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Discourse Analysis
Applied to
English Language Teaching
in Colombian Contexts:
Theory and Methods

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Introduction

At some point in history, humans began to discover the real, multidimensional and elaborate nature of words coming to the realization that they were not transparent, but rather, they possessed symbolic characteristics beyond their literal meaning which played an active part in the creation and transformation of realities. This meant that meaning-making and interpretation were a social and multifaceted negotiation which required boundless information from the social environment in order to make sense, not merely of the physical world around them, nor simply of the language-constituting bits and pieces, but about *the self* as well, especially in relation to its physical and social surroundings and its interdependence as to time and space (Gee, 1996) in a way that created individual and collective identities. Escobar (2013) defines this as:

> "[…] a historical and sociocultural structure which makes the ever-changing co-formations of relationships possible between the self and the world and that, through discourse, allows us to identify, understand, conceive, construct, and accept or reject the different possibilities within a given time and space while seeking individual or collective interests. Accordingly, identity is closely and directly related to discourse since this is how individuals act and interact, position themselves and are positioned in a social place, a way of being in the world, and thus, a way to form and transform identities." (p. 50)

Hence discourse transcends all realms of society: science, politics, religion, culture, education, psychology, language, thought, etc. Initially, and in Jørgensen & Phillips (2002)'s words, "[…]language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life, familiar examples being 'medical discourse' and 'political discourse'" (p. 1). However, while there are socially pre-established patterns of language use which allow us to distinguish between discourse genres,

types, and ways in which language behaves according to context specificities, there are also sociocultural conventions at play in interaction which create, assign, shape, and modify meaning, and whose systematical and meticulous examination would potentially expose, on the one hand, understandings of the word and the established relations to it—*inter alia* beliefs, intentions, dispositions, attitudes, choices, values, positions, desires, knowledge—and on the other, the potential that discourse poses to create, maintain, and change them (Escobar 2013; Fairclough, 2003; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Van Dijk, 1993). That is to say that once humans caught a glimpse of the scope of possibilities discourse presented to construct and modify people's knowledge, ideologies, and social understandings, they saw an advantage they could use for their gain and consequently, analyzing discourse would reap numerous benefits, among others, in the following general arenas.

Initially and at an operational level, discourse contributes to the understanding of language and language behavior, factoring in prescriptive as well as ever-changing parameters to nurture understandings about speaking and writing mechanics such as the position, form, and functions of parts of speech; the configuration of language in conversations and other speech events; and changes of language use across genres, geographical regions, generations, and communities of practices. This understanding, in turn, could potentially boost language development, not only for the purposes of learning or acquiring a subsequent language, but also to enhance the communicative performance in genres and domains in one's dominant language—of which one may not have a full command (e.g. refining texts to reach academic publishing levels or learning business vocabulary and idiomatic usage for business contexts).

Analyzing discourse beyond the fundamentals of language while bearing in mind the reciprocal influencing-dynamics that culture and language exert on one another (Escobar & Gómez, 2010) can shed light on the ways in which society structures and engages in communication as well as how such communication builds and transforms society, generates common sociocultural representations, and establishes a social order to reveal collective principles: the ideologies, values, and idiosyncrasies associated with language behavior (e.g. patterns of language use, language variations, and language evolution).

Similarly, discourse operates alongside cognitive domains creating, establishing, and justifying a socially constituted body of knowledge. In their exploration of this, Appel and Lantolf (1994) sought to explore ways in which speaking mediates thinking, comprehending, and higher-order cognitive processes to claim that "speaking not only mediates the subjects' attempts to report on what they understand from a text, but also how it serves as the process through which they come to comprehend a text" (p.

437). That is to say, "discourse is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1). However, discourse does not just enable knowledge construction and its diffusion, it also serves as a screening mechanism which selects what knowledge claims can be socially acknowledged by positioning people in places, employing means of communication, and designing discursive strategies that regulate what can be said about something, Foucault's "when, where, and how" (1988). Consequently, discourse analysis may prove useful in both informing cognitive processes and uncovering the discursive strategies that establish knowledge both in society and in intentions.

