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## More about Text, Textuality and Discourse Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Study of language, like any other discipline, has naturally been developing ever since its inception. But it assumed an accelerated pace from the early twentieth century onwards with two or more paradigm-shifting outlooks, among which the 'socio-contextual surge onto the consideration of language functioning' led to the emergence of an approach which came to be known as 'discourse'. Within the framework of this outlook, new trends and concepts as well as new definitions have evolved in Applied Linguistics in the last five decades: discourse, text, meaning, function, speech act, linguistic vs. communicative competence, discourse analysis, cohesion, coherence, genre, register, etc. This paper, after clarifying its position on the concept of "discourse vs. text", will set out to discuss the dimensions of discursive perspective on language, to examine the perspectives of variations in textual presentation of discourse (or rather "the construal of context"), to engage in some discourse-analytic deliberations on both production and comprehension phases, and to consider some reasons, or rather applications, for discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** discourse; text; discourse analysis; context; function; textuality

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## 1. Introduction

Language studies, like any other discipline, cannot be immune to constant evolutionary changes. Among many such changes since early twenties, two are considered paradigm-shifting ones. One involved the introduction of De Saussure's principles into the study of language which shifted the paradigm of traditional grammar into Saussurean Structuralism (cf. Saussure 1916); and the other has been the revelations concerning the true components of language apart from its code-system: context and socio-culture. Prior to this socio-cultural surge (Firth 1957; Halliday 1973), language was defined as consisting of invariably defined (sound, word, syntagm and meaning) elements of the code-system without reference to the function and the socio-cultural components involved in its operation. Along this second line of changes, and for the characterization of the nature of involvement of socio-cultural factors in the functioning of language in interpersonal verbal transactions, a set of concepts and labels have appeared in the last five decades such as discourse, text, function, speech act, linguistic vs. communicative competence, discourse analysis, cohesion, coherence, genre, register. Discourse as the 'flagship' concept in this socio-culturally merged notion of language is revisited here in this paper.

Discourse as a term in modern applied linguistics has been variously conceived and defined; and most of the definitions offered have failed to establish a defining picture of the target concept in the mind of the audience. The reason for this can be said to arise from the fact that we are trying to define a concept in one camp while still being pre-conditioned by the framework of the older camp: defining a concept in the socio-functionally-surged camp of language but mostly falling by default back on 'language-as-code-system' camp. The term 'discourse' was first used in 1950s mainly with reference to 'language beyond sentence level' (cf. Harris 1952). But, as noted above, it was not until 1970s and beyond that more characteristic dimensions of language came to be included within its domain (cf. Halliday 1964, 1985; van Dijk 1977, Widdowson 1990)

Most of the definitions attempted have turned out to be unhelpful and not comprehensive: discourse as spoken language, discourse as language beyond sentence level, discourse as language in action. These defining features were of little comprehensiveness and led to hardly any change in the defining orientation of the concept of language. Ever since its emergence in the arena of language study, the name 'discourse' soon became popular and, as such, papers, projects, and dissertations appeared which were, in one way or another, decorated with the name without due attention to the true nature of the 'concept' underlying it. Some, of course, chose to pretend to be in line with their pretentious inclusion of the term 'discourse' in their title by defining the term at their own convenience and including dimensions such as 'spoken language' or 'discourse-markers (= connectors) as the only defining features of the concept.

The present paper first discusses the two core defining features of discursal approach to language. It then presents a brief discussion of the dimensions of the discursal perspective as well as the trends in language study and other disciplines which have been instrumental to its development. In section 4, the perspectives of variations in the 'construal of context in text' are explicated. In section 5, more concrete aspects of production discourse and textualization process, variations in the textual choices and the discursal justifications for the textual strategies employed by the producer are characterized. Section 6, includes a brief version of the discussion originally planned for 'comprehension discourse', relegating its more elaborate version and examples to future papers (due to the space limitations). Lastly, in the section on 'discourse in action', some applications of discourse analysis are examined.

## 2. The Two Core Defining Features of Discoursal Approach to Language

Discourse as a new outlook on the true nature of language is best defined in terms of (a) the nature of the substance of discourse and its relationship with 'text' and (b) the way the source of meaning in language is characterized.

### 2.1. *Discourse vs. text: their substances and inter-relationship*

Discourse is a 'process' not a product, but text is a product (cf. Widdowson 1990). For Sidlhofer and Widdowson (1999), discourse is "the process of conceptual formulation whereby we draw on our linguistic resources to make sense of reality" (p.205) and "text is the linguistic product of a discourse process" (p. 206). The discourse producers, speakers or writers, considering all the factors relating to the communication context, engage in production discourse, the result being presented in the text (speech or writing). The receivers, when listening to or reading that text, engage in comprehension discourse under all the factors specific to their communication context and arrive at a message, which can be presumed to be deposited as their mental text. The text is, thus, an interface between the production and comprehension discourses (cf. Lotfipoursaedi 1982):

*Production discourse* → *Text* → *Comprehension discourse*

Discourse, due to its nature as a process, is at the mercy of an influx of socio-contextual factors arising in a given communication event. It is, thus, a collectively crafted process, and not a fixed individually attempted piece. According to Bazerman (2012) "Discourse arises among people, in interaction, and it is part of the means by which people accomplish social actions." (p.226)

Discourse has no visual entity, but it starts 'arising' mentally when people engage in oral or written interaction with one another. For example, in daily interpersonal interactions, people may need to say something for a purpose. They will engage in a discourse under the related socio-contextual factors and say what they want (i.e. produce a piece of text). The interactants, in turn, will engage in comprehension discourse upon receiving what is said trying to 'work out' what is meant from what is said, and deciding on the next line of the transaction. Interactions can be of various modalities: oral, written, mono-logic, dialogic, in-person, virtual, etc. Mono-logic interactions are not, of course, of a single participant. For example, in 'reading', the reader is in fact interacting with the writer; in 'writing', the writer engages in discourse with an audience in mind; in speech, the speaker addresses an audience. But in these modes of interaction, the interaction is considered to be covert and non-immediate.

