Discourse Analysis

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<div align="center">**Discourse Analysis**</div>

Discourse analysis is a research method for studying written or spoken language in relation to its social context. It aims to understand how language is used in real life situations.

When you do discourse analysis, you might focus on:

- The purposes and effects of different types of language

- Cultural rules and conventions in communication

- How values, beliefs and assumptions are communicated

- How language use relates to its social, political and historical context

Discourse analysis is a common qualitative research method in many humanities and social science disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology and cultural studies.

What is discourse analysis used for?

Conducting discourse analysis means examining how language functions and how meaning is created in different social contexts. It can be applied to any instance of written or oral language, as well as non-verbal aspects of communication such as tone and gestures.

Materials that are suitable for discourse analysis include:

- Books, newspapers and periodicals

- Marketing material, such as brochures and advertisements

- Business and government documents

- Websites, forums, social media posts and comments

- Interviews and conversations

By analyzing these types of discourse, researchers aim to gain an understanding of social groups and how they communicate.

How is discourse analysis different from other methods?

Unlike linguistic approaches that focus only on the rules of language use, discourse analysis emphasizes the contextual meaning of language.

It focuses on the social aspects of communication and the ways people use language to achieve specific effects (e.g. to build trust, to create doubt, to evoke emotions, or to manage conflict).

Instead of focusing on smaller units of language, such as sounds, words or phrases, discourse analysis is used to study larger chunks of language, such as entire conversations, texts, or collections of texts. The selected sources can be analyzed on multiple levels.

Discourse analysis	
Level of communication	**What is analyzed?**
Vocabulary	Words and phrases can be analyzed for ideological associations, formality, and euphemistic and metaphorical content.
Grammar	The way that sentences are constructed (e.g. verb tenses, active or passive construction, and the use of imperatives and questions) can reveal aspects of intended meaning.
Structure	The structure of a text can be analyzed for how it creates emphasis or builds a narrative.

Discourse analysis	
Level of communication	**What is analyzed?**
Genre	Texts can be analyzed in relation to the conventions and communicative aims of their genre (e.g. political speeches or tabloid newspaper articles).
Non-verbal communication	Non-verbal aspects of speech, such as tone of voice, pauses, gestures, and sounds like "um", can reveal aspects of a speaker's intentions, attitudes, and emotions.
Conversational codes	The interaction between people in a conversation, such as turn-taking, interruptions and listener response, can reveal aspects of cultural conventions and social roles.

How to conduct discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a qualitative and interpretive method of analyzing texts (in contrast to more systematic methods like content analysis). You make interpretations based on both the details of the material itself and on contextual knowledge.

There are many different approaches and techniques you can use to conduct discourse analysis, but the steps below outline the basic steps you need to follow.

Step 1: Define the research question and select the content of analysis

To do discourse analysis, you begin with a clearly defined research question. Once you have developed your question, select a range of material that is appropriate to answer it.

Discourse analysis is a method that can be applied both to large volumes of material and to smaller samples, depending on the aims and timescale of your research.

For example, You want to study how a particular regime change from dictatorship to democracy has affected the public relations rhetoric of businesses in the country. You decide to examine the mission statements and marketing material of the 10 largest companies within five years of the regime change.

Step 2: Gather information and theory on the context

Next, you must establish the social and historical context in which the material was produced and intended to be received. Gather factual details of when and where the content was created, who the author is, who published it, and whom it was disseminated to.

As well as understanding the real-life context of the discourse, you can also conduct a literature review on the topic and construct a theoretical framework to guide your analysis.

For example, You research factual information on the politics and history of the country and on the businesses you are studying. You also research theory on democratic transitions and the relationship between government and business.

Step 3: Analyze the content for themes and patterns

This step involves closely examining various elements of the material – such as words, sentences, paragraphs, and overall structure – and relating them to attributes, themes, and patterns relevant to your research question.

For example, You analyze the selected material for wording and statements that reflect or relate to authoritarian and democratic political ideologies, including attitudes toward authority, liberal values, and popular opinion.

Step 4: Review your results and draw conclusions

Once you have assigned particular attributes to elements of the material, reflect on your results to examine the function and meaning of the language used. Here, you will consider your analysis in relation to the broader context that you established earlier to draw conclusions that answer your research question.

For example, Your analysis shows that the material published before the regime change used language that emphasized the quality and necessity of its services and products, while the material published after the shift to a democratic regime emphasized the needs and values of the consumer. You compare the results with your research on the ideology and rhetoric of the political regimes, and infer that the shifting political context shaped the communication strategies of national businesses.

References

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