

外教社 21世纪语言学新发展丛书

INTRODUCTION TO DISCOURSE STUDIES

语篇研究导论

JAN RENKEMA 著

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INTRODUCTION TO DISCOURSE STUDIES

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藏书章

AN RENKEMA 著



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Acknowledgments

This *Introduction to Discourse Studies* is the result of almost twenty-five years of academic and non-academic experience in teaching discourse studies. Guided by the questions and answers of hundreds of students and communication professionals, I have selected and (re)formulated what I consider the key concepts and major issues in discourse studies.

In 1992 I published my first introduction, *Discourse Studies: An Introductory Textbook*, which was reprinted several times and published in four languages. It has been the basis for this book but the enormous number of discourse studies publications and new insights of the past decade that have been incorporated here make this a very different book with over 300 source references and about 500 basic concepts explained. This book touches on various disciplines that previously did not consider discourse, and the broader, dynamic, contexts of discourse in communication science.

At the Tilburg University campus a footbridge connects the library annex e-learning center with the area of the lecture halls. In lecturing I have always considered myself a human bridge between all the books, journals and websites, and the question marks in the students' eyes. And when, in rare moments, these students left my lectures with more insight and more questions, I was grateful to have been a medium for this transfer. I hope that by studying this book and trying to deal with all the questions and assignments students will catch a glimpse of this joy of lecturing. In my opinion this is the best guarantee for a fruitful future in activities concerning discourse.

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Discourse Studies Group at Tilburg University, especially for the opportunity to do research in the USA as a Fulbright fellow. Furthermore, they gave me the chance to be confronted with many student questions abroad while lecturing in different academic cultures, such as at Japanese, South American, South African and German universities. I guess that in past decades I have discussed dozens of the problems brought up in this book with over a hundred colleagues from all over the world. Most of them are mentioned in the bibliography.

There are two people who I would like to thank personally. First, Bertie Kaal at Benjamins Publishers for stimulating me to found a journal on Document Design, which provides me with many new contacts, and for supporting me in "just writing down the notes" of my lectures. Second, Eric Daamen who was of invaluable support in assisting me in reference and index work and all the time-consuming aspects of text production. During this work he became more than only an assistant.

I hope that this course book will help teachers in discourse studies and related or overlapping domains such as communication science, pragmatics, rhetoric, stylistics, conversational analysis and design studies. If they consider this introduction a textbook for their basic courses that can take half of the work out of their hands, then I have done a useful job. Most of all, however, I hope that the bridge I built between the insights in the phenomenon discourse and the students' interest will motivate students to cross it. Perhaps after graduating they will even be stimulated to build a bridge themselves, somewhere between the academic island and the various professional areas where they end up. In any case, I would like to encourage both teachers and students to send me any comments or suggestions that might arise from using this textbook. All contributions are welcome. Please see www.janrenkema.nl for contact information.

Fall 2003, Tilburg University

Jan Renkema

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1 Introduction

1.1 A rough definition of discourse studies

Discourse studies is the discipline devoted to the investigation of the relationship between form and function in verbal communication. This short but rough definition is the point of departure for this book. The definition prompts the following questions:

1. What is meant by the relationship between form and function?
2. Is it really necessary to have a separate discipline for the investigation of this relationship?

Answers to these two questions are given in this section. The aim and structure of this book are discussed in the next two sections.

What is meant by the relationship between form and function? Consider the following example of a fragment of verbal communication.

- (1) A: Say, there's a good movie playing tonight.
B: Actually, I have to study.
A: Too bad.
B: Yes, I'm sorry.
A: Well, I guess I don't need to ask you if you want me to pick you up.

In this example, A's first utterance is in the form of a statement that there is a good movie playing that night. The function of this statement, however, is that of an invitation to B. B knows that A's statement is meant to be an invitation. B could have responded by simply saying, "That's nice" or "I didn't know that." But B responds with a statement in turn expressing a need to study that evening. B's response counts as a refusal of the invitation. A's statement of regret shows that this interpretation is not mere conjecture.

In this fragment the form *statement* has the function of an *invitation* (first utterance of A) and a refusal thereof (first utterance of B). Below is another example: a passage from a statement concerning a newly built office complex and the same passage in a slightly different form.

