

discourse analysis essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

To truly understand what discourse analysis is, it is important to first understand what discourse is. There are three ways in which we can describe discourse; each of which are of equal importance: Firstly, discourse can be described as language beyond the level of the sentence. By this we mean that it is a type of language that extends past features such as sounds (phonetics), structures (syntax) and the parts that make up words (morphology). The second description of discourse concerns language behaviors linked to a social practice; this suggests that a discourse is a type of language. For example, the most popular discourse you may have heard of is the discourse of law, whereby legal documents are written in as much depth as possible to avoid any vagueness and ambiguity. This style of writing is unique to the legal profession, meaning it is a specific kind of discourse.

Finally, discourse is described as being a system of thought. This is by far the most scientific description of the three, as it disagrees with the notion that knowledge and truth are either universal or objective. Conversely, it suggests that the ideas about knowledge and truth emerge from particular social and historical situations. An example would be the process of contemporary science and its attempts to produce objective knowledge. The concept of objectivity is itself socially constructed; it's subjective. This means that 'natural' categories are actually produced by human categorization, such as the differences between humans and animals; all humans are animals, but not all animals are humans. However, this is purely because humans have decided it has to be like this. Discourses appear to produce '

natural' knowledge, but they're actually shaped by powerful institutions (such as capitalism and heterosexuality).

This may all seem a little bit confusing at the moment, so for now just be aware that discourse, in its broadest definition, refers to a written or spoken type of communication. As such, a discourse analysis attempts to delve deeper into the various types of written or spoken language.

Discourse analysis can be characterized as a way of approaching & thinking about a problem. In other words discourse analysis will enable to reveal the hidden motivations behind a text or behind the choice of a particular method of research to interpret that text.

Discourse analysis can be defined in 3 ways :

- 1) Language beyond the level of sentence.
- 2) Language behaviors linked to social practices.
- 3) Language as a system of thought.

Analysis of discourse looks not only at the basic level of what is said, but takes into consideration the surrounding social & historical contexts.

There are three most important people involved with the development of Discourse Analysis.

- 1) French philosopher, Michel Foucault:

He set the stepping stones for many social theorists and discourse analysis itself. The theories of Foucault have actually led to a specialized variant of discourse analysis, called Foucauldian discourse analysis. In 1972, Foucault wrote “ Nothing has any meaning outside of discourse” and the point he was

<https://assignbuster.com/discourse-analysis-essay-sample/>

trying to make here was that discourse creates a social context and gives meaning to anything that is spoken about. This includes institutional objects such as power and knowledge and discourse analysts work from these ideas about social objects to look for the truth in their structures.

2) Norman Fairclough :

Although the principle of his work is concentrated on the variant of critical discourse analysis, which looks at how power and ideology are reproduced through language. He is considered as one of the founders of critical discourse analysis, and his first book *Language and Power* (1989) was all about looking at discourse usage and how it related to unequal measures of power. This is one of the key concepts in CDA, considering how language reproduces power, and the effect of this in society.

3) Teun Adrianus van Dijk:

He currently lectures at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain. Van Dijk has published many books on discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, with the bulk of his work looking at racism in discourse. This is important work for the social sciences as understanding how racist ideologies are reproduced by ‘symbolic elites’ (a term used by van Dijk to refer to politicians and journalists among others) is key to working towards cutting racism and prejudices out of society.

There are many reasons why we may want to study discourse analysis: One of which would be that the language we use in everyday life is used by everybody. It might sometimes be incoherent or nonsensical, but

nevertheless we can usually comprehend it; it is a prevalent phenomenon. Another reason is that people never communicate things in either a natural or objective way. This, according to a discourse analyst, simply means that our language always seeks a particular response when we use it. Usually, it's a cognitive process (i. e. an unconscious decision), making it interesting to a linguist. For example, look at the way these two common utterances are expressed:

a) “ Are you sure you want to go out?”

b) “ How come you want to go out?”

As you can see, both a) and b) concern the same query. However, if you were to say utterance a), then the likely result you'd be seeking would be for the person you're addressing to not go out. In contrast, utterance b) would be less demanding; it is more of an actual query than a dissuasive device. Also, by studying discourse analysis, you'd be promoting yourself as a “ critical consumer of information”. This means that you'd begin to view the way newspapers encouraged you to look at something one way but not another.

The purpose of discourse analysis is not to provide definite answers, but to expand our personal horizons & make us realize our own shortcomings and unacknowledged agendas / motivations- as well as that of others. Discourse analysis will not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enable us to understand the conditions behind a specific “ problem” and make us realize that the essence of that “ problem” and its resolution, lie in its assumptions ; the very assumptions that enable the existence of that “

problem”. By enabling us to make these assumptions explicit.

Discourse analysis aims at allowing us to view the “ problem” from a higher stance and to gain a comprehensive view of the “ problem” and ourselves in relation to that “ problem.”(Frohman, bernd. “ Discourse analysis as a research method in library & information science” library & information science research 16 (1994) : 119: 138

Frohman applies the kind of Discourse analysis practiced by Michel Foucault to the field of library and information science. This is both an introduction to Discourse analysis and an explanation why the theories of Michel Foucault are relevant to our field, as well as an example of the practical application of Discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis is a form of discourse analysis that studies the relationship between discourse and ideology (a set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that constitute a perspective on the world). It focuses on critiquing social injustice, and has strong links to the study of language and power. Most critical discourse analysts approach a text with a political goal or agenda of some kind, and are often advocates for social justice and social change, seeking to show how a text could be biased towards a particular ideology.

Discourse analysis is not only about method, it is also a perspective on the nature of language and its relationship to the central issues of the social sciences. More specifically, we see discourse analysis as related collection of approaches to discourse, approaches that entail not only practices of data collection and analysis, but also set of metatheoretical and theoretical

assumptions and a body of research claims and studies. (Linda wood and Rolf Kroger, doing discourse analysis. Sage, 2000)

In the end, discourse analysis is one way to engage in a very important human task. The task is this : to think more deeply about the meanings we give people’s words so as to make ourselves better, more humane people and the world a better more humane place.” (J. P.. gee, an introduction to discourse analysis, Routledge 2005.)