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BOOK REVIEW ARTICLE
 THE RELEVANCE OF THE DISCOURSE TO ESL STUDIES:
 A REVIEW OF T.A. VAN DIJK'S TEXT AND CONTEXT:
 EXPLORATIONS IN THE SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF
 DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This paper reviews T.A. Van Dijk's *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse* by summarising the main issues discussed in the work and observing the relevance of the discussion to studies on English as a Second Language (ESL). The review observes that although Van Dijk's work does not provide an adequate theory of English discourse since it only describes the underlying structures of the discourse, and also because it deliberately neglects certain features that are regular to discourse production and interpretation and which are especially of particular interest to discourse studies in an ESL situation, it no doubt provides a good starting point for an adequate theory of English discourse. It also provides a base for more comprehensive studies on the discourse which will have relevance to the pedagogy of English and communication in the language in a natural ESL environment.

Introduction

The case has been made for identifying and establishing English as a Second Language (ESL) both as a variety of English and as an academic discipline.¹ But how the variety can be studied and promoted as a viable and authentic discipline of English studies is only now being given careful thought.² In order to effectively promote the learning and use of the variety, the study of ESL first has to be grounded on theories, principles and practices that will help to cul-

vate it in both its artificial and natural settings. It has to benefit from research in general theoretical linguistics as well as descriptive linguistics of English in order to have a sound base. Also, it has to benefit from the experience, practice and use of English in different socio-cultural settings in order to have relevance for the ESL variety. It is against such assumptions that this review of Van Dijk (1977), *Text and Context*, is undertaken. The review is divided into three parts. While the first part introduces the discourse by identifying some of its basic principles, the second part highlights the main issues raised by Van Dijk pertaining to the linguistics of English discourse; and the third part examines the author's contribution to discourse studies and its relevance to the requirements of the study of ESL.

It will suffice to say that this review primarily aims at introducing discourse studies to the majority of JESEL readers who are non-specialists in the field. Unlike a previous review of the same work (cf. Pierrehumbert, 1980) which mainly highlights and discusses certain limitations of the work, this review intends to use Van Dijk's book as a base for presenting the main features of English discourse to readers. And in spite of the fact that *Text and Context* has an English as a Mother Tongue (EMT) orientation, and was published as far back as eleven years ago, we still consider it appropriate as a basis for this study for three main reasons. First, because of its invaluable theoretical insights into the study of English discourse, the work is still much reckoned with in the field today, despite its age. Second, it is also true that such a book as this is difficult to come by nowadays in some natural ESL communities like Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, and most readers of JESEL, except the few privileged specialists in discourse studies, might be hearing about the book for the first time. And third, it is feared that because of the author's elevated language, the valuable content of the work might be lost on most non-specialist readers who are lucky enough to come across it. It is indeed our hope that the presentation below will introduce the work and thus make it more accessible to such readers.

The Principles of Discourse Studies

Discourse as 'Form-in-Context'

Having accepted the firm establishment of language as an autono-

mous subject, a complete system with its own set of rules for describing experience and language itself, recent approaches in linguistics pay much attention to the formulation of theories for the description of diverse human experiences, thoughts and cultures. This is evident in the recent surge of interest in applied linguistics, especially translation and language pedagogy, socio-linguistics, psycholinguistics, the philosophy of language and discourse studies among others, where 'form' is not the goal of study, but 'form-in-context.' The interest in applied linguistics is further evident in the recent reactions of linguists to the inadequacies of classical theories of language form in describing human experience and their call for appropriate theories which can relate form to the context of communication.

The relation of form and context is considered vital to discourse studies, and as Adegbija (1987:59) rightly points out in a study of English discourse in an ESL community;

In an L_2 context, therefore, there is a need for an extra-sensitivity to the context in which communication occurs, for such a context could hold the key to the genuine, bona-fide speech act functions of utterances.

Another context that could hold the key to the genuine, bona-fide speech act functions of English utterances is the field of discourse studies. This field should serve to educate readers by providing them with descriptions, analyses and interpretations of discourses in diverse human situations. Below we present the levels of discourse description via the semiotic dimension of language study.