- (2) a. The new office complex is situated in the old city center. The architectural firm of Wilkinson and Sons designed it.
b. The new office complex is situated in the old city center. It was designed by the architectural firm of Wilkinson and Sons.

The active voice is used in the second sentence in (2a): “The firm designed the new office.” Whereas in (2b) a passive variant is used: “The new office was designed by the firm.” What is the difference in function between these two sentences? In the active form the accent is on the firm that provided the design. In the passive form the office complex is elaborated on. When different forms are used for getting across approximately the same content, they often lead to differences in function. The aim of discourse studies is to provide an explanatory description of the intricate relations between forms of discourse elements and their functions in communication.

The second question is more difficult to answer. Why should there be a separate discipline *discourse studies*? To many researchers the best answer is that the investigation of the relation between form and function requires contributions from different disciplines such as linguistics, literature, rhetoric, stylistics and pragmatics as well as other fields concerned with verbal communication such as communication science, psychology, sociology and philosophy. Discourse phenomena cannot be studied adequately from just one of these perspectives. Because the concepts dealing with these phenomena are taken from many disciplines, a common ground is necessary. Discourse studies is this common ground. It serves as an inter- or multidiscipline that enables different research schools to have the necessary interaction so that specific contributions can be made to research into the relationship between form and function in verbal communication.

1.2 Aim and structure of this book

The aim of this book is to familiarize the prospective student with the most important concepts and the major issues in the field of discourse studies. Knowledge of the basic concepts will serve as a scientific “toolkit” that the student can use in advanced courses in discourse studies. This introduction is also meant as a stepping-stone to further reading in handbooks on different discourse topics and to studying research results in scientific journals on discourse.

This book consists of fifteen chapters spread over four parts. The ordering is inspired by the metaphor of the student who is supposed to be undertaking a scientific journey. After this introductory chapter, Part I provides information about the basic characteristics of this journey through the diverse landscapes of discourse studies. Part II invites students to fill their backpacks with some essential traveling material.

In Part III the different ways of making a scientific journey are presented. In Part IV some specific domains of interest can be chosen.

In Part I, Chapters 2 and 3 provide a general orientation towards the field. The focus is on the last part of the rough definition given earlier: discourse studies is the study of verbal communication. Chapter 2, *Communication as action*, is the most philosophical chapter in this book. It tries to answer questions like: What is (verbal) communication? What are the principles governing the use of the instrument “language”? What are the strategies that are brought to bear when we communicate? Verbal communication is presented as the performance of acts which must have some relevance for partners involved in it. This chapter stimulates the student to think of what verbal communication is about. Chapter 3, *Discourse in communication*, focuses on discourse as part of the situation in which people communicate. Discourse is no discourse at all without a sender and a receiver. Therefore, discourse cannot be studied adequately without the discourse situation being taken into account. Within this framework two basic discourse questions are answered: How can discourse best be studied in a perspective in which forms are related to functions in a discourse situation? What makes a string of sentences or a couple of utterances discourse?

In Part II, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 present the basic concepts for studying discourse. Chapter 4, *Discourse types*, gives an overview of the variety of forms of discourse such as written (a tax form), oral (a doctor–patient conversation), electronic (an e-mail), etc. It also discusses the attempts that have been made so far in putting the main varieties into some sort of model that reflects the essential differences between them. The classic intriguing question behind this modeling is: What exactly is a discourse type? The discussion on constructing a model is followed by the question of how to study new electronic communication situations in which combinations of modes (oral, written and visual) are used. Chapter 5, *Structured content*, presents the approaches to discourse with respect to the structuring of the message content. How can this structure be described for the different levels of discourse? Three levels are distinguished here: the global structure (the discourse as a whole), the mesostructure (the study of topics and themes) and the local structure (the smallest meaning units). The central question in Chapter 6 is: What are the formal ties that keep the different content elements together? Descending from a global structure, an overview of different knots and links to connect content elements is given. Special attention is paid to techniques of referring back- and forward in discourse and to so-called discourse relations and their markers. Chapter 7, *Contextual phenomena*, deals with discourse elements from both the production and the perception side, which are directly linked to the context. Examples are the fact that the meaning of “I” depends on the person using it or the possibility of putting some information more into the back- or foreground in order to produce a special effect on readers or listeners. However, the link

not only goes from discourse to context, it goes the other way round as well. We always deal with discourse on the basis of knowledge and attitudes that we already have. We are no black boxes. Otherwise we would all give exactly the same rendering after having seen the same movie; nevertheless these renderings do differ in content.

