

UNIT 1

COMMUNICATION: THE MULTIPLE MODES OF HUMAN INTERCONNECTION

Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard

1.1 Aims

- To introduce the notions of Communication, Discourse, Genre and Text
- To introduce ideas of interaction through text
- To present notions about text structure
- To explore what it means for a text to be well-formed

1.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will:

- be familiar with concepts of text, genre and discourse
- understand what we mean by the interactive nature of text
- understand what we mean by the prospective nature of text
- be able to evaluate a text as successful or unsuccessful

1.3 Reading

After working through this unit, you should read

- Jaworski, A. and N. Coupland (eds.) (1999) *The Discourse Reader*. London: Routledge. Introduction: 1-38. (recommended)
- Van Dijk T (1997) 'The Study of Discourse'. In T. Van Dijk *Discourse Studies 1*: 1-34. (optional)
- Kress, G. (1985) *Linguistic Processes in Socio-Cultural Practice*, Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press, Ch. 1: 4-32. (optional)
- Bloor, M. and T. Bloor (2007) *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: an Introduction*, London: Hodder Arnold, Ch. 2. (optional)

1.4 How do we communicate?

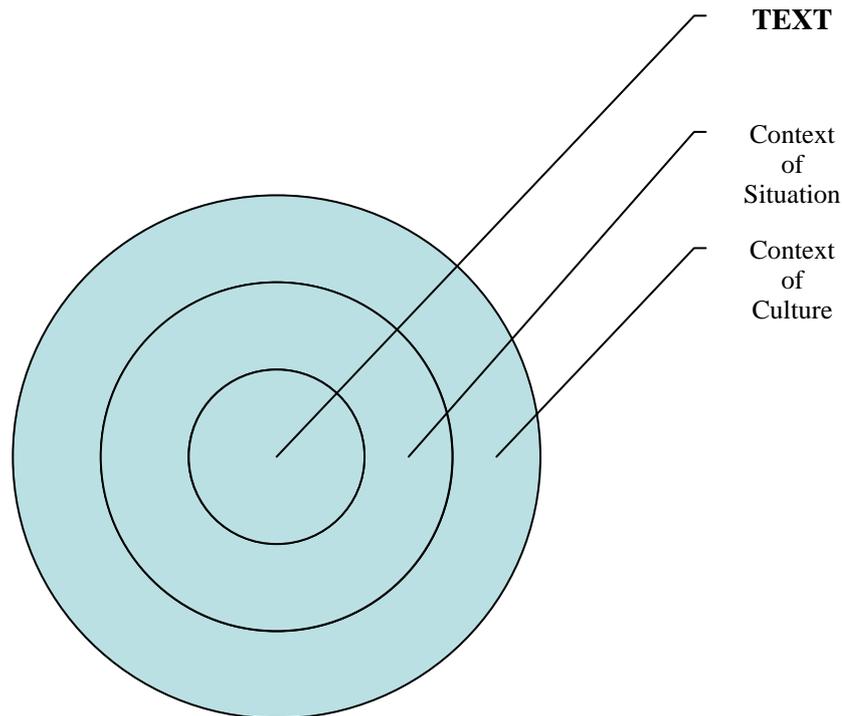
Language is only one of the ways in which we communicate meanings in our daily lives. We use the resources of our bodies and the environment to send messages to others. It is very interesting to look at babies and see how they use their physical resources to start and to maintain interactions with other beings. By using an index

finger and pointing, for example, an 11 month-old baby ‘says’ to her mum – ‘this is the lamp’.

We also communicate meanings through the choices we make in the ways we dress, accessorize, the ways we walk (think of the different meanings in the ways Bush used to walk), the ways we cut our hair, etc...

When we talk about Discourse, we refer to the ways people use different semiotic resources to communicate in general. The linguistic system is of course one of the most important modes of communication. One important fact about communication is that it always takes place in a context. Native speakers of all languages ‘know’ how to communicate in certain social situations, being appropriate most of the time. This is because communication and society are a unified conception – one does not exist without the other. So we can state that **all texts have contexts**, and even when we are examining surface linguistic features – as we will be doing in a few units of this course – we need to be aware of what outside the text is informing the text, and affecting the ways it is written or spoken. For example, we need to consider: who wrote the text? who did the author write it for? when, where, and why did they write it? where has the text appeared and in what format?

