

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the role of Discourse Analysis in English Language Teaching. In this paper the methodological significance of discourse to master language materials in teaching a foreign language has been determined.

Keywords: discourse analysis, discourse competence.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, after the publication of Z. Harris's book "Analysis of Discourse" in 1952, the concept of "discourse" has become interdisciplinary. Currently, this phenomenon is being studied by various sciences, and each puts its own meaning into it.

MAIN PART

In the mid 70s of the XX century the concept of "discourse" penetrated into the theory of teaching foreign languages. This happened, when the term "discourse" appeared in a number of articles devoted to the problems of teaching and learning foreign languages. Traditional language teaching methods were mainly concerned with grammar. Even with perfect knowledge of grammar most learners had difficulty in using the language for communicative purposes. As Widdowson states "Knowing a language does not mean to understand, speak, read, and write sentences, it means to know how sentences are used to communicate effectively." [3] Towards the end of 1970s teachers changed their direction to teaching language as communication. The purpose of teaching foreign languages has become to form communicative competence of learners, that is, to accept language as a tool for communication. Now teachers should be responsible for training students accordingly. Therefore, discourse should be considered as the most important component of teaching foreign languages. As stated by Cook there are "two different kinds of language as potential objects for study: one abstracted in order to teach a language or literacy, or to how the rules of language work, and another which has been used to communicate something and is felt to be coherent. This latter kind of language – language in use, for communication- is called discourse: and the search for what gives discourse coherence is discourse analysis." [2] Brown and Yule state "the analysis of discourse, is necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs." [1]

According to Cook novels, as well as short conversations or groans might be equally rightfully named discourses. [2]

Seven criteria which have to be fulfilled to qualify either a written or a spoken text as a discourse have been suggested by Beaugrande. These include:

Cohesion – grammatical relationship between parts of a sentence essential for its interpretation;

Coherence – the order of statements relates one another by sense.

Intentionality – the message has to be conveyed deliberately and consciously;

Acceptability – indicates that the communicative product needs to be satisfactory in that the audience approves it;

Informativeness – some new information has to be included in the discourse;

Situationality – circumstances in which the remark is made are important; Intertextuality – reference to the world outside the text or the interpreters' schemata

The application of discourse analysis in the theory and practice of teaching foreign languages is important. The analysis of discourse encourages students to reconsider the 'rules' of language with which they are already familiar. The aim of teaching discourse analysis is to develop students' awareness how language is described and used and to enable students to analyse spoken and written discourse from different perspectives.

With the help of discourse analysis students will be able to compare written and spoken discourse in English, be more aware of phonological, lexical, grammatical features of different types of discourse, be able to distinguish main features of different written discourse types, be more aware of conversational features of spoken discourse and sociolinguistic dimensions in discourse. The discourse analysis provides students with the opportunity to study the meaningful production and interpretation of texts and talk which may include written texts of all kinds, and spoken data, from conversation to highly institutionalised forms of talk. Successful interaction, in both written and spoken form, is essential in language learning. 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. It aims to understand how language is used in real life situations.

“While some linguists may concentrate on determining the formal properties of a language, the discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what that language is used for” [1] Grammar analysis focuses on the structure of sentences while discourse analysis focuses on the broad and general use of language within and between particular groups of people. In terms of textual analysis, grammarians may examine texts in isolation for elements, but discourse analysis takes into account the social and cultural context of a given text. Pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are essential elements in communication, and discourse is realized through them. Students should study language materials not in isolation, but in context, that is, in a discourse that shows how a linguistic phenomenon is used in a particular speech situation. Discourse is extremely important for mastering language materials. Discourse and formal skills are interdependent and must be developed together. We need to consider activities which can develop discourse skills, without concentration on any one aspect in isolation. These will be activities in which students handle all the interlocking systems of discourse at once, and those of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation as well.[2]

Let's turn your attention to existing exercises and activities for the language learners. Many activities are designed in the communicative approach, because using language for communication of necessity involves discourse in operation. Activities in Communicative Approach are mainly focused on students in realistic and meaningful communication. This kind of activities and practice give students motivation to learn. Activities are carried out to fulfil specific purposes such as booking a plane ticket, answering an invitation letter, shopping, etc. In this case we refer to the types of speech and functions :

Spoken interaction - telephone calls (business or private), service encounters (shops, ticket offices, etc), interviews (jobs, journalistic, in official settings), casual conversation (strangers, friends, intimates), organizing and directing people (at work, at home, in the street);

Spoken production - monologues (speeches, stories, jokes), language-in-action (talk accompanying doing: fixing, cooking, demonstrating, assembling etc), classroom language (classes, seminars, lectures, tutorials);

In communicative activities conversational features like politeness, appropriacy: hesitation devices and pragmatic strategies are also considered.

It should be noted that language teaching should not follow only a bottom-up approach in isolated sentences, without developing the way that system operates in context. The bottom-up approach may be a very fruitful way of trying to understand what language is and how it works, but that does not mean that it is the best way to teach a language. A top-down approach which considers all levels of communicative products as a whole is more holistic. It is important to make students be aware of these two ways and take advantages of both approaches.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that the above characteristics of discourse determine discursive competence, the formation of which is one of the goals of teaching foreign languages. As the main aim of teaching English is to form the communicative competence of learners, language should not be taught in isolation but in discourse. Foreign language learners should be exposed to genuine circumstances or natural input frequently. It gives them the opportunity to store, develop and use the knowledge about the target language effectively. Thus, in order to avoid difficulties in language teaching, discourse of language has to be taught carefully by the teachers.

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