36 Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching

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0 Introduction: The Interface of Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching

The **communicative approach** to language teaching, which began in the early 1970s and gradually took over most of language teaching in the world, at least in "ideology" if not in practice, has made people aware of the need to focus on communicative features of language use as an integral part of the teaching program. It is widely accepted in the field that we teach both "language *for* communication" and "language *as* communication." In other words, the objective of language teaching is for the learners to be able to communicate by using the target language, even if at times this is limited communication, and the most effective way to teach language is by *using* it for communication. So, given this premise, the *goal* of language teaching is to enable the learner to communicate and the *method* for teaching is for the learner to experience and practice relevant instances of communication.

It would be ill-advised to teach language via the communicative approach without relying heavily on **discourse analysis**. In fact discourse analysis should provide the main frame of reference for decision-making in language teaching and learning. Creating suitable contexts for interaction, illustrating speaker/hearer and reader/writer exchanges, and providing learners with opportunities to process language within a variety of situations are all necessary for developing learning environments where language acquisition and language development can take place within a communicative perspective.

Discourse analysis and pragmatics are relevant to language teaching and language learning since they represent two related discourse worlds that characterize human communication. The first represents **intended meaning** transmitted within context, and is, therefore, concerned with sequential relationships in production; and the other explains the **interpreted meaning** resulting from linguistic processing and social interaction, all the while taking into account a variety of contextual factors, at the receptive end. Language teaching needs to focus on both (1) strategies of message construction to facilitate learner production of the communicative intent and (2) strategies of

interpretation, in order to ensure some ability on the learner's part to process inferentially (even if only approximately) the speaker/writer's intent.

For many years during the first half of the twentieth century and well into the second half, language teaching, like linguistics, used the **sentence** as its basic unit of analysis. In language teaching this meant that rules, examples, exercises, and activities focused on individual sentences. Consequently, this was an approach which legitimized decontextualized language practice. Individual sentences can be interesting, unusual, or mysterious, but when separated from context, they lack real meaning. Generations of learners practiced sentences in the target language and remained quite incapable of linking these sentences into meaningful stretches of discourse. In the more recent approaches to language learning and teaching, **discourse** or **text** has become the basic unit of analysis. More recent language textbooks present texts, short or long, as a basis for both understanding and practicing language use within larger meaningful contexts. This approach has greatly altered the type of activities undertaken in language classrooms. Learners need to focus, therefore, on various discourse features within any specified language activity.

Another perspective that was added to language materials and classroom activities, once discourse became the unit of analysis, is the set of sociolinguistic features that accompany any natural interaction. The real or imaginary participants involved in a communicative activity in the classroom become important. If the classroom activity is to represent real-life interaction, then age, social status, and other personal characteristics of the interactants cannot be ignored, and learners are expected to develop awareness of the linguistic choices which are related to such features. They need to gain experience in decision-making related to choices of linguistic representations that are compatible with the characteristics of the participants and with the pragmatic features of the given situation. Simulated speech events become an important feature of the language classroom, and although such a simulated speech event is a classroom artifact, it must represent as closely as possible a real speech event that could occur in natural interaction.

Prior to adoption of the communicative approach to language teaching, the main goal of the language classroom was to supply students with the ability to produce and recognize linguistically acceptable sentences. The communicative approach added a very important new dimension: communication strategies. The underlying notion of the approach recognizes the fact that learners may never achieve full linguistic competence and yet they will need to use the target language for various types of communication. One needs to develop, therefore, communication strategies that overcome and compensate for the lack of linguistic knowledge. Such communication strategies are partly "universal" in nature from the learner's point of view, since some can successfully be transferred from the first language. Thus, learners who are "good communicators" in their first language have a good chance of also becoming effective communicators in their second, although they may not know the second language nearly as well as the first. We are referring here to the ability to paraphrase, use circumlocution and gestures, among other things, during spoken communication. These abilities seem to be quite transferable if the language classroom provides sufficient opportunities for using such strategies in the second language.

As a result of the general acceptance of the communicative approach, language learning and language teaching have had to fully incorporate communicative interaction into the curriculum. The fact that language users exhibit linguistic, cultural, and

social identities in a real-life interaction affects the teacher's choice of simulated or specially designed classroom interactions which attempt to recreate the main features of the real-world event within the language classroom. The competent language teacher can no longer limit herself or himself to being an educator and a grammarian. To a certain extent, she or he also has to be a sociolinguist, aware of and interested in various aspects of discourse analysis.