The Levels of Discourse Description

Discourse studies refer essentially to that branch of language study which specializes in the description, teaching and learning of discourse production and reception. A discourse is an incorporation of the form, meaning and function of language and its description can be done fully along the dimension of a semiotic approach to language study. This approach recognizes three interconnected levels essential for discourse description, viz. syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The levels parallel those of form, meaning and function stated above and they account for the relationship between (i) formal items (or forms)

(ii) forms and their referential or denotative meanings, and (iii) the interrelationship between forms, meanings and users (cf. Morris, 1946 and Hawkes, 1977) respectively. The foci of these three levels of semiotics are explained very briefly in the next three paragraphs, especially as they relate to discourse studies.

The consideration of form in discourse studies still benefits from the descriptions in classical formal sentence theories such as transformational generative grammar, systemic grammar, stratificational grammar, etc. When we study form, we are studying abstract patterns of formal items which realise at the surface structure all aspects of discourse meaning - cognitive, conventional (or social) and contextual³ - organised at the semantic and pragmatic levels of deep structure. The basic unit of the form of discourse is the sentence, which also represents the formal counterpart of an utterance in a discourse. Just as a discourse is made up of one or more utterances, the form of a discourse is made up of one or more sentences. In other words, the form of discourse is essentially a sequence of sentences (cf. Van Dijk 1972 and 1977).

The study of meaning in discourse assumes the knowledge of semantic concepts about word and sentence (or propositional) meaning such as reference and sense, articles and definitivisation, pronominalisation, presupposition, generative and interpretive semantics, logical, cognitive and conventional semantics, speech acts, etc. (cf. Lyons, 1977, vols 1 and 2). Discourse theoreticians recognise all these different concepts in addition to other discourse - oriented semantic notions like connection, coherence, cohesion and macro-structure (cf. Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981. Since there is no hard-and-fast method of describing meaning in discourse, and discourse scholars have always described it from their various points of view, we shall not attempt to present an overview of all discussions about discourse semantics here for fear of saying more than is necessary for the present study. Maybe it is more reasonable then, for the purpose of this work, to consider Van Dijk's description as being handy enough for our readers.

The functions (or acts) which a discourse may perform are many. For example, discourse may be produced to advise, accuse, promise, request, annoy, cure, entertain, etc. But in line with Searle's (1976, 10-15) classification of acts into types, it is possible to identify cer-

tain basic functions which may underlie the achievement of the individual acts stated above (cf. also Dore, 1979). For instance, a discourse may perform the act of 'annoying' by informing or failing to inform someone about something, or by directing or failing to direct someone to do something, or by expressing an emotion, or via two or more of these means.

With the essential background information about the discourse given above, readers should now be able to observe Van Dijk's contribution to the field, and also the significance of his work vis-à-vis discourse studies, the learning, teaching and use of ESL.

Van Dijk's (1977) Contribution to Discourse Studies: The presentation of the linguistics of discourse

Text and Context is a work designed to complement as well as improve on Van Dijk's earlier work *Some Aspects of Text Grammars* (published in 1972) in which he proposes a formal text theory which describes the competence of native speakers. In the present work, he recognises the fact that 'an utterance should not only be characterised in terms of internal structure and meaning assigned to it but also in terms of the act accomplished by producing such an utterance (p.2).' According to him (ibid.); Dijk 1972

There is no a priori reason why a grammar should not be a FORM-MEANING-ACTION RULE SYSTEM in which abstract forms of utterances are related to both meaning and function of these forms in theoretically reconstructed contexts of communication.

Thus, Van Dijk sets out to describe in *Text and Context* not the morpho-syntactic conditions determining the well-formedness of a discourse, having dealt considerably with this aspect in his earlier work, and the semantic and pragmatic conditions determining the interpretability and appropriateness of a discourse respectively. In describing the features of discourse, he examines only their underlying conditions. He deliberately neglects the description of text types and also rhetorical devices such as parallelism which he claims are restricted to certain types of discourse and are not assigned a conventional meaning or a conventional speech act (p.4).

The work is divided into three parts: an introduction, the semantics of discourse and the pragmatics of discourse. This approach leads to his discussing formal (artificial) language and the cognitive features of natural language under semantics; and conventional and

contextual features of natural language under pragmatics. Let us examine the content of the three parts of the work.

