Discourse analysis
Linguistics
Unit II
Unit II

Introduction

REFLECTION

1. What do you understand by the functional approach to second language teaching?
2. What are language functions?
3. Are they taught in the English classroom?

Read the following text on these issues.

There are two main approaches to the study of grammar: the functional approach, based on language functions, and the traditional approach which is based on grammar forms. The functional approach starts from a system of meaning (functions) and relates how these functions are expressed through the language's grammar. Put it in other terms, the functional approach starts with meaning and works towards grammatical form for expressing this meaning rather than starting with the grammatical form and working towards meaning.

On the other hand, the traditional formal approach to language focuses mainly on grammatical form or structure and then comments on the meaning these forms express.

The functional approach has interesting implications for second language teaching, specifically by highlighting the distinction between form and function, a distinction not always clearly made in other approaches.

By identifying language functions and the many grammatical ways of expressing these functions, it becomes clear that the relationship between form and meaning is not one-to-one.
Linguistics – Discourse Analysis

If we make our students aware of the functions of language they will find it possible to focus on the meaning that they wish to get and then to choose the proper grammatical forms best suited for the context rather than focusing exclusively on grammar.

We should like to bring into prominence the influence of the functional approach in second language acquisition, which often for historical reasons, has been neglected.

The following material was taken from chapter 3 of Guy Cook’s book: ‘Language Teaching-Discourse’ and it sheds some light on this approach.

Functions of language

We must point out that although formal links reinforce the unity of discourse, they cannot, on their own create it. Look at the following examples given by Cook:

A. It’s a mystery to me, how the conjuror sawed that woman in half.
B. Well, Jane was the woman he did it to. So presumably she must know.

It would be a mistake to suppose that formal links, and nothing else, create the unity between these sentences. We can see this clearly if we replace the third sentence with another, so that the sequence reads:

A. It’s a mystery to me, how the conjuror sawed that woman in half.
B. Well, Jane was the woman he did it to. So presumably she must be Japanese.

Here, there are also formal links (so, she, etc.) but it is not clear how the sequence makes sense. Of course, they might form part of a discourse, and if we stretch our imaginations we could come up with a situation in which they do; but this will not be by virtue of the words “so” and “she”, but of some other information about the context.
As we can see from the above examples, formal links between sentences are not enough to account for our feeling that a stretch of language is discourse. They are neither necessary nor sufficient, and in brief spoken exchanges, it is quite common to come across sentences that are almost entirely bare of them.

Now do the activity suggested by the author: For each exchange, supply a context in which it makes sense. Notice that there are no formal links in any of these exchanges, but they are nevertheless easy to understand. Each one could form a complete discourse.

The speaker A says: “the window is open.”
A second speaker may answer with a different response depending on the situational context, here we have the ones provided by Cook as examples:

1. Go back to sleep, will you?
2. Don’t worry.
3. My job’s staking boxes, mate.
4. By Jove, Holmes! It was the gardener!

Let’s work on the first one together:

A- The window is open.
B- Go back to sleep, will you?

Context: It’s three in the morning, there’s a couple in bed. The wife wakes up out of cold. She says to her husband “the window is open” but he, half asleep, answers: “go back to sleep, will you?”

Please, notice that we didn’t have the need to add more utterances to create the context. Only the two exchanges with no help of cohesive devices are enough to contextualize the situation. Work on the other three, be creative, think who can be saying “the window is open”, who is answering “don’t worry”, why that person is giving that response. It will also help to have
a clear context if you imagine and state where they are, how they are related, when this is happening, why, etc. And remember, don’t add more speech! Good luck!

--------------------------------------

These examples above are invented; but one does not have to look far to find such exchanges in real life. Clearly, if we need to explain some interpretations we will need more than our list of cohesive devices.

Thus, knowledge of the functional approach to language is necessary. As learners and future teachers of English we assume you are already familiar with functionalism.

In this subject you will, surely enlarge your knowledge about the functional approach. Reading about such concepts as speech acts, illocutionary acts, semantic roles and other concepts will probably contribute to this.