Fortunately, there are several books now available to address this educational need. Cook (1989) introduces the theory of discourse analysis and demonstrates its practical relevance to language learning and teaching for those with little background. In the first part, which deals with theory, the author provides accessible definitions for basic concepts in discourse analysis. In the second half, he demonstrates the incorporation of discourse analysis into language teaching. Nunan (1993) also directs his work at beginning students in discourse analysis, and, like Cook, he addresses language teachers who want to incorporate discourse analysis into their teaching. The main purpose of the book, as stated in the introduction, is to give the reader "some of the key concepts in the field and to provide [the reader] with an opportunity of exploring these concepts in use" (1993: ix). Nunan's choice of texts helps clarify and deepen the reader's understanding of discourse analysis.

The three other texts described below present more extensive theoretical grounding for applying discourse analysis to language teaching. McCarthy (1991) goes into the details of how discourse analysis relates to the different language areas (grammar, vocabulary, phonology) and to spoken and written language. The main objective of the book is to help language teachers become knowledgeable about discourse analysis. The book encourages teachers and material developers to use natural spoken and written discourse in their textbooks, teaching materials, and classroom activities. Hatch (1992) aims to give teachers and other practitioners in the field of language teaching a better understanding of how the general theory of communication, and discourse analysis in particular, can and should relate to language teaching. She includes discussion of scripts, speech acts, and rhetorical analysis, among other areas. Perhaps the most comprehensive text available is McCarthy and Carter (1994), which presents the relevance of a basic description of the properties of discourse analysis to language teaching. The book describes research and findings in the area of discourse analysis and shows how these findings can be applied to classroom teaching. It is rich in authentic texts, which provide data for analysis and exemplification.

From this brief review, it seems obvious that a number of key texts have come out recently in an attempt to initiate and guide teachers into the era of discourse analysis and language teaching. Even if the implementation of this view is not being carried out everywhere, teachers and practitioners today are aware of the importance of pedagogical discourse analysis.

1   Shared Knowledge: The Basis for Planning the Teaching/Learning Continuum

The discourse perspective in language teaching places particular importance on the notion of **shared knowledge**. This notion relates to one's general knowledge of the world – knowledge to which participants in an interaction can appeal before, during,

and after a communicative event. This appeal to or reliance on knowledge of the world is not always conscious, but it always affects the communicative interaction by either easing it along or interfering and even blocking it. The extent to which the participants share such knowledge will, therefore, affect the degree to which the communicative interaction will be effective.

Speakers assume shared knowledge when they address others and plan their utterances accordingly; listeners appeal to prior knowledge while interpreting the flow of speech; writers plan their texts according to what they presume their intended audience knows about the world, and readers appeal to their prior knowledge while processing written texts. Furthermore, interactants select or prefer language which accommodates and strengthens some of the shared and mutually perceived situational features. When we misjudge shared knowledge or the perceptions of the other participants in the interaction, we potentially run the risk of creating instances of minor or serious miscommunication. This can happen among speakers of the same language and within the same sociocultural setting, but it occurs much more frequently across linguistic and cultural barriers. Shared knowledge must therefore include both general knowledge of the world and sociocultural knowledge related to the target speech community whose language the learner is trying to acquire.

In the literature about reading and writing the term **prior knowledge** plays a very central role. It is the conceptual knowledge that enables interactants to communicate with one another via the written or spoken text. Marr and Gormley (1982: 90) define prior knowledge as "knowledge about events, persons, and the like which provides a conceptual framework for interacting with the world." Schallert (1982) further expands the notion to refer to *everything* a person knows, including tacit and explicit knowledge of procedures and typical ways of expressing information. Alexander et al. (1991) develop a conceptual framework of knowledge including domain and discipline knowledge as part of general **content knowledge**, and knowledge of text structure, syntax and rhetoric as part of one's **discourse knowledge**.

Effective communicative interaction among language users is achieved, therefore, when there is a basic sharing of prior content and discourse knowledge between the producers and the interpreters of the text. There needs to be a matching of three types of background knowledge: prior factual or cultural knowledge; prior work or life experience; and prior familiarity with the relevant discourse community. For spoken language the interlocutors need to be familiar with sociocultural conventions and interaction management. Considerations of politeness norms, of turn-taking conventions, and of forms of address are important for maintaining social harmony and for personal negotiation. For written language, writers and readers need to share writing conventions, familiarity with genre types, and rhetorical traditions.

In formal language teaching we need to distinguish between adult learners and adolescents or children in school. Adult language learners come not only from a different language background but also from a different cultural background, and as was mentioned before, this cultural background is very much part of their knowledge of the world. For such adult learners, the modern language classroom needs to take into account cross-cultural differences that might interfere with successful communication in the target language (Tannen 1985). It is therefore important to plan the language curriculum so as to accommodate communicative interaction that will enable learners to both experience and reflect on cross-cultural differences.