Texts representing discourse are product. They may consist of two or more sentences (paragraphs, pages or even volumes). It is unfortunate that the terms 'discourse' and 'text' are not always used as defined above, which can be confusing. The terms are sometimes misunderstood for one another: 'discourse' being used for stretches beyond sentence or for interconnectedness among sentences (the term 'discourse marker', thereof), and 'text' is used to denote only stretches beyond the sentence levels.

### 2.2. *How is the source of meaning characterized discursively?*

There are two different views on the relationship between 'form' vs. 'meaning', or 'text' vs. 'meaning'. These two views are referred to as 'product' vs. 'process' or 'medium' vs. 'mediation' (cf. Widdowson 1990). Traditionally, language was considered only as a form or medium, playing no role in the creation of the meaning, and acting only as a channel for the exchange of meanings across the communication parties. The relationship between the channel and the meanings it

transfers was seen to be only an 'arbitrary' one. But with the emergence of discursal approaches to language, the outlook towards meaning and text changed. These approaches, rather than viewing meaning as 'static constructs', talked of 'meaning potentials' in any context of situation (cf. Halliday 1985). Language and text are seen to play a role in the crystallization of a meaning. According to Hasan (1995, p. 205), "the lexico-grammar is .....a resource that construe the semantic potential of language; it is for this reason that, in the words of Martin (1986), language is a meaning-making system." Thus, in 'medium' or 'process' view, "the relation between the meaning and the wording is not...an arbitrary one; the form of grammar relates naturally to the meanings that are being encoded." (Halliday 1985, p. xvii)

The piece of language (words or a text) used in verbal interactions among people does not carry a definite invariable meaning.

*Meaning.....has no ontological basis, but is determined only by social---discursive---practice. The choices and the associated communicative/discursive strategies and routines that make up those social practices are what determines the meanings, and these strategies and routines are, in turn, determined by ideologies. (Birch 1993, p. 45)*

In other words, meaning is not carried in its ready-made shape by the text. The text, rather, carries indices to activate the comprehension discourse process through which the receiver may negotiate a message depending on the socio-cultural context in which she/he is situated. Thus, the same piece of language (a single word or a piece of text) can imply different messages for different recipients or the same recipient in different contexts and occasions.

*Discourse analysis, as I see it, has to do not with what texts mean, but with what might be meant by them, and what they are taken to mean. In this view there is no 'understanding' of texts as a semantic process, separate from, and prior to, a pragmatic 'evaluation' which brings context into play. Text implies context right from the start, so textual interpretation necessarily involves a consideration of contextual factors. (Widdowson 2004, p.35)*

### 3. Dimensions of Discursal Perspective on Language

Before we move on to practically examining the unfolding of discourse processes in some example cases, a list of concepts and trends in language study which have been instrumental in the development of discursal perspective on language are briefly<sup>2</sup> described.

#### 3.1. Recognition of the role of context in language

The role of 'context' in the study of language is said to have initially been emphasized by J.R. Firth (cf. Mitchell 1975). He held that "language was not to be studied as an isolated system, but as a response to the context of particular situations" (Chapman & Routledge ,2005). Having returned from his academic position from India in 1928, to take the teaching at University College of London, Firth met Bronislaw Malinowski, who was at the time working on language from an anthropological point of view. The idea that the study of 'meaning' and 'context' should be central in linguistics was among Firth's main writing interests. He considered the analysis of meaning of utterances to be the main goal of linguistics, an idea which was unusual at a time when his contemporaries such as L. Bloomfield were positively excluding meaning from linguistic study. Firth saw language as a set of 'events' which speakers uttered, a mode of action, a way of 'doing things', and believed that linguists should focus on speech events themselves.

For Firth, meaning was, in fact, ‘function in context’ (Firth 1957). He argued that the meaning of utterances, when they occur in real-life contexts, derived just as much from the particular situation in which they occurred as from the string of sounds uttered: an integrationist idea which mixes language with the objects physically present during a conversation to ascertain the meaning involved. This idea came to be known as Firth’s ‘contextual theory of meaning’ or his theory of ‘context of situation’, a phrase which he borrowed from Malinowski. Firth’s ideas on meaning and context were later reflected in discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics, and several of the fundamental ideas thereof were taken up by M.A.K. Halliday’s (1985, 1994) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG).

### ***3.2. The concept of language as action***

In 1960s, some philosophical ideas on language contributed a lot towards the discursive perspective of language. Austin (1962) talked about performing an action through saying a verb in first person simple present tense and he called such statements ‘speech act’. For example, one can perform the speech act of ‘promising’, or ‘marrying’ by just using words: “I promise to be on time” and “I pronounce you husband and wife” under certain contextual conditions. Austin made a distinction between ‘performative’ vs. ‘constative’ verbs. He said, unlike constative verbs, performative verbs cannot be judged to be ‘true or false’ but they can be ‘felicitous or infelicitous’, and felicity can only be determined on the basis of the contextual factors. For example, the statement “I promise to be late” cannot be judged to be true or false but ‘felicitous’ or ‘infelicitous’ under given socio-contextual factors. Or the statement “I pronounce you husband and wife” can be judged to be felicitous only under certain conditions such as ‘the performer being a priest’, ‘the context being ceremonial’ and ‘the couple addressed showing intent’. Thus, according to speech act theory, language is used not only for presenting information but mainly for the purpose of performing actions.