(Adapted from: Language Teaching - Discourse, Guy Cook; OUP, 1996, pages 22-23)

---

How meaning is created and understood?

Pragmatics, the science concerned with the study of meaning looks behind the literal, formal meaning of what is said or written, and considers what the sender of a message intends to achieve with it, that is to say it tries to understand its function.

It has, consequently, more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than with what those words or phrases might mean by themselves.

Stop for a moment and try to answer this question:

What kinds of rules enable people to infer the function of what is said from its literal, formal meaning?
In order to discover how such inferences are made, we will need firstly to examine the range of possible functions of language, and secondly to try to understand how people correctly interpret them. Understanding this connection between the form and the function of the language, will help us to explain how stretches of language, can be coherent without being cohesive; it will also help us as language teachers to provide students with a better sense of contextual meaning. We cannot assume that these interpretations will be made in the same way in all the cultures and in all languages, so understanding how interpretation proceeds in the culture of the language we are teaching is crucial if we are to help learners to make their words functions in the way that they intend.

(Adapted from Language Teaching- Discourse, Guy Cook ;OUP, 1996, page 24)

Research work: find out the difference between what an utterance is and what a sentence is. You may use whatever source is at your hand.

Let us now read some further concepts about functions.

If you were asked off hand what the function of language is what would you reply? Look at the answers below and see which one you agree with most:

- to send information
- to tell other people your thoughts
- to convey your feelings
- others

Cook says that people are not as simplistic as this; even a moment of reflection leads to the conclusion that language has many more functions. Nevertheless it is true, in the adult and public world at least, that this function that language has of transmitting information, its referential function, is considered the most important. To abuse it, by sending false information, is usually regarded as wrong, and can, in certain circumstances, incur the punishment or imprisonment or a fine. Yet, it is by no means the only, or the first, function of language in human life. In the world of the infant and parent the referential function of language often takes a subordinate role to others. There is little the four-year-old child can tell his or her parents that they do not know already, for they share the child’s world almost entirely. The same is true in other intimate relationships. Some conversations of couples have scant informational content.
And even in the wider social world of adult intercourse, language clearly has many more functions than simply sending information.

(Taken from: Language Teaching: Discourse, Guy Cook; OUP, 1996, pages 25-26)

You hear one side of a telephone call in a foreign language. The speaker says: ‘tak...tak...tak...pravda? ...tak...’ what do you think the function of these words is and what are their English equivalents?

Is it easy to classify language functions?

There have been many, sometimes conflicting attempts to do so. One of the clearest and most influential was formulated by the linguist Roman Jakobson (1960), and further developed by Hymes (1962). The scheme proceeds by first identifying the elements of communication, as follows:

**The addressee:** The person who originates the message. This is usually the same as the person who is sending the message, but not always, as in the case of messengers, spokespeople, and town criers.

**The addressee:** The person to whom the message is addressed. This is usually the person who receives the message, but not necessarily so, as in the case of intercepted letters, bugged telephone calls, and eaves dropping.

**The channel:** The medium through which the message travels: sound waves, marks on paper, telephone wires, word processor screens.
**Linguistics – Discourse Analysis**

**The message form:** The particular grammatical and lexical choices of the message.

**The topic:** The information carried in the message. Basically, what the message is about.

**The code:** The language or dialect, for example, Swedish, Yorkshire, English, Semaphore, British Sign Language, Japanese.

**The setting:** The social or physical context.

Let’s find the elements of communication in the following dialogue:

A. Dr. Peterson's office. How may I help you?
B. I'd like to make an appointment to see the doctor.

A. Certainly, are you ill at the moment?
B. Yes, I'm not feeling very well.

A. Do you have a fever, or any other symptoms?
B. Yes, I have a slight fever and aches and pains.

A. OK, Dr. Peterson can see you tomorrow. Can you come in the morning?
B. Yes, tomorrow morning is fine.

A. How about 10 o'clock?
B. Yes, 10 o'clock is fine.

A. May have your name?
B. Yes, it's David Lain.
A. Have you seen Dr. Peterson before?
B. Yes, I had a physical exam last year.

