



Electronic lectures on
Linguistics

Adapted from Yule's The Study
of Language

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Lecture 7

Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction: From Sentences to Conversations

While Pragmatics focuses on the intended meaning of an utterance, Discourse Analysis examines how we link these utterances together to create meaningful stretches of language—whether in a conversation, a novel, or a newspaper article. We don't speak in isolated sentences; we speak in coherent "discourses."

2. Core Concepts

Cohesion: The formal, linguistic ties that hold a text together.

Cohesive Ties: Words that link sentences (e.g., and, but, however).

Reference: Using pronouns or synonyms to link back to previously mentioned entities.

Ellipsis: Omitting information that is already understood (e.g., "Would you like to go?" "I'd love to [go].").

Coherence: The logical connection that exists in the mind of the reader or listener, even if the grammatical "cohesive ties" are weak. It is the ability to make sense of a text based on our experience of the world.

Speech Events: Socially regulated interactions, such as debates, interviews, or casual chats. Each has its own set of rules and expectations.

Turn-Taking: The "rules of the game" for conversation.

Turn-taking signals: How we know when it is our turn to speak (eye contact, pauses, body language).

Completion points: Places where a speaker indicates they are finished.

Hedges: Phrases used to soften a statement or show uncertainty (e.g., "sort of," "kind of," "I guess").

Background Knowledge (Schemas and Scripts):

Schema: A conventional knowledge structure in memory for a person, place, or object (e.g., your mental "schema" for a restaurant).

Script: A dynamic schema that involves a sequence of expected actions (e.g., the "restaurant script": entering, sitting, ordering, eating, paying).

3. The Cooperative Principle

Proposed by H.P. Grice, this principle states that we expect our conversational partners to contribute appropriately. It is broken down into four Maxims :

1. *Quantity:* Make your contribution as informative as required (not too much, not too little).
2. *Quality:* Try to make your contribution one that is true (don't say what you believe to be false).
3. *Relation:* Be relevant.
4. *Manner:* Be clear, brief, and orderly.

4. Key Discussion Points for Students

1. *Breaking Maxims:* Why do we sometimes intentionally break the Gricean maxims? (Hint: Think about irony, sarcasm, or trying to be polite).
2. *Scripts:* If you walked into a restaurant and the waiter asked you to dance instead of ordering food, your "restaurant script" would be broken. How do we react when social scripts are violated?
3. *Cohesion vs. Coherence:* Can a paragraph be grammatically perfect (cohesive) but completely nonsensical (incoherent)? Can it be the other way around?

5. Critical Thinking Activity: The "Conversation Transcript"

Provide a transcript of a short, messy, real-life conversation (including interruptions and fillers). Ask students to identify "turn-taking" signals, find where Grice's maxims are being followed or ignored, and discuss how the conversation remains "coherent" despite being grammatically "unstructured."

Lecture Supplement: Key Terms (Glossary)

- Cohesion:* The grammatical and lexical links within a text.
- Coherence:* The underlying logical flow of a text or conversation.
- Turn-taking:* The process of switching speakers in a conversation.
- Hedge:* A linguistic expression used to express caution or non-commitment.
- Script:* A pre-existing knowledge structure for a sequence of events.