### ***3.3. Indirection and implicatures in language actions***

Following Austin (1962), the concept of speech act was further developed. Texts were discussed to be constituted of interconnected speech acts. According to Searle (1969), speech acts do not function in isolation but rather within a presumed state of mind and belief system on the part of the performers and in relation with other acts before and after them in a situation or text. Searle talked about three categories of functions performed by every speech act: locutionary (what is said), illocutionary (what is meant) and perlocutionary (the effect on the receiver). He also introduced the notion of indirect speech acts where what is said is different from what is meant. Namely, the discourse producer says something but means something different from what is said. This indirection is, of course, intentional and the receivers are supposed to tease out a meaning from what is said on the basis of its situated context. Grice (1975) introduced the ‘Cooperative Principles’ (or rather conversational maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner) to characterize the way a meaning for each indirect speech act is negotiated by the receivers depending on their socio-contextual perspectives.

(As for indirection in literary texts see ‘Literature Texts as Prominent Language Patterns’ below, 4.4.)

### ***3.4. Tact and politeness principles in linguistic interactions***

Linguistic communication is, of course, the primary social framework for language use. For this reason, all speech communities would naturally endeavor to make sure their communication acts would avoid any damage to social harmony. The domain of politeness is an aspect of human communicative competence consisting of certain conventional strategies aimed at enhancing

social harmony. Brown and Levinson (1978) talked about negative politeness, which is employed to avoid imposition, and positive politeness, which is used to expect imposition. Leech (1983) added politeness principle to cooperative principle (cf. Grice 1975) to “minimize the expression of impolite beliefs...and maximize the expression of polite beliefs” (p. 81). Judgements on what constitutes politeness/impoliteness can be quite argumentative depending on a host of factors operating in the context especially in social media. Oliveira and Miranda (2022), in an interesting paper on the concept of impoliteness and shame on Twitter, show how new trends in the political debate can be underway possibly licencing “impolite shameful language to be uttered” (p. 30).

### ***3.5. Ethnomethodology and common-sense modes of perception***

The term “ethnomethodology” was coined by Garfinkel (1967) “to index the study of everyday practical reasoning as constitutive of all human activities” (Cicourel 1973, p. 99). Ethnomethodology as a modern trend in sociology highlights the involvement of common-sense modes of perception in reading and understanding of the events thus valuing reflexivity and not objectivity. It “looks at people’s ways of making sense of the everyday social worlds” (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2013, p.22). For the ethnomethodologist, “talk and action are produced and understood as indexical displays of the everyday world” (Cicourel 1973, p. 99). In ethnomethodology, “the scientific investigator never seriously departs from the world of everyday life” and it is maintained that “common-sense modes of perception and operation are an integral and essential feature of recognized scientific practice” (Elliot 1974, pp. 23 & 25). Garfinkel (1967) also considers this outlook as the prevailing topic for ethnomethodology.

*Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members’ methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., “accountable,” as organizations of commonplace everyday activities. The reflexivity of that phenomenon is a singular feature of practical actions, of practical circumstances, of common-sense knowledge of social structures, and of practical sociological reasoning. (Garfinkel 1967, p. vii)*

Contrasting the viewpoints of ethnomethodology and linguistics on ‘meaning’, Cicourel (1973, p.100) notes:

*The ethnomethodologist views meaning as situated, self-organizing and reflexive interaction between the organization of memory, practical reasoning and talk. While ‘linguistic rules’ are seen as normative constructions divorced from the cognitive reflection and ethnographic settings in which speech is produced and understood.*

Linguist talks about ‘understanding’ the meaning of a text by the receiver while ethnomethodology emphasizes the ‘negotiation’ of a meaning in verbal interactions. Thus, according to this outlook, in handling any situation, processing an event or a text, rather than acting objectively, we operate reflexively using all the indicators of the situation at hand and our common-sense to arrive at a possible account.

### ***3.6. Conversational interactional rules/principles***

Conversation is a socially volatile arena in human activity both as an organizational agency of interpersonal relations and as being reflective of the context of situations which would encompass the nature of such relations. Conversational Analysis (CA) sees talk as a form of action and focuses on discovering what people do with talk in the course of their everyday lives (cf. Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2013). CA has, thus, been of interest in many disciplines such as sociology, sociolinguistics, anthropology and consequently discursal studies. Projects on CA are believed to “provide an empirically grounded explication of the social organization of naturally occurring human action and interaction” (Pomerantz & Fehr 2011, p.166). The reciprocal effect of

conversation as a core player in human interactions and context of situation has led to a plethora of studies on aspects and features of conversations (cf. Sacks, et al.1974; Gumperz & Hymes 1972; Schegloff 1968; Schegloff & Sacks 1973). It is believed that the large body of empirical work on CA since Sack's pioneering work has uncovered the key structural features of 'talk-in-interaction': how people get to take turns to talk, how actions are organized into sequences, and how speakers and listeners deal with troubles in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk (cf. Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2013). There is no doubt that this uncovering has had fundamental effect on broadening the domain of language studies into discursal perspectives.

### 3.7. Textuality

The concept of 'text' as opposed to 'sentence' came to prominence in language studies literature in early 1970s when talks emerged about stretches and regularities beyond sentence level. Linguists talked about 'text grammar' and started discussing rules and connectors across sentences, paragraph organization, texture and cohesion (cf. van Dijk 1977; Halliday & Hasan 1976). But it should be mentioned that 'stretching beyond sentence' is not a sufficient condition for the text-ness or textuality of a piece of language. It is, of course, a necessary condition for 'texture', but not for textuality. For a piece of language to function as a text representing a discourse, it should be situated in a context. For example, even single word 'STOP' can be considered a text when it appears on a street corner as a traffic sign. Also, Seidlhofer and Widdowson (1999, p.207) note that under their definition, text does not necessarily consist of more than one sentence indeed, "a single word (e.g. PRIVATE) or even a single letter (e.g. 'P' indicating a parking place) can constitute a text in the sense of the record of a discourse process". In fact, in the given socio-cultural context, the above single items would act as a text representing an underlying discourse and invoking a definite message to drivers. Along this line, it is also argued that

*...text is not simply a 'bundle' of propositions (clauses), and.....unless it (this bundle) assumes a specific CONFIGURATION referred to as TEXTUALITY, it cannot be perceived as representing an underlying discourse. Or rather, as soon as this bundle is underlain by an INTENT and is contextually situated, it is empowered by TEXTUALITY, changing from a 'propositional reservoir' into an 'Indexical Discursive Agency'. (Lotfipoursaedi 2021, p 51, original emphasis)*

Perhaps because of this essential 'discourse-representative' feature for text, Halliday (1985, 1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) have always used 'text' and 'discourse' interchangeably. As noted before, text as a product acts as an interface between the production and comprehension discourses and any variation in text or textualization process would represent variations in context. This idea is verbalized as "text construing context" in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), as you can see in section 4.1. below.