At a personal level, discourse embodies ways of constructing and reconstructing our views of the world and our relationships to others, means of devising strategies to position and reposition ourselves so as to take up distinct roles in society, forms of acting in, and interacting with the world, of representing and interpreting realities and of thinking, doing, and being and thus, ways of manufacturing the self in light of the multifaceted power dynamics of social interaction (Clark, 2010; Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1988; Gee 1996, 1999; Norton, 2000). Examining this would help us understand the formation processes of social constructs like membership, positioning, gender, community, otherness and their corresponding associations with past experiences, present developments, and future possibilities.

At a political level, the rise of spoken discourse prompted individuals to imagine themselves as part of communities, and gave birth to the concept of nationalism which was successively reinforced with printed discourse that stressed common characteristics (capitalism, Christianity, democracy, etc.,) and downplayed the differences between sub-groups (Anderson, 2006). In this regard, social forces at work have taken various forms: from the use of the most powerful biological weapons to subtle pursuits for communication control. On the one hand, country incursions like the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii were displays of force in the quest for power accompanied by discursive elaborations of national identities, supremacy, sovereignty, and justice. Subtle occupation campaigns, on the other hand, involve the monopolization of the media: propaganda, news, movies, satellites, radio and television stations, and other forms in addition to discourse channels which exemplify the creation of confusion, bewilderment, and perplexity: "Modern and more effective power is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation, or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the minds of others in one's own interests" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 254). Hence, the value of being able to discern such phenomena lies in the potential to identify outdated and unjust social structures, to raise

awareness, and to strive for social change.

Examining the nature of language and its relationships to the self, others, thought, knowledge, culture, and society is every bit what education should be about. Rogers et al. (2005), for example, explores literature about discourse analysis in education in light of those relationships it establishes with the physical and social domains (e.g. explaining methods, studying issues of reflexivity, and discussing singularities like ideology, privilege, power, and control) to conclude that critical approaches to discourse analysis have changed education and this, in turn, has widened the boundaries and altered the characteristics of discourse analysis itself.

In this specific area of English education in the Colombian national context, researchers have increasingly embraced discourse analysis to fulfill a wide range of functions. To better understand how language works, for example, Chapetón (2009) employed a qualitative and quantitative mixed-approach to discourse analysis to study frequency, distribution, and functions of discourse markers in EFL student interaction to describe pragmatic characteristics of such discourses. Castañeda (2012), on the other hand, utilized its tools to characterize discourses which emerged from women EFL learners in online discussions about literature and how language mediates their social exchanges and, consequently, their learning processes. Maloof and Housset Fonseca (2009) taught critical discourse analysis to enhance the critical thinking processes of students. On the topic of identity, Soler (2012) explored ways in which ethnic identities are discursively constituted around dynamics of adaptation, resistance and negotiation in learning. Gómez (2012) studied processes of identity construction in the EFL classroom and their relation to the development of the target language.

Moving beyond the impact that discourse analysis may have in the micro-level contexts of individual EFL classrooms, in the policy realm, Guerrero (2010) analyzed official discourses to describe the ways in which English teachers are portrayed in documents like the *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés. Formar en lenguas extranjeras, el reto [Basic Standards of Competencies in Foreign Languages: English. Development in Foreign Languages, the challenge]*. Escobar (2013), on the other hand, frames a study of English policymaking processes in Colombia under discourse analysis principles to illustrate discursive strategies employed to form and transform identities and, thereby, justify asymmetrical power structures in English education.

Despite the numerous aforesaid examples of studies on discourse analysis, the discussion addressing the corresponding relations of second or foreign language acquisition and discourse analysis in the Colombian context

is still limited (Castañeda-Peña, 2012); hence, this book, *Discourse Analysis Applied to English Language Teaching in Colombian Contexts: Theory and Methods* represents an attempt to complement such discussions by depicting social practices in EFL teaching and learning processes and contributing to the academic community with the assertions that may ensue in regard to language knowledge, social constructions, and dynamics of power and control.

