to consider for the researchers is their position about the context. With a clear philosophical worldview, they can build a relevant theoretical framework that can provide a proper lens to formulate researchable questions and hypotheses to reach the valid findings and add to the existing knowledge body.

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