### 3.8. Textuality vs. texture

Textuality, as discussed above, represents the close interconnection between the textual choices and socio-contextual factors, that is, the way the text construes the context and vice versa the context motivates the choices made in the text. Widdowson identifies a text "not by its linguistic extent but by its social intent" and argues that "unless it is activated by this social connection, the text is inert" (Widdowson 2004, p, 8). Texture, on the other hand, represents the inter-sentential connectedness, not implying that such connections may not represent the context, of course. The main reason for our dual labeling is to emphasize the discursal or 'situated' nature of the textual choices. Halliday and Hasan (1976) have presented a thorough discussion of texture under 'cohesion'. They have classified texture or cohesive ties into grammatical (reference, ellipsis and substitution), lexical (reiteration and collocation), and meaning (additive, adversative, causal and

temporal) ones. Halliday (e.g. 1973) treated cohesion as involving non-structural relations beyond the sentence, within what he refers to as the textual function.

We use 'textuality' as distinct from 'texture' to highlight the 'discourse-dependency' of the former as opposed to 'connectedness-dependency' of the latter. While 'discourse-dependency' is an essential feature for textuality, 'connectedness' or extending beyond sentence level is an essential feature for texture.

#### 4. Perspectives of Variations in the Construal of Context

Languages are never homogeneous and they undergo variations on the basis of the purpose of communication, the relationship between the participants, and the socio- contextual factors affecting the production. Awareness on the part of language users of these variations is part and parcel of their communicative competence. Namely, to be able to engage in discourse production/comprehension processes for achieving their communication needs, familiarity on their part with the textual manifestations of these variations is essential. These variations can be placed under the following perspectives.

##### 4.1. Genre

Genres as conventional perspective focus on "the rhetorical organization of texts from a variety, especially the rhetorical conventions of written varieties" (Biber and Conrad 2009, p.16). As examples of such conventions, one may name the expectations in a culture about how a letter should start and end, how a front-page newspaper story in journalistic genre should begin, the structuring of 'research articles', 'conference abstracts', 'undergraduate essays', 'book reviews', 'textbooks', 'lectures', 'tutorials', 'seminars', and 'critical reviews' in academic writing see (Devira & Westin 2021). According to Biber and Conrad (2009, p. 16) "genre is viewed as a social process in which language is used in predictable sequential structures to fulfill certain communicative purposes". Genre is also used with reference to variations in literature texts. Fiction, drama and poetry are literary genres. Production discourse needs to be observant of the conventional generic rules of the context at hand. Otherwise, the communication will be deemed to fail acceptability.

##### 4.2. Register

Register has been characterized as the "expression-plane of genre" (Martin 1985) and is more concerned with the typical linguistic choices within different genres. Generic features belong to the textual framework, while register features are pervasive and scattered around the whole text. Registers are functional (motivated by the subject-matter). We can talk of academic register or journalistic register characterized by subject- related lexicogrammar.

As an example of the register-specific textual (lexicogrammar) choice on the part of the discourse producer in expository writing, we look at 'mode of realization' named 'buried reasoning' whereby "the lexico-semantic meaning of cause-and- effect is realized in lexicon-grammar inside one clause rather than across clauses" (Chen & Foley 2005, p.206). As an example, the following two alternative ways of saying are cited: [*Because modern science has developed very fast, the disease of smallpox becomes curable. The decline of smallpox can be attributed to the development of modern science.*] It is argued that this feature "contributes to the effectiveness of expository writing" (ibid, p.206). Martin (1985) also notes that the resource of *buried reasoning* has developed in exposition texts because it enables the writer to present an argument "not as supposition but as an unassailable fact". (ibid, p.26). Martin is of opinion that "reasoning in this way has the effect of strengthening one's case"



(ibid, p.26). This feature of *buried reasoning* is noted to be achieved through the linguistic resource of *Grammatical Metaphor* (cf. Chen & Foley, 2005 ; Martin, 1985). The concept of grammatical metaphor which was first introduced by Halliday (1985) involves grammatical transformations (traditionally referred to as passivization, nominalization, etc.) in a clause or sentence with the effect of changes in the theme-rheme distribution or various lexical meanings being packed into a single nominal group.

### 4.3. Style

Style refers to linguistic features associated with a particular author or a particular historical period. The features associated with style, unlike register, are not functional. They are rather “associated with aesthetic preferences, influenced by the attitudes of the speaker/writer about language” (Biber & Conrad 2009, p.18). Style can also be used to refer to linguistic variations which are classified into Geographical (e.g. British or American English), Temporal (e.g. Old English, Modern English) and Social (upper class, middle class, lower class English). Variations in literature texts including, for example, fictional styles for different authors are also included under style. Stylistics as a sub-discipline in language studies focuses on the variations in literature-text

### 4.4. Literature-texts and their context of situation

No doubt literary discourse is different from non-literature. The major distinctive point about literary discourse is that it ‘elides’ in some way the ‘context of situation’ while, of course, still being constrained by the ‘context of culture’ (cf. Kress & Threadgold 1988). In other words, literary discourse would be immune to the effects of the immediate context of situation. Literary text is generally characterized by the special effect on the reader which can at least by experience be judged to be of special character. This literary function is not an inherent property of literature. It rather derives its ‘essence’ from the language substance: “Poetic language is permanently characterized only by its functions; however, function is not only a property but a mode of utilizing the properties of a given phenomenon.” (Mukarovskiy 1977, p. 18).