In Chapter 8, *Style*, the last chapter of this first part, an overview of stylistic variation in discourse is given. After a brief discussion of classical rhetoric, the concepts of style and register are clarified. Special attention is paid to stylistic phenomena that can easily be studied by students and to stylistic research that highlights the different manifestations of seemingly the same messages. Consider, for example, the different renderings of one movie again, now focusing on the differences in formulation.

Part III deals with four central modes of communication. In everyday life we can “just talk” or make conversation intuitively without knowing the outcome, but we can also use language intentionally to give information, to tell a story or to try to convince someone. Chapter 9, *Conversation analysis*, gives insight into a more sociological way of discourse studies: conversation as a kind of glue between the members of a community or a society. Chapter 10, *Informative discourse*, focuses on the readability of information and the improvement of documents. In this chapter old methods to measure readability are dealt with, as well as the notion of discourse quality in a more contemporary view. Chapter 11, *Narratives*, starts with a more literary approach to discourse and illustrates how narratives are studied from three different perspectives: sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and organizational. Chapter 12, *Argumentation and persuasion*, starts with approaches to analyzing the validity of reasoning in everyday language and presents a social-psychological framework for studying the way in which discourse can be persuasive. Here the emphasis is on stylistic elements.

In Part IV, *Special interests*, the three most important domains of discourse studies are presented. In Chapter 13, *Discourse and cognition*, the focus is on what goes on in our brain during the production and the perception of discourse. Cognitive psychologists have done extensive research into modeling the way we speak and listen or write and read. Several of these models and some highlights of current cognitive approaches are presented here. Chapter 14, *Discourse and institution*, focuses on the institutional aspects of discourse within the sociological approach. Some key publications are presented, dealing with institutions such as law, health and media. Chapter 15, *Discourse and culture*, presents the major topics in the study of discourse from a societal point of view. The main question is: Can discourse tell us something about the way in which the producer views the world? This is made more concrete by addressing questions such as: Can discourse analysis reveal something about power relations in society or, for example, the place of women in masculine cultures? These types of questions are of special importance in the study of intercultural communication.

1.3 The presentation of the material

The material in this book has been organized to serve as a first introduction to discourse studies at university level. Inherent in the interdisciplinary nature of the field of discourse studies is the fact that each phenomenon can be looked at from different viewpoints. Moreover, the danger exists of trivializing theoretical concepts, as they are taken out of their disciplinary context. Special attention will therefore be paid to the origins of key concepts in discourse studies.

Inter- or multidisciplinary discourse studies arose during the 1980s. However, it is rooted in classical rhetoric and language philosophy and in classic psychological and sociological studies from both the Anglo-American and the European traditions. It is for that reason that relatively much attention is given to classic or impressive landmarks in the field of discourse studies.

When dealing with the conceptual arsenal, examples of scientific applications are given whenever possible. The research examples chosen are not always the most recent ones. In this book attention is also paid to approaches upon which contemporary developments are based. In the bibliography almost half of the references date from before 1990 as in this introductory textbook the focus is on concepts and approaches that have proved to be soundly based and not just trendy. After studying this book the student will have most of the fundamental apparatus to do his or her job. The index at the end of this book, containing about 500 entries, is a good basis for studying the most important concepts in the field. The index entries only refer to the page on which the concept in question is most elaborately explained. This makes it a concise "guide" to the major concepts in discourse studies.

Obviously, an introductory work cannot delve deeply into discussions about definitions of key concepts or elaborate on issues. For students who wish to study more specific topics, each chapter or section is accompanied by a list of suggested readings. The main aim of this bibliographical information is to incite the reader to study the classic or key publications in the field. Books comprise about 80% of these references. The other 20% consist of what are considered seminal articles. All the references in each chapter's bibliographical information are listed at the end of the book, with reference to the specific section they refer to.