When we are concerned with students in school as language learners, we have to take into account another perspective: the students' maturational development and their acquisition of world knowledge. A text in the target language brought to class might present content difficulties because of the subject matter, which might not yet be known to the students, or it might be difficult because of cultural information with which they are not familiar. Planning the language curriculum and planning the language lesson have to take into account the need to accommodate the learner's prior knowledge in order to build up the shared knowledge necessary for the learners to interact successfully within the planned communicative event.

A discourse perspective on language teaching places significant emphasis on the notion of **shared knowledge**, since this factor is at the heart of successful interpersonal communication. Classroom pedagogy can no longer limit itself to the linguistic corpus of the target language; it has to expand its activities and planning to include sociocultural and pragmatic considerations. In order to use a language effectively, the language user needs to have knowledge of the various factors that impact human communication. A discourse-based model for language pedagogy perceives shared knowledge as consisting of layers of mutually understood subcategories: content knowledge, context knowledge, linguistic knowledge, discourse knowledge, etc. (Johns 1997). Therefore, shared knowledge is of primary importance in modern language pedagogy.

2   Discourse in the Language Classroom: The Basis for Creating the Context for Language Learning

If we think of a discourse community as a group of people who share many things – a considerable body of knowledge, a specific group culture, an acceptable code of behavior, a common language, a common physical environment, and perhaps a common goal or interest – we can easily see how the language classroom is a unique discourse community. The students and their teacher make up a group that shares almost all of the factors mentioned above. But beyond these factors they also have an unwritten "contract" with respect to the obligations and commitments they have to the group. Thus it is quite common in a foreign language class for the students and the teacher to share the understanding that communication will take place in the target language even though the teacher and the students could communicate more effectively in their first language. Similarly, in any language class that uses the communicative approach, it is known that many of the classroom events and activities are not "real" in terms of the classroom situation, but are used as representations of real situations in the world outside the classroom.

Swales (1990: 24) has developed six defining characteristics that are necessary and sufficient for identifying a group of people as a **discourse community**, and we adapt these to the language classroom:

1   "A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals." The public goal of a language classroom is quite obvious: to promote the students' acquisition of the target language, as a group and as individuals, in as effective a

manner as possible. Sometimes, certain classes will have other specific goals for particular periods of time, but those specific objectives will usually fall within the more global goal of acquiring the language.

2 "A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members." Any classroom, the language classroom included, has well-recognized mechanisms for intercommunication. The teacher communicates instructions, knowledge, and guidance to the students in various ways and the students communicate with the teacher via homework assignments, group activities, and other educational projects. The students also communicate with one another within the classroom context – sometimes this is real communication pertinent to the situation and at other times this is part of the "make-believe" world that is part of classroom activities.

3 "A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback." The language classroom has unique participatory mechanisms that provide feedback on students' participation in learning activities, feedback on the degree of approximation of their language performance to the target, information to prepare them for subsequent work, etc. Typically, however, within the classroom context the teacher is in complete control of the initiation of the information and feedback flow, while the students are at the receiving end. In more modern educational contexts the students can also become initiators of the information and feedback flow.

4 "A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims." According to Bhatia (1993: 16), "each genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discourse resources." The language classroom has definitely developed, and continues to develop, expectations for discourse that are compatible with its goals and with the type of activities that go on in the classroom. The instruction and guidance that teachers direct at their students take on a genre that the students recognize. As part of the interaction, students also learn which genre is appropriate for *their* linguistic production within various classroom activities. Many features of these genres may be common to all classrooms, and certainly to all language classrooms, since they share common goals and conventions, yet any particular classroom may also develop its own unique genre, which fits the common goals and preferences of that particular teacher and that particular group of students. In any case, it is obvious that anyone joining a classroom after the start of the school year, for instance, will have to learn specific features of the genre of that class.

5 "In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis." Again this requirement fits the classroom context quite well: school language has its specific lexis, language learning has its specific lexis, and a particular classroom may have some of its own lexis. Any teacher, but particularly a language teacher, may have his or her own preferred stock of words and phrases, which then become the lexis of the classroom. Sometimes students who act as leaders in the classroom also add their own word and phrase preferences to the common lexis.

6 "A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise." With respect to this particular

requirement, classrooms have some universal features which are part of any school system. At the beginning of every school year, only the teacher is normally considered an "expert"; however, each particular group of students is "initiated" into the discourse code of their class. In terms of their participation in their discourse community, one could consider each year's "new" students as novices, who will become experts in certain skills and areas by the end of the year.