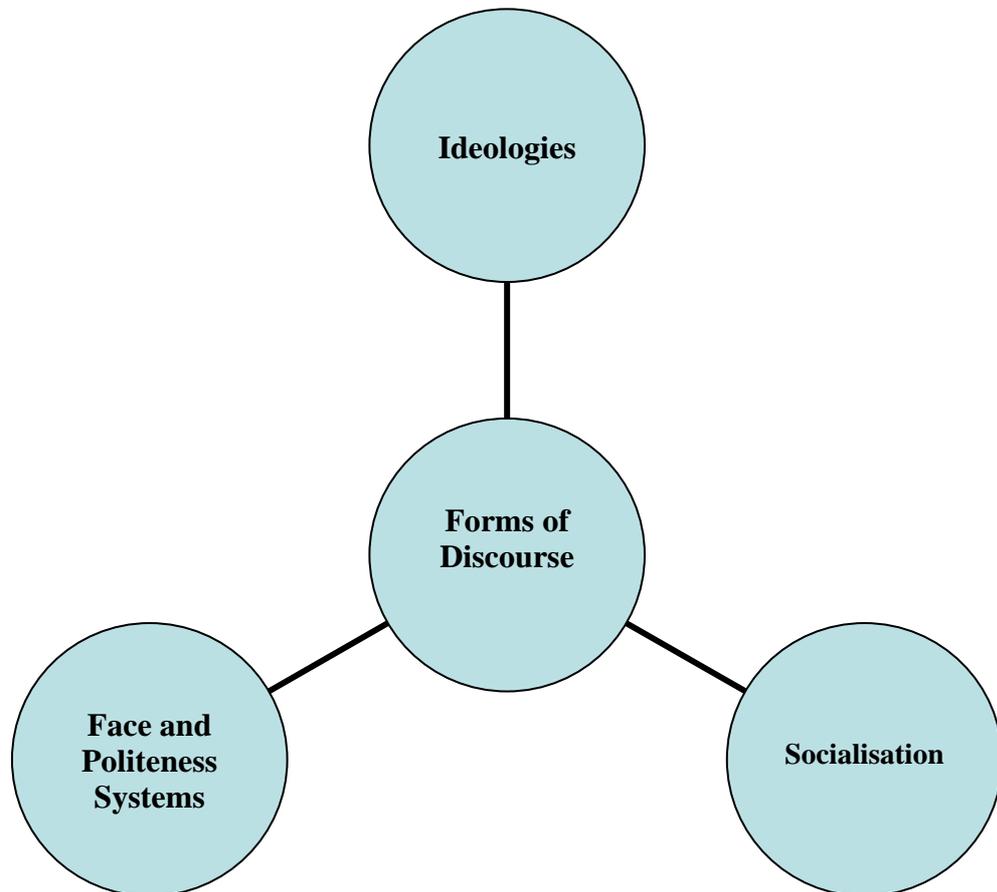
Michael Halliday (2004) the main proponent of the systemic functional view of communication and language, refers to two types of communicational contexts:



The context of culture is the broader context relating to general cultural rules for interaction. The context of situation is the inner circle where the immediate location will determine ways of interacting (things going on in the world outside the text which make the interaction what it is). Language is itself inseparable from its socio-linguistic context. In other words, we will have different ways of interacting if we are in a party or in a classroom (context of situation), especially if we are in different places like England or China (context of culture). The combination of the two contexts will produce differences in communication. Halliday says that when we notice that language is not the same across different situations, we are taking a **FUNCTIONAL** view of language. A functional view of language focuses on what makes one piece of language different from another. For Halliday, language is a systematic semiotic resource for expressing and exchanging meaning through varying contexts and linguistic usage.

Another important aspect of communication (or what we will call ‘forms of discourse’ from now on) is that our communications will depend not only on cultural and

situational contexts but also on the ways we were raised as people (socialisation patterns), on our beliefs and values (ideologies), and on the ways we use our social skills to maintain as good as a social interpersonal climate as possible (face and politeness systems, Goffman 1955). The diagram below summarises these relationships:



Finally, our forms of discourse will also depend on the ways we identify ourselves in given situations. Our identities depend also on the ways we interact with others and these are closely linked to our ways of being: our gender, age, profession and social relations, our nationality, our religion, among other possibilities. In fact, we can say that 'because' of our forms of discourse we have multiple identities. So, when we refer to 'modes of discourse', we are talking about the kind of text that is being made,

the channel of communication adopted, the people involved in the interaction and finally the place and time where this interaction takes place.

Reflection Task 1

Read the following fragments of texts, and say what *general kind* of writing you think each comes from. How easy is it to decide? How sure are you on a scale from 1-10?

In what contexts would you expect to find these fragments? What clues are there in the fragments to their contexts?