Thus, literary discourse achieves its special function through ‘foregrounding’ which is, in essence, achieved through manipulation of language resources. Leech considers foregrounding as “a touchstone of literary effect through the use of language” and defines it as a “significant literary deviation against the background of non-literary norm” (Leech 1992, p.259).

If in ordinary communication, as noted above, the reader approaches the text representing the writer-discourse to negotiate a meaning within the given context of situation, in literary discourse, the processing of discourse takes place (as noted just above) irrespective of the context of situation, and the reader is exposed to further textual indices, i.e. special literary patterns representing the literary effect or the foregrounding of the text (cf. Lotfipoursaedi 2008, p.92). The special patterns in literature text would not, of course, operate on their own. They would rather function and derive their essence, as noted above, from the substance of the main-stream language codes. In other words, “the foreground achieves its value against the established ‘background’ ” (Lotfipoursaedi 1992, pp. 92-3).

It can, thus, be argued that literature text through its special patterns engages the reader in active and creative imagination, as something distinct from idle daydreaming, through which she/he becomes actively involved in establishing novel links between the familiar schemata by temporarily suspending the unacceptability of such links and switching to the rules of a new universe of discourse (cf. Lotfipoursaedi 2008).

Apart from literary text, special language patterns are utilized in some non-literary texts for advertising purposes. A common example for non-literary prominent patterns, a phrase like '4 you' representing 'for you' may be given. But it needs to be noted that the prominence of special language patterns utilized in literature is argued to be of different nature. The foregrounding patterns in literature are said to be 'thematically' motivated while those in non-literary texts are not (cf. Halliday 1971; Leech 1970).

## 5. Discourse in Action

As noted above, discourse as a process, is invisible, and as such, it is in a state of constant 'influx' because its constituent elements undergo constant changes at every stage of its unfolding. For this reason, one cannot present '*in vivo*' examples of a discourse process and any attempted exemplifications will have to be an '*in vitro*' representation of a 'crucified' piece of a text. Before attempting such a representation of a few short pieces of texts, we would like to explicate the theoretical outlook in the related literature on construing of context in text (i.e. textualization process) we subscribe to.

### 5.1. Textualization or construing of context in text

Textualization can be described in different ways. As characterized by systemic-functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004), in discourse production process, the context of situation is 'construed' into three elements of 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode'; and each of these elements are textualized into 'ideational', 'interpersonal', and 'textual' meta-functions respectively. The next stage represents a further 'grammaticalization' where the ideational meta-function realizes 'transitivity', interpersonal meta-function realizes 'mood' plus 'residue' and textual meta-function realizes 'thematic structure'. The transitivity involves the choice of process-types (verbs) and their respective arguments (noun phrases) as well as circumstances (adverbials). Mood involves the choice of modality (mood elements) and the residue (subject plus finite); and thematic structure involves the choice of theme (the discourse producer's starting point) plus rheme (the direction the clause takes from that point).

Textualization from SFG perspective would, thus, involve choices on the part of the producer at various levels, layers, and directions from the potentials offered by the context and guided by the communicative goals (both immediate and broader ones). The choices which are non-random and indicative of what Butt et.al (2012) call 'direction' or 'drift':

*As each text materialises from the complex embroidery of language user's choices, regular patterns begin to emerge that reveal much about the variables in the context in which the text is being produced, as well as the orientation and sensibility of the text producer whose choices have brought the text into existence. These regularities give the ensemble of meanings that make up a text a particular direction or 'drift', which we can be certain, is not random or accidental, given the infinite number of potential choices a text producer might make. (Butt, et al. 2012, p. 314)*

To put all this in simpler terms, discourse production or 'construing of context of situation in text', involves variations in different choices as follows.

### 5.2. Variations in the choices for textualization

As noted above, 'construing of context in text' or textualization can be characterized from SFG perspective in terms of a layer-by-layer 'conversion of context into text' or 'grammaticalization' procedure during which the communicatively valid features of context would materialize into

propositions (units consisting of a process plus its required participants/ arguments). These procedures are of three types: some are oriented towards Ideational meta-function (reflecting the processes, relations and their participants), some are oriented towards Interpersonal meta-function (catering for the interpersonal aspects of the context) and some others are oriented towards Textual meta-function, taking care of the surface organization of the text into T-units, paragraphs, sections, etc. The resulting propositions would undergo further layers of ‘context-motivated’ changes appropriating them closer for their textual function including the following : (a) the hierarchy of propositions are broken down into linearly arranged packages called T-Units; (b) among the propositions packed into each T-Unit, one is assigned the main clause status while the others serving it semantically as adjectives or adverbs; (c) T-Units would vary in terms of the number of propositions they are assigned (i.e. their propositional density see Lotfipoursaedi (2021) ); (d) some of the subordinate propositions would undergo grammatical transformations such as passivization, nominalization , relativization, being assigned modifying , qualifying , or adverbial functions; (e) for every T-unit, the thematic vs. rhematic elements are specified; (f) the cluster of crystalized T-units are functionally demarcated into paragraphs and for each paragraph a topic sentence (T-unit) is determined (see Lotfipoursaedi 2021 for more detailed analysis and examples).

