

Grammatical categories in discourse

I. General overview

Vladimir A. Plungian
Institute of Linguistics, Moscow

Some basic principles

- Linguistics is primarily about discourse, because it studies what is being said.
- When using language, people produce discourse, not just sounds, words, phrases or (even) sentences.
- Modern linguistics knows more about components of discourse than about discourse as such.

How discourse studies emerged

- For the first time, the term appeared in Z. Harris 1952's paper
- “Discourse analysis”, with a special purpose of studying the flow of information in human communication
- Emphasis both on communication (< ‘parole’) and structural properties of the text (< ‘langue’)

CAVEAT 1: French tradition

- Benveniste 1959's paper "Les relations de temps dans le verbe français" (followed by Weinrich 1964)
- Two types of grammatical meaning, taking into account what can be called "register opposition"
- "Narrative" vs. "deictic" registers, or *récit* vs. *discours*
- NB different sense of Benveniste's *discours* and Harris' *discourse*!

CAVEAT 2: Modern French tradition of philosophy and semiotics

- Going back to M. Foucault, J. Derrida et al.
- Equating discourse (Fr. *discours*) with “text type” or even “style”
- As in “political discourse”, “discourse of hate”, etc.
- Not taken into account here

Linguistic analysis of discourse

- Groundbreaking studies of William Labov: Labov & Waletzky 1967, Labov 1972 a.o.
- Substandard varieties of Black English
- “Personal narratives”
- Sociolinguistically innovative, but not only sociolinguistically
- For the first time, discourse structure is introduced as a special object of linguistic analysis

The world's other trends of the same period (\approx 1950-1970s)

- Massive interest in “oral / colloquial speech”
- France: “français parlé” (Claire Blanche-Benveniste et al.)
- Japan: the school of the “language life” (Takeshi Shibata et al.)
- Russia: «русская разговорная речь» (M.V. Panov, E.A. Zemskaja, O.A. Lapteva et al.)

The impact of literary studies

- M. Bakhtin and his «речевые жанры» (1953)
- Text types: one of the first attempt at classification – beyond literary genres
- Cf. recent Bakhtin-based approaches such as Biber 1988 and 1995, Freedman & Medway (eds.) 1994, a.o.

Discourse studies in the 1970s

- W. Dressler's "Text Linguistics"
- M.A.K. Halliday's "Text cohesion"
- Emphasis on relations "larger than the sentence" and other structural properties on the text (as a static unit): anaphora, reference tracking, etc.

Recent developments

- Macro-structures of discourse (uses of discourse, types of discourse and parts of discourse): the work by Chafe, Givón, Mann & Thompson...
- Micro-structures of discourse (discourse uses of grammatical categories): the work by Hopper, Schiffrin, Fleischman, Thelin, Padučeva... // see part II

Some important oppositions

- Written vs. Oral
 - NB! electronic communication!
- Global (schemes and passages) vs. Local (clauses, elementary units) discourse structure
- Frames and scenarios

Narrative discourse

- Definition: a sequence of (real or imaginary) events retold in their chronological order – “as they happened” (or were supposed to happen).
- *Vēnī, vīdī, vīcī* (C. Julius Caesar)
- One of the basic discourse types (or genres), most important both culturally and linguistically.

Constraints on narrative structure

- Даниил Хармс, «Встреча»
- *Вот однажды один человек пошел на службу, да по дороге встретил другого человека, который, купив польский батон, направлялся к себе восвояси.*
- *Вот, собственно, и всё.*

What's wrong?

- Well-formed beginning, strange continuation
- No “development” expected from the protagonists
- No “culmination” and “outcome”
- No clear purpose: what for to have told?
what is expected from the hearer?

Non-narrative discourse

- Not all “narration” represents narrative discourse,

cf. Brodsky’s poem (1980):

*Я входил вместо дикого зверя в клетку,
Выжигал свой срок и кликуху гвоздём в бараке,
Жил у моря, играл в рулетку,
Обедал чёрт знает с кем во фраке. <...>*

- No chronological sequence!

End of the Part I