This book presents a conceptualization and contextualization of discourse analysis, followed by studies of language patterns, structures of conversations, identity constitution, and the vision of virtual communities through online interactions. It concludes by drawing assertions between discourse analysis and the acquisition of English as a foreign language in Colombian contexts.

The first chapter, 'Classroom Discourse Analysis: Outlining the Field' draws constituents from many different discourse analysis approaches to situate and characterize classroom language. To begin, it deliberates on how discourse studies define classroom language. Subsequently, it delineates discourse analysis in *general* educational settings, from feminist post-structural analysis (a derivation) which facilitates the understanding of power dynamics of learning in foreign language classroom interactions. Accordingly, the author elaborates and advises on methodological implications regarding classroom discourse to finally expand on the analysis of discourse for English as foreign and second language settings.

The second chapter, 'Exploring Pragma-grammatical Roles of 'Do' in EFL Students Spoken Production' is a corpus linguistics study that uses computerized tools to examine naturally occurring conversations and characterize patterns of language use to subsequently compare them to the sociocultural language configurations native English speakers use in their natural sociocultural exchange to analyze their potential impact on communication. The analysis is initially guided by patterns of use, overuse, and underuse of linguistic resources which consequently warrants the detailed examination of specific linguistic items through the creation and use of concordances; additionally, this chapter exemplifies the study of one specific linguistic item 'do' and its interrelations to other linguistic components in meaning-making attempts and in light of sociocultural representations.

Chapter three, 'Doing Research on Classroom Interaction: Approaches, Studies and Reasons' reflects upon the structures of conversations discussing three investigations conducted under conversation analysis methodologies and theories about discourse analysis. These studies postulate influences of L1 on L2, describe request events and delineate sequencing in classroom conversations. This chapter advocates discourse analysis to understand the pragmatics

of interaction, the construction of social roles in the EFL classroom, and the discursive dynamics of the EFL teaching and learning endeavor.

Chapter Four, 'Unveiling the Masked Meanings of Classroom Interaction: A Critical Analysis to Classroom Discourse' seeks to characterize the identity-forming processes of EFL learners and how such identities may have an impact on the linguistic development and performance of EFL students. It advocates the need to enlarge our conception of the foreign language beyond the linguistic code and in isolation from other knowledge constructions into conceptualizations of language as a social practice that mediates cognitive processes of diverse natures.

Chapter five, 'From Underdogs to Important Speakers: Unveiling Language Learners' Identities through Peer-Approval Discourses' explores the discursive construction of status, hierarchy, and membership to groups in virtual contexts observing the interchange of opinions and reactions of students' affiliations to music, hobbies, knowledge, etc., and in terms of peer approval and disapproval. This study highlights the importance of discourse analysis in terms of the contested power struggles evidenced in a learning environment, the importance of understanding such dynamics in the teaching practice, and the possible mitigation of hostile environments to enhance learning.

Finally conclusions draw comprehensible associations between discourse analysis and language in several arenas: (a) the progressive evolution of discourse analysis and what it could represent for language education today; (b) the understanding of language make up and behavior and how discourse analysis could promote advantageous findings about linguistic structures and language use; (c) the establishment of connections between language and society to describe how language structures social life and, reciprocally, how social life structures language; (d) exploring the intricate relation between language and the self to depict identity-forming processes in foreign language interaction; and (e) describing individual and collective dynamics of social positioning which strive for distinctiveness as well as 'me' membership.

Discourse analysis holds wide-reaching importance for the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. It provides methods to acquire linguistic knowledge and update linguistic competence in a context where English is not commonly spoken in social life; it allows inquiries into social factors which play a crucial role in linguistic development and performance; and, it facilitates understanding the social appropriations of English as a foreign language and the construction and positioning of the persona in foreign language interaction.

As such, *Discourse Analysis Applied to English Language Teaching in Colombian Contexts: Theory and Methods* seeks to stimulate the discussion

about discourse analysis within the English teaching and learning processes, exemplify approaches to such analysis which may result in changes in teaching practices, and disseminate findings derived from studies which have exhibited a significant impact in the field of English as a foreign language teaching and learning in Colombia.

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