### ***5.3. Textual linearity as a challenge for receiver***

As noted just above, T-unit is a psycho-socio-linguistically important unit in the linear presentation of the textual hierarchy (cf. Candlin & Lotfipoursaedi 1983). But this linearity faces its own challenges arising from the incompatibility between the situational settings and the cognitive requirements for processing the textual materials. By the situational setting, we mean the linear presentation of the texts representing the underlying discourse process on the one hand, and the limitation of human working and short-term member capacity and possible attention lapse on the other. A constant access to the production discourse is required for the receivers to be able to process it, but, due to the linear availability of the text, by the time the whole text is received, the prior segments could have been disappeared from the working memory. This incompatibility can be a challenge for the discourse receiver (listener/reader) in processing the represented discourse. To compensate for this, special strategies are employed by the discourse producers and receivers. Among these special strategies, the following can be named.

### ***5.4. Textual strategies compensating for textual linearity: reiterations***

Textual linearity, as noted just above, can pose a cognitive impairment (challenge) for the receiver due to the limitations of general human short-term and working memory capacity on the one hand and the cognitive requirement for the large chunks of information across the linearly presented text to be accessible to the receiver’s working memory on the other. Certain dimensions of textual structure can be characterized as intended to compensate for this situation. These strategies would, of course, vary in their mode of realization as well as their variation and frequency depending on the text type, the message, and the target audience presumed by the producer. Despite such variations, we choose to name all of such strategies ‘**reiterations**’ because they are all intended to ‘repeat’ the chosen concepts or chunks of information across the temporal space of the linearly presented text, thereby assisting the discourse receiver (listener/reader) to overcome possible cognitive hurdle in handling the discourse. The following can be considered as textual representations of some of these reiterative strategies.

#### ***5.4.1. ‘Given-new’ structuring of textual presentation***

Textual presentation can be characterized into ‘given-new’ binary packages which mostly coincide with ‘theme-rheme’ categories of Systemic-Functional Grammar (cf. Halliday & Matthysen 2004).

'Given' and 'theme' would name the topic to be talked about and 'new' and 'rheme' would elaborate on it. This organisation applies to sentence, T-unit, paragraph, and text levels. In other words, the first structural component of every sentence or T-unit, irrespective of their grammatical categories, would function as 'theme/given' and the rest as 'rheme / new'<sup>23</sup>. The given information helps the receiver to revive previously given elements for processing the new one.

#### 5.4.2. Cohesive ties

Cohesion or connectedness across the sentences of a text was first studied by Halliday and Hasan (1976). They identified three major categories of cohesive agencies: Grammatical, (consisting of reference, substitution, ellipsis), Lexical (consisting of reiteration and collocation) and Conjunction or meaning relationship between sentences (consisting of Additive, Adversative, Causal and Temporal). These cohesive devices would build 'bridges' in the mind of the receiver between concepts represented by the words occurring at later stages of the textual unfolding and those having occurred before in the text, and, in so doing, they tend to compensate for the cognitive limitations of textual linearity discussed above (cf. Lotfipoursaedi & Moghaddasi 2004).

#### 5.4.3. Recapitulations

Apart from the above two strategies, texts would abound with repetitions of elements mentioned in the former stages of textual unfolding (discourse production) in the form of summaries, paraphrasings, exemplifications, concluding remarks, introductions for sections, chapters, etc. In fact, repetitions in various forms and under different pretexts can be located in all texts and, depending on the amount of shared background knowledge presumed by the producer on the part of the receiver, the amount of this repetition would vary (cf. Lotfipoursaedi & Sarhaddi 2000). Both under-repetition and over-repetition can cause issues: the former causing processing issues, and the latter possibly leading to unwanted implicatures based on violation of maxim of Quantity (cf. Grice 1975). In fact, to prevent such unwanted implicatures, in some cases the discourse producer chooses to add phrases such as '*As noted before*', '*As it was mentioned in section...*', '*As you know...*' before repetitions which he/she suspects to be more than needed for some members of the audience. Such elements have been discussed under meta-discoursal 'implicature blocking strategies' (cf. Lotfipoursaedi 2005).

#### 5.4.4. Inter-text

One of the fundamental functional features of texts and their textuality is their interdependence with other texts. This is a phenomenon which is referred to as intertextuality. This feature can be characterized in two ways. First by the consideration that all texts would depend for their processability on certain basic levels of common background knowledge shared by the speakers of the language. For the second way, one can name how the discourse producers may choose to include some 'guest' elements from other texts to enhance their communicative goal in the host text. These 'guest' pieces can vary in many aspects including in extent (from full paragraphs to text topics or phrases or even single words), in non-linguistic textual modes (e.g. bringing diagrams, tables, illustrations and pictures from other fields or texts), in language variation (using different social, geographical and temporal varieties of some guest lexical and grammatical items to be hosted by texts belonging to different varieties), and in language (e.g. elements from languages other than the host language: for example adding an Arabic, Spanish or French word or segment in an English language novel). An interesting example heard from the BBC World News interview about the latest Middle East War where the interviewee, in order to warn about the abominable consequences of the civilian casualties of the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, borrows

a single word from medical discourse and talks about “*the danger of ‘metastasiẓation’ in case the civilian casualties rise.*”

Literature texts abound with intertext. For example, all figures of speech such as metaphors, similes and metonymies employed in a poem, also proverbs and expressions (used in both literature and non-literature) would bring along the guest images associated with them, thereby contributing to the host discourse. It is in this sense that all texts are said to be intertext.