Each chapter ends with questions and assignments. These are meant to stimulate reflection upon and discussion of seemingly unproblematic topics, which it is hoped may encourage students to initiate reasoned articulation of their own astonishment about (mis)communication. The key at the end of this book provides answers to these questions. The assignments can be seen as proposals for students to work on in the library at their own campus. The extent to which the assignments are to be worked out depends on conditions of time and curriculum and on special wishes the lecturer

may have. The number of questions and assignments may vary per section, depending, for example, on the length of the section or the nature of the subject that the section deals with.

Questions and assignments

Questions

- 1.1.1 Explain in your own words what discourse studies is.
- 1.1.2 Explain in terms of form and function what is going on in the following fragment of dinner conversation.
- A: Could you pass the salt?
- B: Of course. (B continues eating without passing the salt.)
- 1.1.3 Describe the differences in form and function between the following two passages:
- A general practitioner at our health center closed his practice yesterday after local demonstrations. He was suspected of molesting patients.
 - A general practitioner at our health center, who was suspected of molesting patients, closed his practice yesterday after local demonstrations.

Assignments

- 1.1.1 One journal issue on discourse analysis can contain several papers that, according to their authors, all have to do with discourse. Explain how the following subjects could fit the definition of discourse studies that is given in the introductory chapter of this book. This assignment is inspired by a passage in Johnstone (2002).
- Descriptive terms used of the accused in the media coverage of a murder trial.
 - A discussion of differences between English and Japanese.
 - An analysis of expressions of identity in Athabaskan (Native American) student writing.
 - A discussion of sonnets by Shakespeare.
 - A paper about the epitaph of the spiritual master of a sect of Muslims.
 - A discussion on whether the pronoun I should appear in formal writing.
 - A study of political debate.
- 1.1.2 The bibliographical information of this chapter contains a list of the most widely known journals in the field of discourse studies. However, the notion *discourse* frequently occurs in all sorts of journals not specifically linked to discourse studies. Some examples are an article on the communication

skills of people with dementia (in the *Journal of Communication Disorder*), one on text comprehension in relation to children's narratives (in the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*) and research into organizational changes as discourse (in the *Academy of Management Journal*). Select any issue of one of the journals mentioned in the bibliographical information of this chapter or find a journal comparable to the ones mentioned above. Look at the summary of one of the articles and try to determine whether it falls within the definition of discourse studies. Support your opinion.

Bibliographical information

The article *Discourse analysis* by Zellig Harris (1952) is viewed by many as the starting point of discourse studies. Harris was the first to use the term *discourse analysis* in a scientific article. He discussed an advertisement text by analyzing the way in which sentences are linked and the way in which the text correlates with society and culture. A salient detail is the fact that in the first footnote Harris thanks his research assistant, who ended up developing the most influential theory on elements *within* a sentence: Noam Chomsky.

In the decades following the year in which Harris wrote his article, a vast quantity of books and articles on discourse studies has been published. So it is obvious that this textbook is not the only introduction to this field of research. On the contrary, one of the aims of this book is to serve as a reference guide to a qualitative selection of other handbooks and readers. In this first bibliographical overview more general works are mentioned whereas in the following chapters the references are more geared to specific aspects of discourse studies.

Several important introductions to discourse studies were published in the early 1980s. Prominent German-language publications are Kalverkämper (1981), Coseriu (1981), Sowinski (1983) and Scherner (1984). The most widely used English-language publications of that time are De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Brown and Yule (1983), Stubbs (1983) and Cook (1989). In the past decade various new introductions were published, which underlines the vitality of the broad field of discourse studies. The most important publications of recent date include the following: Salkie (1995) is a workbook, with exercises to detect various discourse phenomena; Jaworski & Coupland (1999) give a collection of some thirty passages from key publications on discourse studies; Goatly (2000) provides a clear introduction with practical exercises for developing critical awareness of the relationship between text production and consumption; Johnstone (2002) approaches discourse not as a discipline but as a research method, connecting it with six topics that shape it, such as world, audiences, medium and purpose.

There are also introductions to specific parts of the research field and books that indirectly have this function. The most significant ones dating from the 1980s and early 1990s deal with the analysis of conversation (Edmonson, 1981; Henne and Rehbock, 1982; McLaughlin, 1984; Nofsinger, 1991) and with stylistics (McMenamin, 1993). Recent publications emphasize the socio-cultural aspects of discourse studies, for example, Gee (1999), and narratives, for example, Georgakopoulou & Goutsos