N. B. We recommend that you use our discussion lists to discuss the tasks in this course.

A. bread 1 pane m. 2 (*fig*) (*food*) pane m cibo m: *give us this day our daily* ~ dacci oggi il nostro pane quotidiano.

B. For Morton (1979), the central issue in word recognition is the role of *context*, because it is easier to recognise a word in some supporting context than in isolation.

C. The government is to unveil a £100m rescue package this week to save coal pits in Labour's heartlands as the party battles to rally traditional supporters threatening to desert it.

D. First of all make the marinade in a saucepan by combining the vinegar, spices, bayleaves and sugar with 1/4 pint (150 ml) water. Bring to boiling point, then simmer very gently for 5 minutes.

E. Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed.

F. Individual presentations should be timed for 30 minutes, followed by a 10 minute discussion period. There are no restrictions on the language of the presentation, but unfortunately it is not possible to offer interpretation.

We hope that you found this relatively straightforward and that you recognised these fragments as coming from (number these according to the presentation above):

- | | |
|--|-----|
| academic writing (a linguistics textbook) | () |
| conference announcement. | () |
| cookery book | () |
| dictionary | () |
| newspaper report | () |
| novel | () |

It is also very important to keep in mind the fact that all texts have **purposes**. These will, of course, range widely. A humorous column in a magazine may be intended purely to entertain, whereas a document such as an act of parliament is intended to establish a binding principle of law. One way in which texts can fail is that they do not fulfil their purpose adequately.

Reflection Task 2

What are the purposes of the texts from which the fragments in the previous reflection task are taken?

1.5 Text, Genre and Discourse – introducing concepts

Before we go any further, we need to establish what we mean by 'discourse' and what we mean by 'text'.

When we talk about **text**, we are referring to language. When we study text, we study its formal characteristics: in particular, its structure and its grammatical and lexical choices. When we talk about **a text**, we are referring to a unit of language that is complete within its own terms. A course book, a poem, a lecture, an advertisement, an instruction leaflet, a courtroom trial are all texts: that is, we can consider them as individual linguistic units (although normally, of course, we react to them in the context of other texts, or in the light of our awareness of other texts, and not in isolation). This course can be considered as a text, as can the other courses that you have studied so far. As you work through to the end of the course, you may like to think whether or not it is successful as a text, in its structure as well as in its contents. We can summarise the definition of 'text' by saying that 'text' is a **collection of meanings appropriate to a context**. The *Purpose* of any communication will determine its structure – the way most pieces of language are put together containing certain obligatory elements to create meaning.

Genres (further discussed in later units) is a socially acceptable way of using language in connection with a particular kind of social activity. Through different 'genres', people use language to achieve culturally recognised goals. When texts share the same obligatory and optional structural elements, they belong to the same genre.

Stories, comments, anecdotes, for example, share the same generic structure and share the same social purposes.

When we talk about **discourse** (in the singular) we are referring to texts and genres in their social context. That is, we are not just considering the *language* and *structure* of the text, but also how it relates to the society and culture that it belongs to. When we study discourse, we study the way a text creates meaning and reflects the views and ideology of its writer and his/her society: we will see how, in fact, a particular view or ideology is constructed through a text. If we were to consider this course as a discourse, we would investigate how we – the authors – project our view of the topic, of linguistics, and of the world, at the same time as explaining the issues, and we would also investigate our social purpose in creating the text. In this sense **discourse is always part of social action**: every text is an instrument of communication placed in a social context, being influenced by it and at the same time, influencing it. One of the major proponents of a critical stance to discourse, Norman Fairclough, in fact suggests: ‘Discourse is for me more than *just* language use; it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice’ (1992: 28).

But we also talk about **discourses**. And by this we mean: **knowledges**, which are at the same time:

(1) knowledges of practices, of how things are or must be done, together with specific evaluations and legitimations of, and purposes for, these practices – we can refer to Discourses of institutions with their rules and regulations (legal discourses, media discourses) or ideologically motivated (sexist discourse, racist discourse);

(2) knowledges which are linked to and activated in the context of specific communicative practices – a lecture, a political speech, going to a bank, or a play session between a mother and a baby.

This is the distinction between **text**, **genres** and **discourse** that we will be making in this course. Many other writers now use the terms in very similar ways: text to refer to language, discourse to refer to language-within-social-context. However, you will find as you read on the subject that these terms are sometimes differentiated in other ways. Most significantly, some writers, including linguists of the Birmingham school, use **text** to refer to written-mode language and **discourse** to refer to oral-mode

language: hence ‘written text analysis’ and ‘spoken discourse analysis’. And other writers use **text** and **discourse** interchangeably. This is yet another (infuriating!) example of the problem of terminology. At this point, you should read Jaworski and Coupland's (1999) *Introduction*, where the authors discuss the many usages of the term 'discourse'.