## 6. Comprehension Discourse (Decoding Process)

One cannot, of course, talk of a homogeneous and isomorphic discourse comprehension or ‘decoding’ process for the same text; and depending on variations on the receiver, text, or the interaction context, the process would vary too. A host of factors such as the receivers and their socio-cultural profile, their interaction goal, their literacy level (basic, academic, professional etc.), the context, mode of interaction (oral or written, in-person or virtual, classic or social media, single or multi-modal, leisure or task-oriented) would affect the process. The decoding process would normally be initiated by a text. As mentioned above under the ‘special strategies of textualization process’, the texts, representing production discourse, are informationally organized in terms of ‘given-new’ principle, which can be viewed as arising from human natural information processing cognitive system. The notion of ‘given-before-new’ was formulated by Halliday (1967) and was codified by Prague School of linguists in 1960 and 1970s as Communicative Dynamism. According to this principle, in a text, what is ‘given’ should be stated before what is ‘new’ in relating to it. This principle would, of course, apply not merely at clause level but at higher levels such as T-unit, paragraph, text, and book as well. For example, in a paragraph, the topic sentence can be considered to be ‘given’, the rest of the paragraph as ‘new’ relating to that.

Upon receiving the ‘given’ element of each segment, some related information is activated to the receiver’s working memory. The textual realization of this thematic / given element can vary based on the amount of shared knowledge presumed by the producer on the part of the addressee about the topic at hand. For example, in an exchange where the speaker is talking about the cancellation of the school buses, the thematic/given element can vary as follows: “they / the buses / the school buses / the buses transporting the school children to their schools “. When this initial element of the text achieves its function, the activated information paves the ground for the handling of the information presented in the ‘new’ segment. In other words, the ‘new’ information is processed within the information frame of the ‘given’ one. In the third stage, the receiver engages in a mental dialogic interaction (cf. Bakhtin 2002) trying to arrive at a message and work out what is meant by what is said.

The comprehension discourse process can, thus, be characterized to consist of series of cycles each being composed of three stages of **activation**, **orientation** and **dialogic interaction**. Among these stages, the third one ‘dialogic interaction’ is in fact the power house or the arena for the unfolding of the comprehension discourse process operating to determine a ‘value’ for what is said with respect to a host of factors including the context of interaction, the receivers’ background knowledge, their communication and language competence. For example, looking back at our ‘school-bus’ example, the piece of text “*The school buses are cancelled tomorrow*” uttered by a father at a winter night in a Canadian family, it may initiate a ‘discourse process’ in the mind of the receiver (the speaker’s wife) with regard to the information already shared by the couple: (*with one car only, the legal requirement for having an adult supervisor for children when they are left at home, the father having to be in his office early in the day etc.*), in the light of which the mother responds, “*Oh, I’m working from home*”, to which the husband adds, “*Great. I could drive her to school on my way.*”

The dialogic interaction as the power house of comprehension discourse process would, thus, operate under the 'rule of law' of communicative competence. Speakers or even the native speakers of a language may naturally vary in their domain of communicative competence. For example, not all users of a language can equally process texts of all registers: for language users to be able to process a sports report on a cricket match, they should know the rule of the game; and not all language users can equally process a text on an academic subject or write an abstract for an academic paper. The dialogic interaction would thus operate within the following domains of language law or communicative competence (apart from the knowledge of the code system, of course): Context of situation; Context of culture; Verbal interaction codes; Politeness codes; Register codes; Genre codes.

As an example of the dialogic interaction in comprehension discourse, we may look at the following: A couple, or two roommates or two siblings one of whom receives a call and engages in conversation while the other not knowing who the caller is and what she/he says engages in a series of mental 'dialogic interactions' to guess the identity of the caller. The overhearing party tries to use the call-receiver's talk (its contents, textual features, the conversational style, degree of politeness, the language.....) to narrow down the guessing options; and for every hypothetical answer occurring to his mind, he implements a series of quick compatibility tests against the available facts: for example, he presumes the caller to be a family friend, but this is ruled out by the interactional codes displayed; or he may presume the caller to be the call-receiver's colleague, but this is also ruled out by the degree of formality of the displayed talk; or the caller may be guessed to be the call-receiver's gym-trainer, but it is again ruled out by the 'gossip' they seem to get fast engaged in. These speculative presumptions and their management by the overhearing roommate can be seen as examples of dialogic interaction.

## 7. Why Do Discourse Analysis?

As it was discussed above, according to discursial and functional approaches to language, every piece of text represents its context of situation and any variation in ways of saying, even seemingly very minor changes, would reflect changes in the underlying context. It is also maintained that texts are not merely mediums for transferring messages but they also 'mediate' in message-making process. It would, thus, be quite reasonable for applied linguists to engage in *postulating frameworks for the characterization of relationships between the way something is said and its context of situation*. discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis, defined as it was above, can reveal a lot about the nature of verbal interactions, the context and culture engulfing them, the language users and the society; and the information gained thereupon can help the people in charge of running the society to make effective decisions for achieving their plans.

### 7.1. Language education

Most of such decisions can be related to language education. Those entrusted with the task of designing syllabuses for language programs should naturally be aware of the features of the target texts the clients of their programs are planned to be able to handle. Traditionally, such features were mainly defined in terms of the lexico-grammatical components. But discursial approaches, as discussed above, define 'knowing' a language in terms of 'communicative competence' which is far wider than the knowledge of lexicogrammar in that language. Discoursally speaking, verbal interactions arise not merely through a set of lexicogrammar rules but rather along the procedures in the discursial arena operating with regards to a host of socio-cultural factors and directed by the textual indices involved. In fact, it has been this mediating role of text in the discursial

functioning of interpersonal verbal transactions which has been highlighted before under ‘textuality’ vs. ‘grammaticality’, (see Lotfipoursaedi 2008,2015a, 2015b, 2018, 2019, 2021). Textuality, as distinct from texture, is used to highlight how the context of situation is ‘construed’ in text and the way any change in such textual representation would indicate a change in context. It was argued that focusing on lexicogrammar in language education may lead only to ‘learning’ the code-system of the language but focusing on the perception of textuality will enable the language user to perceive the text and its underlying context as interconnected entities. Language, as an ability, is not learnable by learning its code-system but it can be ‘acquired’ by performing language and communication tasks focusing mainly on meaning and function; and, as the L2 acquisition scholars advocate, the process can be facilitated by some focus on ‘form’. As already discussed (see Lotfipoursaedi 2019), the ‘form’ to be focused on cannot be the ‘grammaticality’ but ‘textuality’.