The Introduction

What constitutes the introduction to the work covers its first fifteen pages. This part discusses theoretical issues relating to the aims and problems, organisation and methodology of the study. Here, Van Dijk proposes to make a linguistic study of discourse theory. He thus postulates a theoretical unit of 'text' which he uses to denote 'the abstract theoretical construct underlying what is called discourse' (p.3). And he claims that his theoretical tools are borrowed from certain domains of philosophy, philosophical logic, cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence. The remaining two parts of the work describe the semantics and pragmatics of discourse respectively in eight chapters equally divided between the two topics. The four chapters on semantics (pp. 1-163) discuss features of discourse such as formal semantics, connection and connectives, coherence and macro-structures, while the chapters under pragmatics discuss the theory of action, contexts and speech acts and also the relationship between semantic and pragmatic structures.

The Semantics of Discourse

The discussion on formal semantics is based on the philosophy of logic. It examines such features of logical semantics as truth-functions, predicate logic, modal logic, extension and intension. It also makes a distinction between formal semantics and the semantics of natural language. What in fact does the author say about these features?

A truth-functional semantics is a semantics of logical systems. It is a semantics in which an interpretation is assigned to a proposition not in terms of its content or meaning, as is done in natural language, but in terms of its truth value i.e. whether the proposition is 'true' or 'false', and sometimes, in some systems, 'neither true nor false'. For example, if the proposition 'John is ill' is true, then the proposition 'John is not ill' is false under normal circumstances.

An expression containing several propositional variables is interpreted as expressing a compound truth value; and the truth value proposition is determined by (i) the truth value of the propositional

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variables ('p' and 'q'), and (ii) the values of the proposition as determined by the connectives (e.g. 'and', represented by the symbol '&', and 'or', represented by the symbol 'v', etc.) in the proposition. For example, in a compound proposition with variables like,

p q

1. If Peter is ill, he has called a doctor.

The proposition 'p & q' is true only when the two variables are true and false when either or both variables are false. In contrast, 'p v q' is false only when its two variables are individually false.

A predicate logic, unlike the propositional logic discussed above, does not account for the truth values of utterances as wholes, instead what it does is to describe the truth value of an atomic proposition on the values of its internal parts. For example;

a proposition like 'John is ill' is true if there is some object John, if there is a set of ill people, and if the object John belongs to this set, viz. has the property of illness which characterizes this set. (P. 26)

The propositional and predicate logical systems presented above are the basic and standard systems of logic, but according to Van Dijk, the systems may be enriched with additional categories of expressions e.g. the categories of modal expressions such as necessity, possibility, belief, obligation, permission, want, wish, preference and time, in order to be able to express certain structures of formal or natural languages (p.27).

Formally speaking, modal expressions are operators, and they combine with non-modal sentences to make more complex sentences which indicate tense and mood. Given the sentence (or formula) 'Peter is ill', we obtain another sentence by prefixing, for example, 'It is possible that —' in order to indicate possibility. A valid formula of a logical modality is logically true or logically necessary because its truth depends on purely logical properties of a formula, not on the facts of the universe of discourse. But modal operators and modal connectives are not truth-functional since modal semantics is based on the notion of an imaginable situation, or 'possible world.' Thus we may say that p is necessarily true in any situation we can imagine, and also that p is possible if there is at least one imaginable situation in which p is true.

Further in his discussion on formal semantics, Van Dijk identifies the notions of extension and intension. According to him, extension refers to the characteristic of formal semantics which involves the

specification of objects denoted by sentences and parts of sentences which provide the conditions under which sentences are true or false (p.33). In the strict sense, extensional objects are specific spatio-temporally defined properties of a particular possible world, and as such are 'unique'. Thus, when one talks about 'Peter', one does not usually refer to this momentarily physical existence of Peter here and now, but to something which remains more or less identical or similar in a series of situations (a 'life'). The extensions of sentences are assumed as facts in some possible world, while notions like 'true' and 'false' are reserved for properties of sentences, propositions or even utterances of these; 'a sentence is true, then, if the fact it denotes exists in a possible world.'