Two other terms that you will come across during this course and the reading you will be doing are:

- **Discourse Domain**, which is the socially recognized context within which the discourse takes place (e.g. scientific discourse – domain of science); and
- **Social Practice**, which can be defined as things that people (*social actors*) DO with/to other people, in specific *places* following *conventions/rules* in *time* and *space*. ‘Social practices are the socially condoned models of how social activities should be accomplished in order to achieve coordination within society and *social actors* are the selected participants within a discourse’ (Van Leeuwen 2008: 6).

In this course, we will be interested in investigating social practices through *semiotic* (meanings that arise from other signs, like type faces, colour, diagrams, etc...) and linguistic aspects of texts, genres and discourses, since we need to take into account features of written communication, which help create structure and meaning. All of these aspects of communication reflect social practices or ways of doing things, power relations, and ideologies.

Since the first studies done in Birmingham during the 1970's with the pioneering work of John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard on Classroom Discourse, Discourse Analysis grew out of the research within different disciplines in the 1960's and early 1970's that included the fields of linguistics, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, semiotics, conversation analysis, speech act theory and social theory. Discourse Analysis as an area of study in the 21st century has now expanded beyond Linguistics and Social Semiotics and it is now considered to be a multi-disciplinary approach to communication and interaction. Many other academic areas claim to ‘do’ discourse analysis among them:

- **Psychology**

- **Anthropology**
- **Cultural Studies**
- **Sociology of Interaction**
- **New Literacy Studies**
- **Literary Linguistics (Narratology)**
- **Cultural Geography**

1.6 What is Discourse Analysis for students of language?

Stubbs' (Stubbs 1983: 1) defined discourse analysis for students of language as:

1. concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance;
2. concerned with the interrelationships between language and society; and
3. concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication.

He says:

The term discourse analysis is very ambiguous. I will use it (*in his book*) to refer mainly to the linguistic analysis of *naturally occurring connected speech or written discourse*. Roughly speaking, it refers to attempts to study the organisation of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study *larger linguistic units*, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with *language use in social contexts*, and in particular with *interaction* or dialogue between speakers. (ibid)

We would add that Discourse Analysis is also concerned, not only with describing linguistically or semiotically what goes on in communication but also with understanding what people 'do' socially through their ways of communication. For us, Discourse is socially constructive, constituting social subjects, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief. Discursive practices (like the media and other institutional practices) have effects on social structures – they can produce and reproduce unequal relations through the way they represent people, things, events, since 'all texts code the ideological position[s] of their producers' (Caldas-Coulthard 1996: 268). Discourse Analysts, especially critical ones, are concerned therefore with deconstructing ideologies, power relations, discrimination and exclusion in interaction. Van Leeuwen (2008: 6) states:

[Discourses] not only represent what is going on, they also evaluate it, ascribe purpose to it, justify it, and so on, and in many texts these aspects of representation become far more important than the representation of the social practice itself.

As Discourse Analysts, it is our duty to understand how this is done and to reveal the strategies used by participants in interaction. In this sense, Discourse Analysis is not only an academic subject, but a tool that we can use to take social action. We are interested in investigating, revealing and clarifying how discriminatory values are inscribed in and mediated through semiotic systems. We will expand these notions when we refer to Critical Discourse Analysis in a later unit.

1.7 References

- Bloor, M. and T. Bloor (2007) *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: an Introduction*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. (1996) “‘Women who pay for sex. And enjoy it.’ Transgression versus morality in women’s magazines’ In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard and R. M. Coulthard (eds.) *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge, pp.250-270.
- Fairclough, N. (1992a) *Discourse and Social Change*. London: Polity Press.
- Goffman, E. (1955) ‘On Face-Work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction’. *Psychiatry: Journal of Interpersonal Relations* 18:3, pp. 213–231
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2004) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (3rd ed.). London: Edward Arnold.
- Jaworski, A. and N. Coupland (eds.) (1999) *The Discourse Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (1985) *Linguistic Processes in Socio-Cultural Practice*. Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Stubbs, M. (1983) *Discourse Analysis: the Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Van Dijk, T. (ed.) (1997a) *Discourse as Structure and Process: Discourse Studies 1. A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. London: Sage.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2008) *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: OUP.