A. Yes, here you are. OK, I've scheduled for ten o'clock tomorrow morning.
B. Thank you.

A. Drink plenty of warm fluids and get a good night's sleep!
B. Thank you. I'll do my best. Goodbye.

A. Goodbye.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addresser:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addressee:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Channel:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Message form:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The code: English spoken/oral language

The setting: Physical context. (time and place) We may have to physical context. First, David Lain’s house, though we don’t have explicit clue about it, we can assume he is calling from home. However, he may be calling from his work or another place. On the other hand, we have the receptionist room at the doctor’s. We can also draw some implications about the time, the call took place during daylight, probably late in the afternoon, since she is giving him some advice about drinking liquids and resting well.

Social context: In this aspect we will just focus on how the participants are related. This is an important variable since it will determine the speakers’ linguistics choices. In the dialogue we are analyzing, we can say that they are just acquaintances. They are being polite with each other. And we can also mention that the secretary is in a more dominant role since she is the one providing a service to a person “in need”.

Take a text book used to teach English, choose from it a short dialogue. Attempt to analyse each of the elements of communication in it. This means that you will be providing a possible context to the dialogue. I am eager to see your findings!!

Macro-functions are then established, each focusing attention upon one element:
1. **The motive function**: communicating inner states and emotions of the addressee.

2. **The directive function**: seeking to affect the behaviour of the addressee.

3. **The phatic function**: opening the channel or checking that it is working. The use of such phrases as ‘nice day today’, or ‘how do you do’ is characterized by lack of any informative content and is intended to link people and make the coexistence peaceful and pleasant. The phatic use of language is characteristic mainly of speech, however, in certain types of writing it can also be noticed, as in letters for example, where the beginning *Dear Sir/Madam* and ending *Yours faithfully* also serve that purpose.

4. **The poetic function**: in which the particular form chosen is the essence of the message. Here, the word poetic does not refer to the ability to write poetry, but the ability to manipulate language in a creative way. With the use of jokes and metaphors we can play with words and meanings simply for joy.

5. **The referential function**: carrying information.

6. **The metalinguistic function**: focusing attention upon the code itself, to clarify it or renegotiate it. All we are reading right now has a largely metalinguistic function.

7. **The contextual function**: creating a particular kind of communication.

---

Each element of communication corresponds to a function. For example, the **code element** corresponds to the **metalinguistic function**. See if you are able to match the rest!

---

What do you consider to be the most likely functions of the following? Is it possible to assign one function to each, or can we notice some with mixed function? How might the function of each utterance vary according to the context?
Microfunctions and functional language teaching

If we accept Jakobson’s and Hymes’, or any similar, categorization of language into a small number of macro-functions, we might then go on to subdivide each function and specify more delicate categories, or micro-functions. A breakdown of the directive function, for example, might look something like the following taken from Cook’s work:

(Taken from: Language Teaching- Discourse, Guy Cook ;OUP, 1996, page 27)

The previous diagram follows through only one function in each column, but one might easily imagine a similar division and re-division of any of the other six macro-functions, or of any of the resulting sub-categories. The result would be a diagram which becomes ever more precise and explicit as it moves from left to right, with a long list of fairly narrowly defined functions on the right-hand side. The resulting list of
functions is of the kind used as the bases of functional language courses-the ones which use the term in any meaningful way rather than because it was fashionable- and this is the connection between functional courses and functional approaches to linguistics.

Functional courses set out to list the purposes for which students might wish to use language, and then to teach them how to do so. In this, they have important strengths, and they can teach students skills which courses concentrating on formal features of language often omit: how to greet people, or how to maintain polite contact while listening on the telephone. But they also have certain weaknesses, for the more exact one tries to become about functions, the more slippery they become, and the more scope there is for variation and disagreement. Certainly, no list could ever claim to be exhaustive and complete. There are also pedagogic problems in following list of functions through. What order should we follow? Are some functions more important than others? How exactly do they relate to grammar and vocabulary?

