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## Grammar and Grammar Teaching: Changing Perspectives

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### Discourse and Its Facets

**Prof. G. Coumaran**

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#### Some Features of Discourse Selection

A discourse is a learned write-up at length, about a serious subject to edify the reader. Digressively at times, the *raison d'être* may be to spare the reader of his labour or to entertain by parodying a flimsy matter to an epic height like “*A Dissertation upon a Roast Pig*” by Charles Lamb or a “*Rape of the Lock*” by Alexander Pope or “*Meditation upon a Broomstick*” by Jonathan Swift. Naturally, great care has to be taken with analytical foresight to escape from the prying eyes of the critics in the selection of subject matter, style of presentation and adoption of innovative approach to sustain the undivided attention of the readers to ensure their wide acclamation.

When transcribed into other languages discourse adorns different garbs and ostensibly appears in various avatars.

#### Integral Features

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Discourse and Its Facets

It is everybody's knowledge that a discourse has a number of integral structures such as exordium, narration, confirmation etc., all in an evenly balanced proportion. While taking into consideration, one cannot afford to miss the criterion: "the text". Whatever may be the parts of a discourse, on the whole, the text plays an important role. Hence, the text is conceived as a dimension of the language rather than an element of a corpus from which it draws its sense and strength.

The famous French linguist Patrick Chareadeau is of the considered view that *the text is no more than the encapsulation of the inner core of the subject*. So, the successfulness of the end-product depends on the selection and treatment of a particular eloquent matter taking into consideration the peculiar circumstances prevalent at the time of production.

### **Manner or Matter of the Text?**

In this regard, the principal question that arises is, whether the manner of the text or the concept which encompasses the whole composition is predominantly important.

If it were so, we can with a certain amount of confidence assert that as both manner and matter are interrelated, both are equally important, as both body and soul are necessary for a living organism. For a successful achievement of a discourse, one cannot prefer one at the peril of ignoring the other. If the language of discourse is corporeal dimension, the matter is manifestation of the soul. Could anyone exclusively survive without the other?

### **Importance of the Medium**

As we clothe our thoughts with language, the importance of the medium of language cannot be underestimated.

The impact of the effectual language is so visible and universal that it has already been elevated to the level of systematized body of knowledge called *linguistics*. In the domain of faculty of various disciplines of study, the study of languages has come to occupy a prime place that no one can dare to deny.

### **Two Cardinal Objectives**

When linguistics originated, two cardinal objectives were followed seriously:

1. Explaining the prestigious literary works of Antiquity. Language was employed as a vehicle to carry forward the profound religio-social literatures of Antiquity such as Vedas, Ithihasas, Puranas, Ramayana and Mahabharata of the East, Iliad and Aeneid of the West as legacies to the generations to come. This visionary approach was undertaken not merely to entertain the society at large but with a view to inculcating and exhorting it for its moral betterment.

2. Constructive linguistic structures provide shape or form to the discourse enhancing the qualitative fabric of the matter presented. As regards the constructive structures of discourse concerned, there are no clear-cut or well defined demarcations. Views are freely expressed by the writer and cognitively understood by the reader, thereby fulfilling the purpose for which the discourse is intended.

### **Subjectivity and Objectivity**

But what is the current status of linguistics or language while framing a discourse? The dominance of the subjectivity as against the objectivity is likely to contribute prejudicially to the abandonment of the healthy immanent perspective.

Emile Benveniste, the linguist, brings discourse to a hazy format that *with the phrase we leave the domain of the language as a system of signs, and we enter in another universe, the one of the language as an instrument of communication, from which originates the expression which is the discourse.*

Since the concept metamorphoses into a full-fledged discourse in the womb of the language, naturally both the matter and manner treated in the discourse conditionally become inseparable. In order to be instantly appealing and memorable, they should be closely knit so as to sustain the undivided attention of the reader or speaker. In this connection, it should be acknowledged that besides ancient literature, people with oratorical pre-eminence have equally contributed much to the development of spoken aspect of a discourse.