Intension, on the other hand, is used to refer to other objects of reference of (parts of) sentences which do not have a straightforward extensional character. For example, in the sentence 'A lion has four legs,' the phrase 'A lion' is a generic expression and neither denotes some particular object in some particular world, nor a set of such objects. Intensional objects have a conceptual or possible nature (non-referential), rather than an actual (referential) nature, which extensional objects have (ibid.).

Lastly, the discussion on formal semantics indicates the distinction between formal semantics and the semantics of natural language. As Van Dijk observes, formal logic is part of the study of formal languages, and unlike natural languages, formal languages are artificial (p. 19). Also, he observes that while a simple sentence of a natural language like 'Peter is ill' can be translated intuitively as ill (Peter), or 'f (a),' in a logical sentence, a complex natural language sentence such as 'The little boy who had stolen the orange wanted to eat it before he was seen' can hardly be represented by even the most sophisticated non-standard logical formula (pp. 36 and 37). However, in spite of these differences, formal languages and natural languages have certain abstract structures in common, which allow the application of logic in grammar.

In his discussion of connection and connectives, Van Dijk identifies certain conditions of semantic connection as the relation between references and their related properties, relatedness of the facts and relatedness of possible worlds. Thus, looking at the three sentences below, certain comments can be made:

2. John is a bachelor, so Peter is not married.
3. John is a bachelor, so he buys too many records.

4. I dreamt that it was hot. So I went to the beach.
S2 is normally unacceptable because the meaning relations between the predicates in the sentence do not have identical reference. Intuitively, S3 is strange because 'We do not immediately see in what respect the fact that John is a bachelor could be related to the fact that he buys too many records.' Similarly, S4 would not normally be considered acceptable because the dream world of the hot weather is incompatible with the real world of going to the beach.

Relations between propositions or facts are expressed by sets of expressions from various syntactic categories which Van Dijk calls connectives. As he observes, the presence of connectives does not make sentences connected, as shown by the sequence 'Amsterdam is the capital of Netherlands. It has 800,000 inhabitants.' (p.46); rather the use of connectives presupposes that sentences are connected (p.46). Such connectives thus indicate various sorts of connection, viz implication, cause or reason, and, perhaps, conjunction.

The discussion on connectives is carried out on pp.52 - 90 where Van Dijk describes connectives such as conjunction (and—), disjunction (or—), conditionals (because, for, therefore, if,—), contrastives (but, although, nevertheless—), connected sequences, etc. in terms of their individual characteristics and semantic properties. According to him (p.53),

—one of the tasks of a semantics of natural connectives is to make explicit the intuitive distinctions based on the 'meanings' of the connectives. And it should be clarified how the different classes are related to each other (p. 53).

For example, he observes that one of the problems in the semantics of natural connectives is their possible ambiguity in isolation. This, he illustrates by looking at the different meanings which 'and' may indicate in different sentences (only three are listed here):

5. John smoked a cigar and Peter smoked a pipe.
6. John went to the library and checked his references.
7. John smoked a cigar and Mary left the room.

In the three sentences above, 'and' could be said to indicate 'at the same time' (S5); 'there' (S6) and 'therefore' (S7).

After discussing the conditions of connection in the semantics of discourse, and also examining the specific and general characteristics of connectives, Van Dijk goes on to describe the properties of the

semantic structure of discourse which determine its coherence. Coherence is a semantic property of discourse, as it were, and it is based on the interpretation of each individual sentence relative to the interpretation of other sentences (p.93).

Coherence relations exist between parts (operators, quantifiers, predicates, argument, etc.) of sentences (or propositions) and the model structures involved must be such that values can be assigned to these parts. The greatest amount of discussion, both in sentences and discourses, has been devoted to the relation of 'referential identity' between individuals. For example, the same individual may be referred to in different sentences by the proper name 'John', by the pronoun 'he', or by expressions like 'my brother', 'that boy' or 'the pupil who has lost a book'. Such relations of identity can also be established for properties and relations: 'I may be ill, and so may Peter,' and 'I may love Mary, and so may John.' During the discourse, individuals may be 'introduced' or even 'eliminated,' in the sense that each sentence is to be interpreted with respect to its specific 'actual domain' of individuals. Similarly, quantifiers will also be interpreted for the domains which at some point in the discourse model have been established for the various possible worlds involved: an expression like 'all men' normally refers to the men of a certain, previously mentioned group, not to all existing men, universally speaking, nor to all men of a certain world. In addition, 'properties or relations,' i.e. the values of predicates, will also change for a given individual at different time points and in different possible worlds. A discourse, thus, may have the propositions 'John is ill' and 'John is not ill,' without being inconsistent. In the final analysis, the coherence of discourse is determined mainly by our mutual knowledge about the structure of worlds in general and of particular states of affairs or courses of events.