When the language classroom functions as a discourse community, it thereby creates its own context within which the students and the teacher can develop linguistic and cross-cultural discourse practices that further their efforts toward the common goal of improving the students' target language competence and performance. Language teachers and curriculum developers can and should capitalize on the language classroom as a discourse community – or, as Breen (1985) has said, they should exploit the social context of the language classroom more fully, since it reflects what happens in society more generally. One can, for instance, make the distinction between truly authentic interaction that deals with the actual affairs of the class and its members, and the "representative" material which becomes real only as part of the group's "make-believe" contract. In the teaching–learning situation the truly authentic elements will carry considerable weight, since there is no doubt that these are instances where the students will focus more on the meaning than on the message. In other words, during actual classroom interactions the students will not always think of the language in which they interact but focus on the goals of their interaction. This creates authentic communication in the target language and allows students to accumulate significant experience in using that language. During the simulated, representative interactions, on the other hand, they will need to suspend immediate reality and create represented reality on a make-believe basis. Authentic interactions will further enrich their experience in the target language, leading to more effective acquisition.

Furthermore, the fact that a language classroom is part of a school system, and that students need to show "results" or outcomes based on their learning experiences, will usually motivate students to engage in reflection and metacognition, which will then facilitate the conscious learning process. A special type of discourse will develop for each of these three different types of interaction: the real interaction between students and teacher and among the students themselves when dealing with real matters relating to their immediate environment, instances of practice that are part of the learning curriculum, and instances of reflection which relate to what has been learned and are an attempt to mentally encode the learning experiences for future encounters. Somewhat different discourse rules will develop for each of these subdiscourses.

3   Discourse Analysis and the Teaching of the Language Areas

Within the teaching context, discourse analysis has significant applications in the language areas of phonology, grammar and vocabulary. The teaching of phonology interacts with the teaching of oral discourse. **Phonology**, in particular the prosodic or

suprasegmental elements, provides the range of possible rhythm and intonation combinations. Yet the context is what determines the most appropriate choice of prosody in any given situated utterance. The general pragmatic strategy used by English speakers, for example, is to de-emphasize given information (what is already known) and emphasize new information, thereby utilizing prosody for information management and interaction management. In other words, in any language class where oral skills are taught, the interaction of discourse and prosody must be highlighted and taught, since contextually appropriate control of rhythm and intonation are an essential part of oral communicative competence.

In the area of interaction between phonology and discourse it is important to emphasize information management. In oral interactions the difference between new and old information is signaled via prosody, and contrast and contradiction are also marked by a shift of focus in the ongoing discourse. Students need to be alerted to these prosodic features in the target language, but they also need to be alerted to similarities and differences in rhythm and intonation between their native language and the target language. Much more difficult to describe and teach, however, are the social functions of intonation, which may reveal things such as the speaker's degree of interest or involvement, the speaker's expression of sarcasm, etc. Without a doubt, the discourse analysis of oral interaction is highly relevant to the teaching of pronunciation in a communicative classroom.

A discourse-oriented approach to **grammar** places importance both on the texts within which grammatical points are presented and on the connecting roles fulfilled by the various grammatical forms. As McCarthy (1991: 62) claims: "grammar is seen to have a direct role in welding clauses, turns and sentences into discourse." Knowing grammar can no longer mean knowing only how a form functions within a given sentence, but must also include discourse features of grammatical forms. Thus knowing the tense–aspect system in English cannot mean only knowing which forms constitute each tense–aspect combination, but must also mean knowing how each tense–aspect combination can be used to create temporal continuity as well as signaling other relationships within the larger text.

Students learning a new language need to become aware of the repertoire of grammatical choices in that language, but more importantly they need to become aware of the conditioning role of discourse and context, which guides the language user in making appropriate choices. It is the context-dependent, pragmatic rules of grammar that play an important role in a discourse approach to grammar. In English, such grammatical choices as passive versus active voice, sentential position of adverbs, tense–aspect–modality sequences, and article use, among others, are context-dependent. Similar lists of context-sensitive "rules" can be generated for any language. In all such cases, the speaker/writer's ability to produce the form or construction accurately is but part of a much larger process in which the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse appropriateness of the form itself is also judged with respect to the context in which it is used. Similarly, the interpretation process can be facilitated or hindered depending on the learner's understanding of what functions a given grammatical form plays within the given context.

Some of the most obvious structural features of connected discourse are the type of cohesive ties identified and discussed by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1989): reference,

substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Textual cohesion is achieved by choosing among and using these cohesive devices appropriately – speakers and writers incorporate them as they produce texts, and listeners and readers attend to them as they interpret texts.