For example, “*I have a dream*” of Martin Luther King Jr. pronounced 50 years ago can be classified as the world-wide heritage of the humanity. This small but sublime promulgation made on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1963, made on the occasion of the centenary of the

abrogation of slavery in the United States was empathetically shared by the entire African American people, who felt the racial segregation of the States of the South, as a national blemish to hang their heads in shame. His message is humble and graceful yet strong and solemn. Appealingly he started the speech with the “Hell” experienced by the Blacks that many of the Whites ignored for want of fundamental humanitarian principle. Luther King ably adopted and implemented the conviction and commitments of Mahatma Gandhi, justifying the movement of civil rights with principles of Ahimsa, Non-Violence and peaceful non-co-operation and thereby breaking all the formidable barriers of social *Bastille*. His speech was filled with emotions. He also knew how to provoke tears and laughter, anger and hope in the speech.

“.... *We will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, Free at last, Free at last, Great God a-mighty, we are free at last.*”

Even though he repetitively used the expression “*I have a dream*”, it was mainly to impress the public with cogent thoughts and coherent consistency.

### **Political Discourse**

The practical viability and the pragmatism of the usage of discourse can partially be belittled or totally ignored in any field, but its optimum outcome can never for a moment be doubted, even to the least degree as far as the discipline of politics is concerned. Umpteen evidences as to what lengths it has been successfully employed, is readily available, if we just have a cursory glance at the biographies of Demosthenes of Greece and Cicero and Mark Antony of Rome vividly portrayed in Plutarch’s “*Parallel Lives*”.

Normally, in the study of discourse analysis, analyzing a political speech occupies an important position. But what is the use or purpose of analyzing a political speech? One more question arises in this enquiry: Whether a discourse analysis (of a political speech) conveys more than that of the analyses which appear in the Press written by proficient journalists or intellectuals?

We may not be able to answer these questions right away, because we are uncertain about the right degree of communicability that one such discipline necessitates in comparison to other disciplines. Unless or otherwise we know in advance, in what way it is different from others, we cannot ensure as to how best we have to plough our discursive technical know-how to invigorate it. It is therefore necessary to weigh and consider the type of object that we choose to study on one hand and the consequent characteristic result of this object so chosen.

### **Practice Produces Better Discourse**

There is a wise old saying that poets are born but a speaker (here a discourser) is made, meaning the capability of the poet is spontaneous or inborn, whereas the ability of the speaker is man-made by the persevering practice which is external in nature. Since we confine our concern with the political speaker, it becomes incumbent on us to define as to how an ordinary mortal can develop and hone such ability and reach such a high pedestal to demand the appreciation of a uninformed mass or public.

The political speaker is therefore not a simple and single entity as anyone is liable to conceive, but a two dimensional out-come or amalgamation of the following two factors in right proportion: one external i.e., objective and the other internal with subjective mental make-up and settled way of thinking.

### **Contributing Factors for Better Discourse**

External facet comprises the speaker's social milieu, formal and informal education, family brought up, wide and varied live opportunities and exposure of his personal experiences, are some such factors that go to determine the external aspects of the political discourse.

When external factors shape the out-ward and tangible dimension of the discourse, his internal aspects which is an alloy of a cluster of psycho-sociological factors, distilled and blended with the intellectual and emotional subjective internalization to arrive at a proper qualitative quotient. In this process, the psycho-analytical subjective ability of the speaker is agreeably aligned with the requirements of rules and regulations then prevailing with the

external factors. Thus a presentable and persuasive discourse emerges out as a powerful tool in the hands of a skillful political discourses.

### **Political Speeches and Discourse**

The compendium of the world's famous political speeches, if we care to have a look at, will readily give a fair outline and purpose for which the political discourses are made, of course with varying degrees of success. Though amorphous at first, in its aim and evolution, it gradually gained the essential basic structures in accordance with the disciplines and views one chooses to expound. From Socrates to T.S. Eliot, the system of organizing such political discourse amazingly occupied the attention of the readers, often edifying them with practically moral and social uplifting follow-up. These luminaries unquestionably provided the future generation with enough guidelines to develop a scientific temper and structure for discourse. They also gave due caution to avoid insincere and meaningless rhetoric which is always present to lure the unwary readers into trouble.

