

FRENCH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This article presents a comparative analysis of the French School of Discourse Analysis and Conversational Analysis. Despite their shared goal—the study of language in its social context—these approaches differ in their scale of analysis, research focus, and methodological tools. The French School, represented by the works of Pêcheux, van Dijk, and others, focuses on the macro-level, analyzing ideological and power relations reflected in large discursive formations. Conversational Analysis, conversely, examines the micro-level, detailing the organization and structure of everyday conversations.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, conversational analysis, context, micro-level, macro-level.

Introduction

Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary study of language in its social and cultural context. It examines not only individual words or sentences, but also broader units of meaning – discourses. Going beyond purely linguistic analysis, it investigates the relationship between language, power, ideology, and social practices. The interdisciplinary nature of discourse analysis is evident in its adoption of theoretical tools and methods from sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, and philosophy to interpret linguistic phenomena.

The French School of Discourse Analysis, which emerged in the 1970s, occupies a unique position in the field, distinguished by its theoretical approaches and

methodological preferences. The French School stands out as a significant movement due to its unique approach, differing from Anglo-American traditions. Unlike Anglo-Saxon discourse analysis, which often focuses on the micro-analysis of individual texts, the French School emphasizes the macro-structures of discourse, ideology, and the mechanisms of meaning production within a broad social and political context. The French School's contribution to the development of discourse analysis lies in the development of concepts that link language to social structures, power relations, and ideological systems. The names of Michel Pêcheux, Étienne de la Bédoyère (I believe this should be corrected to Étienne de la Bédoyère - the original name was likely misspelled), Telma Moran, and other researchers are closely associated with the formation of this movement and its influence on the development of discourse analysis as a whole. Their theoretical developments and methodological approaches have significantly influenced further research in this area, securing its place among the leading schools of discourse analysis. Its representatives emphasize:

Ideology and Power: Discourse analysis is viewed as a tool for revealing the ideological mechanisms embedded in language and the ways in which power is reproduced and maintained through discursive practices. The focus is on analyzing how language shapes social reality and defines social relations.

Form and Content: Both linguistic tools (syntax, lexicon, pragmatics) and the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which discourse arises and functions are analyzed. The interplay between form and content is a key element of the analysis.

Interdisciplinarity: French discourse analysis draws on ideas from various disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and history. It strives for an integrative approach, considering the multi-layered nature of discourse.

Conversational analysis is a more specialized field of research compared to the broader scope of discourse analysis. Its focus is narrowed to the study of the structure and organization of everyday conversations, paying particular attention to the details of interaction between communication participants. Conversational analysis examines how conversations are constructed, how participants coordinate their speech acts using mechanisms such as turn-taking, pauses,

nonverbal cues, etc. While conversational analysis and discourse analysis share common roots in linguistics and sociology, and research within conversational analysis can be part of a broader discourse analysis, key differences exist. Discourse analysis encompasses a wider range of linguistic phenomena and often views discourse as a tool for creating and maintaining social relations and power, while conversational analysis primarily focuses on the micro-level of interaction in specific speech events. Thus, CA can be considered one method used within discourse analysis, but not a synonym.

Conversational analysis, developed by researchers such as Emanuel A. Schegloff, Harvey Sacks, and Emily Martin, focuses on:

Conversation Organization: Conversational analysis studies the rules, conventions, and mechanisms governing the flow of speech in conversation. This includes analyzing aspects such as question-answer sequences, turn-taking, the use of pauses and other nonverbal signals.

Sequences of Speech Acts: The analysis focuses on sequences of speech acts (requesting, responding, agreeing, objecting, etc.), their interaction, and their influence on the course of the conversation.

Empirical Data: Conversational analysis relies on detailed analysis of audio and video recordings of real conversations. Data undergoes transcription and thorough analysis to identify recurring patterns.

Despite differences in focus, the French School of Discourse Analysis and Conversational Analysis have points of contact. Both approaches acknowledge the social nature of language, emphasize the importance of context, and strive for empirically grounded conclusions. French discourse analysis can utilize conversational analysis methods to analyze specific fragments of discourse, such as political debates or medical consultations, to highlight ideological and power aspects in everyday communication. Conversational analysis, in turn, can benefit from the theoretical tools of the French School of Discourse Analysis to interpret the patterns and regularities identified in conversations, linking them to broader social and cultural contexts.

Both the French School of Discourse Analysis and Conversational Analysis recognize that language is not a neutral tool, but an active participant in shaping

social relations and identities. Both approaches seek to study language in its natural context of use. Both approaches acknowledge the importance of interaction in creating meaning. In conversational analysis, this is directly manifested in the study of dialogic interaction, while in the French School of Discourse Analysis, it is in the analysis of how discursive practices shape and maintain social interactions.

Both conversational analysis and the French School of Discourse Analysis emphasize the importance of context for understanding meaning. However, context is understood differently: in conversational analysis, it is the immediate context of the conversation, while in the French School of Discourse Analysis, it is a broader social, political, and historical context.

The French School of Discourse Analysis is typically oriented towards the macro-level, analyzing large discursive formations, ideologies, and power relations. Conversational analysis, conversely, focuses on the micro-level, detailing the structure and organization of small fragments of conversation.

The French school of discourse analysis employs a wide range of methods, including text analysis, analysis of discursive strategies, and analysis of thematic networks. Conversation analysis primarily relies on detailed scrutiny of transcriptions of audio and video recordings of conversations, using methods from ethnomethodology and sequence analysis.

The French school can analyze different forms of discourse, from political speeches to advertisements, while conversation analysis typically focuses on conversational interactions. The analysis of form and content of discourse represents a comprehensive approach that views discourse as an inseparable unity of language (form) and meaning (content), closely tied to context. The distinction between form and content is conditional, as they are interdependent and mutually influence each other.

The analysis of discourse form emphasizes the linguistic means used to create meaning. The analysis of discourse content explores the meanings, ideas, values, and ideologies conveyed within the text. Form and content of discourse are inseparable; the choice of specific linguistic means (form) directly impacts the perception and interpretation of meaning (content). For instance, using particular vocabulary can create an emotional tone in the text, while the structure of sentences can highlight logical connections between ideas.

Discourse analysis encompasses consideration of these interrelations rather than studying form and content separately. It is essential to demonstrate how formal language means create, sustain, and transform discourse content, and vice versa. Overall, the analysis of form and content is a powerful tool for understanding how language is used to create meaning, convey information, and shape social knowledge in various contexts.

It is important to note that the French school of discourse analysis and conversation analysis represent two significant and complementary approaches to studying language. Although their focus and methods differ, they share a common goal of understanding how language creates and reproduces social reality. The integration of methods and concepts from both approaches can lead to a more complete and profound understanding of how language functions within its social context.

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