In the teaching and learning of **vocabulary** the discourse perspective stands out very clearly. Vocabulary cannot be taught or learned out of context. It is only within larger pieces of discourse that the intended meaning of words becomes clear. Granted, one could claim that most content words have one or more basic "dictionary" definition which could be learned as such. But the intended and complete meaning of a word can only be derived from the combination of a given dictionary meaning and the contextual frame within which the word appears. Furthermore, when talking about learners of another language we must remember that so-called equivalent words in two different languages might function quite differently in terms of collocations, range of specific meanings, and typical discourse functions.

Vocabulary can be literal or figurative (with figurative language including idiomatic use and metaphorical use (Lakoff and Johnson 1980)). For example, a sentence such as "He got the ax" may mean literally that some male person fetched a tool for chopping wood or figuratively that he was fired from his job, i.e. terminated. The interpretation one arrives at may well depend on the cotext. If the discourse continues, "and he chopped down the tree," the literal interpretation takes hold. If the subsequent discourse is "so now he's looking for another job," the figurative interpretation is the coherent one. The language learner needs both to acquire a word's potential range of meaning and to be able to recognize the particular meaning which is compatible with the context and the discourse within which the word appears. Although this is true for any vocabulary item, in a general sense, this is especially true of a large number of vocabulary items which have specialized meanings when used within a particular context.

A specialized field such as biology or physics may well have three types of vocabulary: (1) a core vocabulary it shares with all sciences and technologies; (2) a specific vocabulary for its own branch of science; and (3) an even more specific vocabulary known primarily to those in a specific subarea (e.g. microbiology or plasma physics). Discourse analysis and concordance analysis (i.e. having access to tokens of word forms in context for an appropriate corpus) can identify the most frequent vocabulary items of each type, which, in turn, is useful information for the language teacher working with second language learners who study these disciplines.

Words that serve a discourse function rather than expressing semantic content are much more dependent on context for their meaning and use. For example, the English function word *else* is a useful and relatively frequent lexical item, yet it is not well treated in ESL/EFL textbooks, where sentence-level grammar and vocabulary exercises are the norm. Like other reference words (e.g. personal pronouns, demonstratives, etc.), *else* generally requires some prior discourse for its interpretation. Sentence-level exercises cannot possibly convey to nonnative speakers the importance of the word *else* and the ways in which it is used in English. What is needed are many fully contextualized examples (taken or adapted from authentic materials) to provide learners with the necessary exposure to and practice with *else*, a function word that is semantically, grammatically, and textually complex.

4   Discourse Analysis and the Teaching of the Language Skills

When using language for communication, we are faced with two major types of processes: transmitting our ideas and intentions to an addressee or interpreting and understanding the text or message produced by an interlocutor. The first places the initiator of the discourse at the production end of the continuum while the second places the interpreter at the reception end. When **producing** discourse, we combine discourse knowledge with strategies of speaking or writing, while utilizing audience-relevant contextual support. When **interpreting** discourse, we combine discourse knowledge with strategies of listening or reading, while relying on prior knowledge as well as on assessment of the context at hand. The language skills can be grouped in two different ways: we can talk about productive versus receptive skills or we can talk about the skills which refer to spoken language versus those that refer to written language.

   For productive skills, learners need to develop effective communication strategies based on either oral or written production. For receptive skills, learners need to develop interpretation skills related to either listening to or reading a text. Yet for each skill the language user requires unique strategies. For interactive listening, for instance, language learners need to develop strategies and routines that elicit clarifications, repetitions, and elaborations from the speaker, in order to facilitate the comprehension process when she or he is having interpretation difficulties. It seems, therefore, that when using the spoken language, in a face-to-face exchange, it is necessary to resort to a variety of compensatory skills to overcome lack of language resources, since the nature of oral exchange is such that immediate remedies have to be found in order to maintain the flow of speech. This can be true for both the speaker and the listener; the speaker lacking linguistic knowledge may resort to situational and other contextual features to make himself or herself understood, while the listener makes use of similar features in order to understand.

   Prior and shared knowledge for receptive skills, at the macroprocessing stage, involves activation of schematic and contextual knowledge. **Schematic knowledge** is generally thought of as two types of prior knowledge (Carrell and Eisterhold 1983): content schemata, which are the background information on the topic and relevant sociocultural knowledge, and formal schemata, which are knowledge of how discourse is organized with respect to different genres, topics, or purposes. **Contextual knowledge** is the overall perception of the specific listening or reading situation (i.e. listeners observe who the participants are, what the setting is, what the topic and purpose are; readers consider the place where the text appeared, who wrote it, and for what purpose). Listeners and readers also make use of their understanding of the ongoing discourse or cotext (i.e. listeners remember what has already been said and anticipate what is likely to be said next, while readers consider the title of the text and subtexts, the larger framework within which the text appeared, etc.). In teaching language, the teacher should exploit the processing features that listening and reading skills share.