The category of 'macro-structure' is set up in *Text and Context* to cater for discourse structures on a more global level of organisation (p.130). This implies that the conditions of coherence are not only formulated in terms of sequence of sentences but also in terms of the relation of sentences to the topic of conversation or discourse. Just as the notion topic is assigned intuitively to represent the major ideas expressed in a discourse, a macro-structure represents a reduction as well as an integration of the propositions of more detailed information given by sentences in a discourse. For example, while the senten-

ces in a passage containing five paragraphs (see p. 132) may be assigned a topic of only a phrase 'The decline of Fairview' (p.133), the macro-structure of the discourse may be expressed in a sentence or proposition like 'A little town called Fairview is declining because it cannot compete with another town called Bentonville' (p.134).

The macro-structure of a sequence of sentences is a semantic representation or proposition entailed by the sequence of propositions underlying the discourse (or part of it). The types of categories and rules based on the category determine the overall organisation of a discourse and at the same time identify the type of discourse involved (p. 154).

The Pragmatics of Discourse

Part two begins with an introduction to pragmatics as a theory of action and an examination of some notions pertaining to the theory. As a prelude to the theory, Van Dijk claims that (p. 167);

—the use of language is not only some specific act, but an integral part of social interaction.

In other words, the categories and rules of language are claimed to have developed under the influence of the structure of interaction in society. He then goes on to describe the notion of action, how actions may constitute sequences of actions and how they are part of verbal or non-verbal interaction in a society. Lastly, he discusses how interaction depends on norms, conventions, obligations and needs of a social group.

Van Dijk further discusses some major issues pertaining to context and speech acts under three subheadings: The aims of pragmatics, the structure of context, and acts of language. Pragmatics is recognised as the third major component of any semiotic theory which has the task of studying the relationships between signs and their users (p. 189). And, according to Van Dijk, if a pragmatic theory should be part of a theory of language, it must be assigned an empirical domain consisting of conventional rules of language and manifestations of these in the production and interpretation of utterances. In describing the structure of 'context', Van Dijk recognises at least two persons, a speaker and a hearer, both belonging to one speech community. 'A context is a course of events' (p.192). And there is an infi-

nite set of possible contexts, of which one will be the actual context which is defined by the period of time and the place where the common activities of speaker and hearer are located. Participants function in the actual context as either 'speaker' or 'hearer' or both. And they produce and receive utterances as acts.

Acts may be 'locutionary' (or 'propositional'), 'illocutionary' or, in some cases, 'perlocutionary' (p.196). A locutionary act represents actions carried out at the phonetic, phonological, morphological and syntactic levels of discourse. The act involves the planning of speech based on the criteria of intention, purpose and control, even if the individual acts are automatised. The formation of intentions for sound production does not come first in performing a speech. On the contrary, a speaker plans the speech act first, then its precise semantic content, and only after that does he give a syntactical, morphological, phonological and phonetic form to this content. In short, the control of lower acts are observed to come from the higher order, social acts (p.196).

Illocutionary acts are the central object of study for pragmatics, and they may be defined in two ways. In one way the acts may refer to the intended meaning/reference of utterances. In another way, they may refer to communicative acts which are defined in terms of purpose - successfulness or successful accomplishment of an act, e.g. assertion. Illocutionary acts are achieved at the fifth order level of operations or processes of deriving such acts; for instance, an act such as giving a piece of advice is realised by lower order (all locutionary) acts of (i) referring to a certain fact (a future action of the hearer), (ii) meaning a certain proposition, (iii) expressing some clause or sentence, (iv) expressing some morpheme sequence and (v) accomplishing a phonetic doing (p.197). The success of an illocutionary act of language depends on whether a hearer recognises the intended meaning/reference of the utterance, and whether the speaker had the purpose that this particular hearer should form this recognition (p. 198). Lastly, a perlocutionary act refers to the consequence of an illocutionary act on a hearer. The conditions of success of this act are given in terms of purposes of the speaker with respect to some change brought about in the hearer.