### **Audience**

Since the political discourses tend to have large size of followers, anyone is liable to go awry or fall a prey to the unsuspected pitfalls. The methods that they so assiduously advocated, still serve as beacon lights in safe-guarding the people from degeneracy individually and preventing the cultural polity of the society from decadence.

Aristotle, who taught political philosophy in his Academy at Lyceum, dwells at length about its structural pattern. He defined that like any other literary form, a discourse should without doubt or exception, have a form, content, method and purpose to provide a conclusive environs for the ever-evolving literary method of expression to survive. He affirmed that the linguistic literary implementation as a contributory congenial element, should palatably infuse the contents and purpose with the structural method as naturally as a plant that produces leaves and flowers.

### **Critical Side of Discourse – Grammar and Other Devices**

So far we had a bird's eye view of the creative side of the discourse. Automatically, now our entire attention is drawn to the critical side of the discourse i.e., discourse grammar which monitors our thought processes from going astray and as a mentor who guides the prolific youth who may go overboard in his enthusiasm. This grammar assumes the study of the lexical consistency on one hand and syntactical and enunciative consistency on other hand. In other words, the aim of discourse grammar is to establish more precisely the possible characteristics which allow to identify a discourse: we may identify the discourse of a certain individual, a certain group, a certain political party, a certain syndicate etc., Yet if the specificity of the vocabulary plays a role in the process of recognizing a discourse, other factors like syntax and enunciation also take part each one related with others.

In a speech, a certain word may be “delivered” in a privileged manner, at the same time, in a certain “location” and “surrounding”. All these aspects remain in the proficiency of the speaker. Here, we can specify one thing: all types of speeches are not labelled as “discourse” (example: a resolution or a reply in an interview).

### **Rich Vocabulary**

Discourse grammar also has a specific characteristic to be viewed: the feature that may be highlighted is that this grammar is probabilistic. If we oppose a political leader's speech with a statistical study, in which component grammar plays important role? No doubt in a political leader's speech. For a statistical study, just an example or mere numbers are sufficient to support the fact. But for a political leader, in order to attract the public, he needs a “richest” vocabulary. As he is obliged to create a certain illusion to deceive the public, he may take upon himself certain freedom in his gimmicks of course with certain amount of limitations. To avail the maximum benefit, he tries to introduce a “new construction of corpus” in his speech which will inspire his followers to emulate him.

### **Preconditions for Better Discourse**

Hence, a system of rules which constitutes the discourse grammar is based upon various relationships. This system is an optimal combination of the rules. At the same time, the exceptional cases in the application of such rules must also be taken into account in this

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study. In all probability, measuring the quality of such new effort speeches constrains a discourser to employ flawless grammar, which is more often found wanting. Later on, these exceptional cases, in the course of time, become general rules in the formation of a discourse.

Charolles and Combettes, notable French researchers, express their views on the discourse grammar. According to them, *the idea of grammar; such as we listen in the most part of the contemporary schools, apply hardly to the text (...). Rules, supposing that we can speak about the rules in textual domain, are not the same order as the rules which are in charge of morphosyntax. On the scale of the discourse, we are not indeed dealing with exclusively linguistic determinations, but with mechanisms of heterogeneous communicational regulation in which linguistic phenomena must be considered in touch with the factors to be psycholinguistics, cognitive and sociolinguistics.*

In the vast area of various disciplines where we can read or listen to the historians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and many more scholars, the main feature is, whatever the field may be, in a discourse, they should express their views, opinions, suggestions, advice in an unambiguous way so to enable us to understand. All statements in a discourse, whether spoken or written, should be clearly comprehensible and always try to avoid misunderstanding or creating problem.

Above all, language is the main criterion in the structural conception and so such a linguistic structural system needs an immediate in-depth study. A superfluous study which does not have a strong basis is liable to lead one to a bad discourse and on the other hand to many misinterpretations. Today, in the fast-flying modern society, filled with ultra-modern technologies and science, a path-breaking approach in the thought process of language should remain constantly in our focal point.

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