   Language teachers can provide learners with a variety of listening activities which will engage them in listening practice at the discourse level. During such activities

it is important that learners have the opportunity to combine the following: recognition of **phonological** signals, such as stress, pause, and intonation; recognition of **lexicogrammatical** signals, such as discourse markers, lexical phrases, and word order; knowledge of **content organization**; and incorporation of **contextual** features. A successful and effective listener will combine all of the above in an attempt to understand the spoken message.

Geddes and Sturtridge (1979) suggest the use of "jigsaw" listening activities for a useful integration of all the above signals and features. During the jigsaw activity, each of several small groups of learners listens to a different part of a larger piece of discourse (e.g. a story, a recipe, a mini-lecture, a news broadcast) and writes down the important points. Later each group shares its information with another group, and then another, so that gradually each group is able to piece together the larger discourse. The different listening subskills are used in this activity, while the students also get an opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts and thus become more metacognitively aware of the listening process. Various strategies and tactics that rely on discourse features can be discussed and are thereby improved for future use.

A variety of other activities can be developed to accommodate the changing environment within which listening becomes crucial. Voice-mail systems and telephone answering machines are important instances of authentic listening to which students should be exposed. Recordings of interactive telephone conversations, during which students are asked to listen first and then interpret and sum up what they have heard, can be helpful practical listening activities. It can also be useful for second language learners to listen to recorded segments of radio or TV news broadcasts as well as to short lectures on a variety of topics. Material developers and curriculum planners need to incorporate such listening experiences into the language classroom (Celce-Murcia 1995a).

In addition, one must not forget that even advanced-level foreign language learners may experience microlevel problems in decoding the normal stream of speech while listening. In some cases the overall context compensates for such problems; in other cases it does not. For example, the university student listening to a lecture who hears "communist" instead of "commonest" may misunderstand an entire lecture segment. Therefore, attention should be given to issues of segmentation and phonemic decoding, as well as to the global features described above, when teaching listening skills to learners.

In order to process a written text, rather than a spoken one, the reader has to perform a number of simultaneous tasks: **decode** the message by recognizing the written signs, **interpret** the message by assigning meaning to the string of written words, and finally **figure out** the author's intention. In this process there are at least three participants: the **writer**, the **text**, and the **reader**. Researchers in this field have been studying and describing the interactive nature of the reading process since the late 1970s (Rumelhart 1977, 1980, 1984; Rumelhart and McClelland 1982; Stanovich 1980, 1981, 1986). The reading task requires readers to choose, select, and apply some of what they know to each new text. It seems that "good" readers do this very effectively while poorer readers encounter many difficulties.

A well-written text exhibits two important features which facilitate its interpretation during the reading process: coherence and cohesion. **Coherence** is the quality

that makes a text conform to a consistent world view based on one's experience, culture, or convention. It can also be viewed as a feature of the text which incorporates the ways and means by which ideas, concepts, and propositions are presented. Coherence is the result of a reader's appropriate response to the writer's plan and relates to the discourse world of written texts, to pragmatic features, and to a content area; it usually fits a conventionally and culturally acceptable rhetorical tradition in terms of sequence and structure. In the process of interpreting a written text, the reader assesses his or her specific purpose for reading and then recruits his or her knowledge of the world, previous experience in reading, and familiarity with writing conventions and different types of genres to arrive at that degree of interpretation deemed necessary.

Cohesion refers to those overt features of a text which provide surface evidence for its unity and connectedness. Cohesion is realized linguistically by devices and ties which are elements or units of language used to form the larger text. Since cohesion relies heavily on grammatical and lexical devices, deficiencies in the reader's linguistic competence may cause the reader to miss important cohesive links and, as a result, to have difficulties in the interpretation process. The language learner needs to develop good strategies of combining linguistic knowledge with the other types of knowledge mentioned above in order to apply them all simultaneously in the interpretation process.

Reading courses should provide learners with activities that help them develop strategies employing all the types of knowledge related to the interpretation process. Personal involvement in such reading activities would most likely result in the development of effective, individual reading strategies. A discourse-oriented reading course will allow learners to negotiate their interaction with texts by constantly involving them in making choices and decisions with respect to a text. Learners need to engage in the processing of a large stock of multipurpose reading matter in order to become independent and strategic readers. The combination of intensive work on the knowledge component and ample exposure to processing activities makes for a successful reading course. However, in order to ensure the development of strategic readers the teacher must also devote attention to reader awareness and metacognition. These encourage learners to become independent readers and to regulate their interpretation strategies during the reading process.