(Taken from: Language Teaching- Discourse, Guy Cook ;OUP, 1996, pages 25-30)

Mandatory assignment 1(deadline: August 29th)

Analyze each of the elements of communication and its corresponding macro-functions in the following dialogue:

A- Why have you changed your mind about the contract?
B- Because we decided to ask our client's opinions.
A- And what did they say?
B- They say that they prefer to buy products that are not tested on animals.
A- Really?
B- Yes, they also said that they wish to live in a better world and when they buy products from companies that respect animal rights, they hope to be contributing to that.
A- You see. That's the reason our products are not experimented on animals. We know that consumers are much more caring now.
B- Yes, that's why we wish to purchase more of your products. We hope to form a good partnership with you guys.
A- And a caring one!
According to Jacobson and Hymes, language is categorized into seven macro functions: motive function, directive function, phatic function, poetic function, referential function, metalinguistic function and contextual function. Choose one of these macro functions and subdivide it specifying its micro functions as in the example of the subdivision of the directive function from the unit.

The Cooperative Principle

Look at a classical example, the conversation, taken from ‘Pragmatics’, by George Yule (p.36)

There’s a woman sitting on a park bench and a large dog lying on the ground in front of the bench. A man comes along and sits down on the bench.

**Man**: Does your dog bite?

**Woman**: No

(The man reaches down to pet the dog. The dog bites the man’s hand)

**Man**: Hey! You said your dog doesn’t bite.

**Woman**: He doesn’t. But that’s not my dog.

One of the problems with this exchange has to do with communication. The problem was caused by the man’s assumption that the dog belonged to the woman. From the man’s perspective the woman’s answer provides less information than expected. Of course if she had, the story wouldn’t be funny. For the story to be funny the woman has to give less information than is expected.

The whole situation points out that there is an expected amount of information provided in conversation, and the assumption is that people involved in conversation will cooperate with each other. In Yule’s example, the woman, clearly, does not want to take part in any cooperative interaction. But in most cases, the assumption of cooperation is common to all conversations, so that it can be defined as a cooperative principle of conversation and further subdivided into four sub-principles, called maxims by the English language philosopher Paul Grice (1975). According to Grice...
speakers and hearers share the cooperative principle. Speakers shape their utterances to be understood by hearers.

Grice analyzes cooperation as involving four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Speakers give enough and not too much information: quantity. They are genuine and sincere, speaking "truth" or facts: quality. Utterances are relative to the context of the speech: relation. Speakers try to present meaning clearly and concisely, avoiding ambiguity: manner.

Grice's cooperative principle: set of norms expected in conversation. Match Grice's four maxims expected in conversation with their corresponding definition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAXIMS</th>
<th>DEFINITIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>response is relevant to topic of discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>speaker's avoids ambiguity or obscurity, is direct and straightforward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>speaker tells the truth or provable by adequate evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manner</td>
<td>speaker is as informative as required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

McGowan proposes that Grice's four maxims establish important norms of discourse that different genres and strategies play with. Joke and tall tale tellers play with language. They bend the ordinary structures and assumptions about speech.

McGowan argues that much joking and tall tale development involve the tellers playing with these four maxims of Grice's cooperative principle. Orville Hicks in a tale of ploughing the popcorn field elaborates details about his father and the mule. These realistic details set us up for the tall-tale exaggeration of the weather being so hot that corn started to pop. Orville, in fact, adds one more "realistic" detail: there was so much popcorn, it created a "blizzard." He goes beyond the maxim of quantity; he gives us more than we need to know. All Orville's tall tales also violate quality. He purposely speaks untruths, yet he gives seemingly factual details. He plays with relation often, creating crazily logical connections. Grice's final maxim, manner, demands that conversation be unambiguous, but Orville's tall tales bend the meanings of words for humour; he plays with words and images. Orville Hicks plays with these four maxims of the
cooperative principle in his performances. Often the appropriate incongruity of humour in such tales depends on the violation or tampering with the four maxims of Grice's cooperative principle: quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

Overall, these simple conversational rules are very useful - both when they are followed and when they are noticeably broken.

Following the Rules/Maxims
When the rules are followed it is very easy for people to understand each other. What people say is explicit, direct, and to the point. People say what they mean.