The approach is / can be employed in all types of language education including ESL, EFL, ESP, EOP, EMP, and for focusing on all aspects of language use including essay writing, report writing, interviews, note-taking, ... Hundreds of such projects can be cited which are listed as discursal in their approaches. But, as noted above, in most of them, especially most of those belonging to the earlier decades after 1970s, the approaches adopted hardly exceeded beyond the register-analytic choice of texts, topics and task-types (for example, medical texts for EMP, lab-report writing for English for Pharmacy students), and some meta-language elements (for example, ‘discourse markers’ instead of ‘connectors’).

### **7.2. Critical discourse analysis (CDA)**

Apart from language educational applications of discourse analysis, socio-politics can also benefit from discursal insights on language. As noted above, texts do not function merely as ‘mediums’ for transferring messages; they are rather ‘mediators’ in interpersonal communications, and as such, they can be used or rather ‘abused’ by communicators for socio-political purposes: establishing ways of thinking and attitudes and inculcating ideologies: political ideas, biases, race, gender, class and other social discriminations. Zaidi and White (2021, 89), for example, show how journalists would opt for strategic use of ‘attitude-associated linguistic resources in difficult political circumstances’. Such abuses are, of course, denied when challenged on the part of the communicators arguing that ‘nothing of the claimed effect is said in the text’. Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to reveal the true nature of such claims by providing discursal evidence. Hart (2014) notes that “CDA ...seeks to disclose the ideological persuasive properties of text and talk which might not be immediately apparent without the assistance of a systematized descriptive framework such as a grammar or typology” (p.2). According to Wodak and Meyer (2009), critical discourse analysis is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. For Normal Fairclough, CDA is a method

*to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. (Fairclough 1995: 132)*

### **7.3. Translation studies**

Translation studies as well as translation practitioners would also benefit from the discursal orientation to language. Traditionally, translation activities were normally defined in terms of replacement of SL (source language) elements by equivalent TL (target language) ones. Depending on the linguistic outlook adhered to, the elements to be replaced in the translation process were maintained to be meanings, functions, language structural levels (words, phrases,

clauses, sentences), or grammatical categories (nouns, adverbials, adjectives). Discoursally speaking, however, meanings and functions are not inherent to the language code and, as discussed before, texts are not merely 'medium' to carry or rather be deposited with meanings and functions; they are rather 'mediators' and 'indices' directing the receiver to perceive the overall discourse process 'construed' by the source text, and to negotiate a possible meaning for the context at hand and under the SL socio-cultural profile. With this orientation in mind, the translator would carry out the act of 'translating' while seeking the 'equivalence' in terms of the SL and TL texts and the respective 'contexts' they 'construe'.

#### **7.4. Analyzing literature texts**

Trends in literary critical studies tend to focus on the language elements employed in literature text as evidence for the claims on the direction of the message. This evidential linguistic support for literary argumentations would naturally carry more validity if they are functional rather than structural, textuality- rather than grammaticality-oriented. As an example, Butt et al. (2012) give an example of using SFG tools for some analysis of a novel. The novel is D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. 1913. They argue that any study of the organization of the systems of Transitivity, Mood and Theme as choices of the Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual meta-functions in the clauses of a text "can only assist us .....in reading off the semantic pressures which may have motivated the making of the text under investigation" (p.316). Not everything in a text can, of course, be of equal value for the analysis. It is argued that in their analysis, they value texts that "often involve higher orders of consistency, strategies of foregrounded meanings that cannot be plausibly explained away as just random choices" (p.320). To put it simply, they seek textual evidence from the choices made towards what they call 'semantic goals' or 'patterns of thought' and 'semantic drift' (p.320) as emergent in the text.

### **8. Concluding Remarks**

This paper was meant to make some exploratory notes and deliberations on the discursal outlook in the functioning of language. The core objectives pursued can be summarized in terms of the following: discursal approach to language; the concepts 'discourse' vs. 'text' defined and their interrelationship discussed; text as medium vs. text as mediator; texts representing or rather 'construing' their respective contexts; how do texts mean what they are believed to mean; texture vs. textuality; grammaticality vs. textuality; the reason why discourse is analysed and the way this analysis should be carried out.

The discursal paradigm to language was discussed to have evolved with respect to the true and essential function of language as a socio-communicative tool; and in the light of such discussions, it was argued in the present paper that in any research project involving language, the discursal outlook and its constituent principles should be carefully observed in order for such projects to achieve authentic and valid outcomes. As an example, the notion of 'focus-on-form' (advocated in second language acquisition research: SLA) was cited, and it was argued that, within the discursal paradigm, this notion should be defined within the domain of 'textuality' not 'grammaticality'.

The paper mainly addressed the graduate students and possibly our colleagues in Applied Linguistics. For this reason and also because of the limitation of space, it is admitted that the concepts discussed may seem not to have been elaborated and exemplified adequately. Also, more research would naturally be required along the discussions made above. For example, on the textualization strategies, explorations can be attempted on the domain of T-unit and the relation between the degree of comprehensibility of a text and the propositional density (see 5.2 above) of



its T-units. This propositional density can also be studied across different genres and registers in academic discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> Chomskyan Transformational Generative Grammar and his view on the innate nature of human language acquisition capacity can also be considered as a paradigm shifting change (though of psycho-linguistic nature) cf. Chomsky 1957 & 1965

<sup>2</sup> The main audience of this paper is presumed to be Applied Linguistics students and colleagues and as such elaborations and examples will be kept to minimum to save space.

<sup>3</sup> The two features 'theme-rheme & given-new' have somewhat been characterized differently in SFG, which is beyond the point to be discussed here.