Psycholinguistic models of reading have placed special emphasis on the reader's ability to combine personal knowledge with textual information in order to get at the meaning of written texts. Accordingly, textbook writers and reading specialists often recommend that readers guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using clues from the text, thus minimizing the use of dictionaries. This practice is useful, is generally very effective, and provides readers with important shortcuts to increase decoding speed. However, there are some serious pitfalls that readers need to watch out for. Haynes (1993), in her studies of the "perils of guessing," finds that English as a Second Language readers can be good guessers only when the context provides them with immediate clues for guessing. Insufficient context or a low proficiency level on the part of the learner, on the other hand, may lead to mismatches in word analysis and recognition, which can then cause confusion and misinterpretation of the target text. Haynes recommends that teachers make students aware of these difficulties and encourage them occasionally to double-check their guesses by using the dictionary.

Dubin and Olshtain (1993) further emphasize the need for teachers to consider the extent to which a given text provides useful contextual clues. The authors arrived at a set of parameters of the contextual support in the text necessary for proper interpretation of unfamiliar lexical items, which includes thematic clues derived from the main idea of the text as well as semantic information at the paragraph and sentence level. Only when readers can combine their general knowledge with information drawn from the text is there a good chance that guessing word meaning from context will be successful.

Writing, when viewed as a language skill for communication, has much in common with both reading and speaking: it shares the features of written text with reading, and it shares the production process with speaking. The writer communicates his or her ideas in the form of a written text from which known or unknown readers will eventually extract their ideas and meanings. The writer is responsible, therefore, for creating a "well-written" text that has cohesion and coherence and takes the potential reader's background knowledge into account. Learners need to gain practice in writing within the language classroom so as to develop experience and effective strategies for a "reader-based" approach, which continually considers and accommodates an absent "reader–audience" (Chafe 1982; Flower 1979; Olson 1977, 1994; Ong 1982). A writer cannot rely on the context to provide support for interpretation. In fact, writing competence develops as a gradual liberation from the dependence on context for meaning. This "liberation" is achieved through skillful mastery of the potential linguistic repertoire, matched with effective use of conventional rhetoric through a revision process leading to the written text. Furthermore, successful adult academic writing is the result of the writer's autonomous and decontextualized production process, which, in turn, results in texts that are self-contained and potentially communicative to readers who are removed in place and time from the writing process itself.

Another school of thought takes a more social view of writing and therefore perceives it as being similar to speech. Such an approach often compares writing to speech events (Myers 1987) that need to adhere to specific writing conventions. The social interactionist view (Nystrand 1982) perceives conversational dialog to be as important for the development of writing competence as it is for the development of spoken discourse. Perhaps the strongest relation between speech and writing was expressed by Vygotsky (1962, 1978), who viewed writing as monologic speech based on socialized dialogic speech.

Classroom activities leading to writing competence, such as those described above, place emphasis on "writing for a reader and matching the writer's and reader's potential schemata while doing so." A child often reaches school with some basic knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, and perhaps with a very limited number of reading experiences and even fewer experiences in interactive writing. The school environment is usually the first and also the principal situation in which young people are expected to partake in writing tasks, and students often perceive the teacher as their only reader–audience. Developing a more expanded notion of reader–audience is part of becoming a "good communicator" in the written mode.

While cohesion, as mentioned above, relies heavily on grammatical knowledge, coherence is grounded in the thinking process. An important consideration in the creation of coherence in a text is the choice of genre and rhetorical format, which in

turn is closely related to one's purpose for writing. At the most general level we distinguish between the narrative genre and factual or expository writing. McCarthy and Carter (1994) refer to these as the two prototype genres. The narrative is structured around a chronological development of events and is centered on a protagonist. Consequently, a narrative is usually personalized or individualized and tells about the events related to the person or persons involved. An expository text, on the other hand, has no chronological organization but rather a logical one, and is usually objective and factual in nature. Both types of writing may be important in the language classroom, but it is the expository text which requires the type of training and experience that only the classroom can provide.

One of the important features of a well-formed text is the unity and connectedness which make the individual sentences in the text hang together and relate to each other. This unity is partially a result of the coherent organization of the propositions and ideas in the passage, but it also depends considerably on the painstaking process carried out by the writer in order to create formal and grammatical cohesion among the paragraphs and among the sentences in each paragraph. Thus, by employing various linguistic devices the writer can strengthen a text's coherence, create global unity, and render the passage in a manner which conforms to the expectations of experienced readers. A significant amount of writing activities should be carried out in language classrooms in order to enable learners to develop the skills and strategies which lead to improved personal writing.