The last two chapters of the work investigate the relations between sequences of sentences (discussed in chapter four) and sequen-

ces of speech acts on the one hand, and between macro-structures and macro-speech acts' (sequences of speech acts), on the other hand. Thus, it is shown that conditions earlier imposed on connectives and connection as well as coherence, topic, macro-structures etc. also have a pragmatic base (viz, appropriateness and relevance) where they reflect performance of specific social acts (p.205). For example, while the two sentences S8 and S9 below are semantically equivalent, in the sense that they have the same truth conditions, they are no doubt pragmatically different because each of them assumes different presuppositions (i.e. knowledge of conventional and contextual features assumed by the speaker to be known to the hearer) of the hearer(s):

8. Because he had an accident, Peter is in hospital.
9. Peter is in hospital, because he had an accident.

While S9 would be appropriate as an answer to a previous question of a hearer like 'Why is Peter in hospital?', S8 would not be so appropriate. But the latter sentence would be appropriate, though a bit awkward, as a response to the sequence 'Where is Peter? They say he had an accident.'

Talking about the relevance or importance of an utterance to a particular context (or situation), e.g. in the board meeting situation, the proposition 'Peter can't come' is more directly relevant to that meeting than the reason 'Peter is in hospital,' which, in turn is more relevant than the fact that 'Peter had an accident.' On the other hand, in a situation in which Peter's wife is informed of the events, information about the accident may well be much more important than the fact that he is in hospital.

The Relevance of 'Text and Context' to ESL Studies

Van Dijk's presentation in *Text and Context* has some positive implications for ESL studies, especially in connection with discourse theory, discourse pedagogy and interactional discourse. Let us briefly discuss the interests of these sub-fields of discourse in relation to ESL studies.

The Theoretical Relevance of Van Dijk's Presentation of Linguistics of Discourse.

Two main features of Van Dijk's book are of particular interest to us here, in so far as they pertain to setting up discourse models for ESL studies. First, the setting up of models is the ultimate task of any language study (cf. Lamb, 1966). And the 'model of knowledge' which Van Dijk attempts to describe is theoretically feasible for ESL. Such a model is not incompatible with an ESL model which is required to foster the learning and use of features which enable ESL learners to produce and interpret discourses correctly in English. Although the author's discussion of a linguistic theory of discourse is an EMT – based theory of knowledge of the rules of discourse production and interpretation, this does not make the work irrelevant to ESL. Whatever model is adequate for EMT cannot be irrelevant to ESL, since EMT will always provide the touchstone for ESL learning and use at the developmental stage, and even after its maturity (cf. Afolayan, 1987: 11). However, because the EMT model is monolingual – monocultural and ESL is bilingual-bicultural, the former will have to be modified and supplemented with relevant ESL features (see below) in order to apply effectively to ESL studies.

In spite of its comprehensiveness, explicitness and precision, Van Dijk's presentation of a linguistic theory of discourse does not provide an adequate description of discourse, as he himself observes (see p.11), because of his exclusion of certain essential features. In fairness to him, he has stated clearly that discourse structures bordering on text types and rhetorical structures are not treated in his discussion because the conventional and contextual rules underlying such structures "cannot be made explicit by a linguistic grammar" (p.4). But so far as we are concerned with developing a discourse theory of English that is adequate and relevant to ESL studies, whatever reason (s) he has given for ignoring such relevant structures cannot be in our interest. In fact, the author has failed to do something which is essential for both EMT and ESL as descriptive models, for neither an EMT or ESL theory of discourse can prove adequate without a discussion of text types and rhetorical structures (see for instance, Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). Certainly, EMT speakers do have some form of conventional knowledge about certain stylistic devices and structures of discourse pertaining to monologues, dialogues, narra-

tives, arguments, expositions, etc. and the situational contexts in which such devices and structures are most predictable. An externalisation of such knowledge would be useful for ESL learners to whom an EMT model is a target model for learning. Even if such features are not included in a description meant for EMT speakers who have already internalised most of these structures informally, they are necessary features to be included in an ESL – oriented model of discourse. In any case, it is quite possible that it is the 'rule-system' approach which Van Dijk employs in his study that has occasioned the above limitation in his description; for some linguists hold the view that features of discourse can be described better in terms of the observations of their 'dominances' and regularities in various kinds of discourse (cf. Halliday, 1978 and Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). Beaugrande and Dressler (ibid., xv), for example, state what should be the focus of 'text linguistics' thus:

We should work to discover regularities, strategies, motivations, preferences, and defaults rather than rules and laws. Dominances can offer more realistic classifications than can strict categories. Acceptability and appropriateness are more crucial standards for texts than grammaticality and well-formedness.

The Character of an Adequate Theory of English Discourse

It is already stated above that for an EMT – based linguistic theory of discourse to be relevant to ESL studies, it has to be modified and supplemented by features of discourse relevant to the ESL situation. Perhaps it is better then to think of an adequate theory of English discourse which can apply effectively to discourse studies in English whether in an EMT, ESL or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) situation. The character of such a theory is that it should embrace all studies of English discourse that consider the interaction of form, meaning and function of language. Its essential properties should be as stated below.

The Constituents of the Theory of English Discourse

English discourse can be described in two ways. The first way is to describe the underlying structure, i.e. the grammar or linguistics of the discourse and the second is to describe the features of particular English discourses in discourse situations. The presentation of discourse grammar may be done via either of two approaches. It may follow either the 'deductive' or 'generative' approach of describing the rules that underlie the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic proper-

ties of discourse or the inductive or 'exemplificatory' approach of describing the potential features of discourse on the basis of previous observations of regularities or dominances of such features in discourse analysis. An illustration of the first approach, which is a deterministic one, can be seen in Van Dijk's description in *Text and Context*, while the probabilistic nature of the second approach is illustrated by Beaugrande and Dressler's (op. cit.) account of the 'standards of textuality' in terms of certain 'constitutive' and 'regulative' principles which regulate or control textual communication⁴. One advantage of the latter approach over the former is that it gives room for the description of text types and rhetorical structures which are neglected in the former.

The second way of describing English discourse is via the approach often called 'discourse analysis.' The analysis of discourse in this sense very often concentrates on the observation of the interrelationship between formal, semantic and pragmatic features of collected individual spoken or written English discourse. But very often in the analysis of literary discourse, much more emphasis can be laid on the rhetorical devices and their aesthetic effects.

The Components of the Theory of English Discourse

The major components of an English discourse theory are the three discourse types; monologues, dialogues and conversations. Monological discourses may be scientific or non-scientific, or literary or non-literary. In this respect, most essays (narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative), speeches and correspondences in the form of letters are monologues, but they may sometimes consist of dialogues. Other kinds of monologues include most poems and the larger part of prose materials. Although the forms of dialogue and monologue do co-exist in certain discourses, the most usual place for dialogues is in literary dramatic texts. The study of conversations is continuously gaining the attention of discourse analysts in recent times. And some notable works in this line can be seen in the description of the rules of turn-taking in conversations (cf. Sacks, et al., 1974), and also the description of the structure and function of conversation (cf. Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Brown and Yule, 1983; and Akindele, 1986).

There is no gainsaying the fact that an adequate theory of English discourse must provide for appropriate representation of the consti-

tuents and components presented above. In other words, the theory must account adequately and explicitly for all essential features of discourse and should be readily available and applicable to the analyses of corpora of actual discourse.

Discourse Studies and The Teaching of ESL

Since the linguistics of discourse has theoretical significance for ESL studies within the framework of an adequate theory of English discourse, it is more reasonable to consider the significance of the latter, rather than the former, to the teaching of ESL.