Noticeably Breaking the Rules/Maxims
These rules, however, are useful even when they are broken. If a speaker breaks the rules in a way that is noticeable (called "flouting"), we try to figure out why it happened - "...why did she say that?"
The following examples show how this works:
If someone asks you, “How much did your house cost?” and you respond by saying “Enough” - well, hopefully they will get the point ("It’s none of your business.")
This is how we imply meaning – we say things without actually having to say them by breaking Grice’s rules overtly (out in the open).
One more example of flouting the maxims: Imagine that you and a friend at work are sitting around work complaining about your boss. Mid-sentence your friend abruptly switches the topic (breaks the Maxim of Relation).
Without saying a word your friend has told what you need to know.
As can be seen, Grice’s rules are important – we follow them when we want to be explicitly clear and direct.
And we break the rules in an obvious, noticeable in order to make a point without having to be explicit about the point being made.

Read the following joke, what maxims of conversation are being violated? Explain.

Student: The brain is a wonder full thing
Teacher: Why do you say that?
Linguistics – Discourse Analysis

Student: Because it starts working the second you get up in the morning and never stops until you get asked a question in class!

Adapted from:
http://www.acs.appstate.edu/~mcgowant/grice.htm
(Taken from: Language Teaching - Discourse, Guy Cook ;OUP, 1996, pages 30-38)

The Speech Act Theory
(proposed by Austin and reformulated by Searle)

Austin first developed the idea that, for instance getting a glass of water is an action, and asking someone else to get you one is also an act. This concept underlies the Speech Act Theory, which we will further analyze in more detail in this section.

The implication is that when we speak, our words do not have meaning in themselves. They are very much affected by the situation, the speaker and the listener. Thus, words alone do not have a simple fixed meaning.

The Speech Act Theory proposes that on any occasion, the action performed by producing utterances will consist of three related acts of speech: There is first a locutionary act which is the basic act of producing a meaningful language expression. Then an illocutionary act and lastly a perlocutionary act. Read the explanations and definitions below:

- **Locutionary act**: saying something (the locution) with a certain meaning in traditional sense. This may not constitute a speech act.

  If a person has difficulties in producing sounds and words to create a meaningful expression, in a foreign language, for instance, because of insufficient knowledge of this language, then the person might fail to produce a locutionary act.

- **Illocutionary act**: the performance of an act in saying something (vs. the general act of saying something).

  The *illocutionary force* is the speaker’s intent. A true 'speech act'. e.g. informing, ordering, warning, undertaking.
In general, we produce well-formed utterances with a purpose, and we always have some kind of function in mind. The communicative force of an utterance results in what has been described as an illocutionary act.

Of course, a speaker does not create an utterance with a function without intending it to have an effect on the hearer. This is the third dimension, the perlocutionary act.

- **Perlocutionary acts**: Speech acts that have an effect on the feelings, thoughts or actions of either the speaker or the listener. In other words, they seek to change minds! Unlike locutionary acts, perlocutionary acts are external to the performance e.g., inspiring, persuading or deterring.

Searle (1969) identified five illocutionary/perlocutionary points:

1. **Assertives**: statements may be judged true or false because they aim to describe a state of affairs in the world.
2. **Directives**: statements attempt to make the other person's actions fit the propositional content.
3. **Commissives**: statements which commit the speaker to a course of action as described by the propositional content.
4. **Expressives**: statements that express the “sincerity condition of the speech act”.
5. **Declaratives**: statements that attempt to change the world by “representing it as having been changed”.

Thus, pretty much all we do when we are talking is to assert, direct, commiserate, express and declare.

The meaning of an utterance is thus defined more by convention than the initiative of the reader. When we speak, we are following learned rules. **Performativity** occurs where the utterance of a word also enacts it ('I name this ship...'). It is a form of illocutionary act. This has been taken up by such as Judith Butler in feminism and has been used to indicate how pornography is less a form of speech as a performative act of sexual degradation. It is related to suture and interpellation in the way it forces a situation.