The speaking skill, although sharing the production process with the writing skill, is very different from the act of writing, since spoken language happens in the here and now and must be produced and processed "on line" (Cook 1989). In such oral communication there is always room for mismatches and misunderstandings, which could derive from any of the following:

- The speaker does not have full command of the target language and produces an unacceptable form.
- The necessary background knowledge is not shared by the speaker and the hearer and they bring different expectations to the spoken interaction.
- The speaker and the hearer do not share sociocultural rules of appropriateness, and therefore the speaker may have violated such a rule from the hearer's point of view due to pragmatic transfer from the first language.

The basic assumption in any oral interaction is that the speaker wants to communicate ideas, feelings, attitudes, and information to the hearers or wants to employ speech that relates to the situation. The objective of the speaker is to be understood and for the message to be properly interpreted by the hearer(s). It is the speaker's intention that needs to be communicated to her or his audience. However, a "faulty" production in any one of the above three areas could create a piece of spoken discourse that is misunderstood.

In an attempt to ensure proper interpretation by the hearer, the speaker has to be concerned with the factors of medium, which are linguistically controlled, as well as the factors of appropriateness, which are pragmatically controlled by the speech situation and by the prevailing cultural and social norms. Factors of medium relate to the speaker's linguistic competence as well as to the possibility of faulty delivery of the

spoken utterance. The language learner needs to constantly improve his or her mastery of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, while gaining ample experience in spoken communicative interactions, in order to develop useful speech production strategies. These strategies are most important in overcoming linguistic and other types of deficiencies that often are typical of nonnative speakers.

5 Conclusion

The biggest obstacle with regard to moving beyond ad hoc approaches to communicative language teaching, and arriving at a communicative approach that is fully informed by discourse analysis at both the theoretical and practical levels, is to provide language teachers and other teaching professionals (curriculum developers, textbook writers, language testers) with proper grounding in discourse analysis. Many language teaching professionals receive training in grammar, phonetics, and the teaching of the language skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. A few programs also include a theoretical course in discourse analysis, but such a course generally does not make practical connections with the language classroom. Courses in "pedagogical discourse analysis" are still the exception in teacher training programs, despite the fact that a body of appropriate pedagogical material exists (see the review of texts in section 0). The need for professional training in pedagogical discourse analysis is clear not only for second and foreign language teachers but also for first language educators and literacy specialists. Until training catches up with need, appropriate reading materials, in-service training, and professional conferences are some of the ways to fill the gap.

Language teachers also require training in cross-cultural communication, since many modern classrooms are multicultural in nature. A multicultural class may be composed of new immigrants of different ethnic groups. Each of these groups comes from a specific cultural background, which may contain discourse and interactional features that are different from the target language promoted by the school system, and which may even be unfamiliar to the teacher and the other faculty at school. In such multicultural contexts, it is important for all personnel to become aware of cultural differences and to learn to respect them, so that they do not unwittingly penalize learners for being different from the target culture while adhering perfectly to the norms of their own culture. Here the notion of shared knowledge relates to the students' background; it is something that teachers must be aware of and that should guide teachers in selecting materials and teaching procedures for their classes.

In addition to having good grounding in discourse analysis and an awareness of cross-cultural differences, language teachers should also be trained in how to impart awareness of discourse and cultural features to their learners at both the macro-organizational and microstructural levels. By "the macro-organizational level" we are referring here to course-planning and content organization, which should lead to successful learning and development. By "the microstructural level" we mean more specific linguistic and pragmatic information that is relevant to particular communicative exchanges. Both teachers and learners need to take responsibility for the reflective

teaching–learning process, but teachers must assume the task of enabling such sharing of responsibility.

The discourse-oriented curriculum, which should be the basis for language courses with a discourse orientation, places special emphasis on three areas: **context, text-types**, and **communicative goals**. Consequently, the delineation of goals, tasks, and procedures for language learning will always take contextual features into account: expectations related to student achievement will center on the students' linguistic and cultural background; texts and other teaching materials will be selected or designed to be compatible with the student audience; and classroom activities will simulate real needs outside the classroom. In this respect such a curriculum is different from a linguistically oriented curriculum, where contextual features might be viewed as external to the curriculum (Celce-Murcia 1995b).

A discourse-oriented curriculum encompasses the various relationships existing between discourse analysis, the language areas, and the language skills, in a manner that guides teaching practitioners in all areas to incorporate a discourse-based approach into their work. Discourse analysts, sociolinguists, and other researchers can consider the classroom environment as one rich and varied context (among many) for discourse investigation. What needs to be examined more closely is both the discourse occurring in the classroom itself (i.e. the spoken and written communication between the teacher and students and among students) and the discourse of teaching materials and assessment instruments (i.e. the discourse structure of these materials as well as the discourse they elicit when used in the classroom). The results of such classroom-centered research in turn will enhance our understanding of discourse-based approaches to education in general and to language teaching in particular.

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