As linguists now become increasingly interested in applied linguistics rather than linguistic theory for its own sake, a wave of change parallel to this is also noticeable in the field of English pedagogy as applied linguists and teachers of English now consider it more beneficial to relate the teaching of grammatical structures to appropriate contexts of communication (cf. Widdowson, 1978; Littlewood, 1981, and Akere, 1984). All the suggestions about the acquisition of communicative competence by learners and the adoption of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method centre on the proper teaching and learning of discourse production and interpretation in appropriate contexts of communication. While one can admit that the exposure of learners to CLT has some advantages for EFL learners, it should have even greater advantages for ESL learners, as Akere (ibid., p.45) rightly observes:

'Native speakers of a language are presumed to have internalized a system or systems of rules which govern the choice of appropriate varieties and their use, in the same way in which they have internalized the rules of grammar.' The language of text-book from which most L2 users of English acquired the variety of English they use, represents but a limited range in the kinds of variation which characterize the English language. (Akere, ibid., p.42.)

From the foregoing, it is thus apparent that the teaching of ESL has a lot to gain from researches into the analysis and description of English discourse.

Discourse Studies and Communicative Interaction in ESL Situations

It is stated in the earlier part of this work that a successful interpretation of discourse strictly depends on the consideration of some

conventional and contextual rules which are relevant to a communication situation. If proper attention is paid to these conventional and contextual rules in the interpretation of discourse, there is no doubt that efficient and effective interaction will be greatly enhanced. However, failure to pay adequate attention to these factors may result in the misinterpretation of speakers' intents, and possibly present serious communication problems (cf. Gumperz, 1982: chap. 8; and Adegbiya, 1987: 56) ⁵. Adegbiya (ibid., p.59) suggests, especially with relevance to ESL studies, that

—participants in an interactional exchange in an English as a Second Language environment may always need to make greater allowances for unintended speech acts than in a first language context.

This suggestion is very useful for interactants in an ESL situation when one considers the fact that a lot of ESL speakers while communicating do actually commit unintentional errors that may be attributable to wrong transference of features from their mother tongues, or, even, false or inadequate learning of the rules of English. Two illustrations of such cases of transfer ⁶ from Yoruba into English are given below:

- (i) the chorusing of 'Sorry sir!' by a group of students to their lecturer who has just sneezed in the class;
- (ii) a speaker who says 'I'm coming' to his friend when he is in actual fact leaving.

And Adegbiya's (ibid., p.48) example of the utterance 'I want to sign my form,' intended as a request by a student to his lecturer, will serve as a signal of false learning and wrong use of polite forms of request by the learner.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the few (mainly procedural) flaws observed in *Text and Context* by Pierrehumbert (1980 114–119), the work undoubtedly embodies well-researched materials on the linguistic theory of discourse. It not only presents lucidly and precisely, many times with mathematical and logical formulae, the cognitive aspects of language, but also gives much useful theoretical insight into the general conditions underlying social rules and contexts of language. It is a book which every scholar of English discourse should find time to read. And in spite of the fact that it is not designed specifically for

ESL learning and use, and also of the fact that it cannot cater adequately for certain essential features of English discourse, it no doubt provides a good starting point for more comprehensive presentations of discourse theories of English.

Notes

1. This journal is committed to the recognition and development of the variety, as can be seen in the editorial and the first article of the maiden issue.
2. This very review is undertaken within this professed commitment, as already stated in 1 above.
3. Although these three aspects of discourse meaning are recognised by language scholars, they are accounted for in different ways by them. For example, while scholars in the systemic linguistic school prefer an integration of both meanings in the semantic system, transformational text linguists describe cognitive and conventional meanings separately under the categories of semantics and pragmatics (cf. Van Dijk's approach in this study). The latter approach may have its own significance for some kinds of studies, e.g. psycholinguistics, but it is the former 'socio-linguistic' approach that is more appropriate for ESL studies since it reflects one of the basic principles of the studies which is 'communicative competence' (cf. Hymes, 1972). This principle assumes that cognitive rules of language are always acquired or learnt in the context of (not separately from) social rules of language behaviour.
4. The constitutive principles are coherence, cohesion, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality, while the regulative principles are efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness.
5. Gumperz has presented an analysis of passages in which he illustrates the miscommunication that arise when speakers of a language use different conventional rules to interpret a discourse. And Adegbiya has illustrated the deliberate attempt by a lecturer to misinterpret the unintended error of impoliteness committed by a student in an ESL situation.

6. While these two examples may not be representative models of native speakers of English, some language scholars also may not regard them as errors because of their cultural (rather than syntactic) underpinning, which may insulate them from being judged as errors via an international standard of correctness.

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