Some examples:
**Implications of Pragmatics, discourse analysis for language teaching**

So far we have been discussing theories of the pragmatic interpretation of language: how people create meaning and make sense of what is said in specific circumstances. The fact that meaning is not constructed from the formal language of the message alone is crucial in explaining what it is that makes people perceive some stretches of language as coherent discourse and others as disconnected jumbles. It is also important for the successful teaching and learning of foreign languages.

The importance of pragmatic theories in language learning is really twofold. Firstly the divergence of function and form means that we cannot rely upon teaching only form. In production, learners need to choose the words which most suitable realize their intention, and this does not always entail the most closely related form; in reception of language, given the human penchant for indirection, they also need to be able to move from the form to the function. There are times when making the language function effectively is more important than producing perfectly pronounced, grammatically correct sentences.

Secondly, the linking of form to function may help learners to originate themselves within a discourse. All learners of a foreign language are familiar with the disturbing sensation of understanding every word, and the literal meaning, but somehow missing the point. The underlying
structure of the discourse may be a progression of functional units, and a breakdown in pragmatic interpretation may easily lead to a learner losing his or her way. We shall need to go further in examining how functional units interact to create discourse, and how the learner may be guided through them.

The two points raise the issue of the extent to which pragmatic interpretation and discourse structure are culture specific, and the extent to which they need to be- or can be- taught. In order to ‘do things with words’ either actively, as language producers, or passively, as language understanders, we clearly need more tools than the formal language system, though we do need that too. The needs of the language user might be represented as in the following chart taken from Guy Cook:

![Chart](image)

Taken from ‘Discourse, Guy Cook, 1996, page 42

Traditionally, language teaching has concentrated only on the three levels of the formal language system- pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary- and the way in which they function within the sentence, on the assumption that other aspects of communication will follow fairly automatically. It remains true, of course, that the formal system of a foreign language is very obviously different from that of the learner’s first language, that it, therefore, forms the basis of any full communication, and that it needs to be acquired in some way. It is not, however, all that is needed for communication. So far, in our search for the forces which creates coherence, we have examined some of the other factors in communication.

In the first unit we have seen how the formal system operates across sentences and we have mentioned how knowledge of the world or of the
culture, about social roles and relationships) enables people to make their language function as they intend to understand how others do the same to them. To connect their knowledge with the language system people use reasoning, and pragmatic theories. In order to understand this, we should go some way towards explaining how people reason their way from the form to the function and thus construct coherent discourse from the language they receive.

What we need to decide as language teachers is the degree to which other components of communication need teaching. All human beings have reasoning power, world knowledge, and knowledge of at least one culture; but the divisions between these categories and the nature of their contents are not always clear. How far do conversational principles and the interpretation of speech acts proceeds differently in different culture, for example? We also need to help learners integrate the components of communication one with another. It is no good teaching them as discrete units and hoping that the learner, suddenly face with immediate success. Whatever cultural variation there may be in pragmatic interpretation, we may be sure that its interaction with form is language specific. It does needs teaching, though we must be careful not to go to the opposite extreme, as many courses do, and patronizingly that adult learners like new-born babies. They bring with them immense reasoning power, knowledge of the world, and a sophisticated skill at implementing through their own language and culture the complex needs of all humans; to relate to others, and to act with them.

(Taken from: Language Teaching- Discourse, Guy Cook;OUP, 1996, pages 40-42)

Mandatory assignment 2 (deadline: September 9th)

Consider the following exchanges. Does the second speaker answers the first speaker's question in each case? Does the answer implicate anything? What maxim/s are being flouted in each case and what the reasons might be?

1) Exchange between two colleagues:
   
   A: Did I get invited to the conference?
   B: Your paper was too long.
2) Exchange between mother and daughter:
   M: What did you have for breakfast this morning?
   D: Food

3) Exchange between two friends:
   Lucy: What's Kate's husband like?
   Sue: She married a rat

4) Exchange between husband and wife?
   W: Do you like my new coat?
   H: It's pink!

5) Exchange between two students:
   A: Coffee?
   B: It would keep me awake all night.

1- Provide two examples (real or invented) in which Grice's rules are broken overtly (flouting) stating which of the maxims is being violated in each case.

2- Speech Acts: Provide one example (created by you) for each type of speech acts: Locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary.