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Discourse Categories: A Case for Metacommunication

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1. Introduction

In modern scientific literature on discourse, multiple and contradictory interpretations of discourse have become commonplace. Indeed, discourse has various meanings depending on the research focus. Moreover, constantly evolving, scientific discussion about discourse leads to a change and refinement in its interpretations. As an actual problem of linguistics, discourse is always the center of attention, which is just the opposite as far as the categories of discourse are concerned. Though discourse categories are of no less importance, linguists have only recently addressed them. It is no accident this new angle of research has become the object of this paper. It suggests a view of discourse categories as a unity of cognitive, communicative and metacommunicative phenomena, where the former two categories match the meaningful, the latter – structural characteristics of discourse. In particular, the paper touches on the place of the metadiscursive category in the system of discourse categories and concludes that it is an operational category aimed at ensuring the progress of interaction and structuring discourse.

2. Discourse in a cognitive-communicative paradigm

Beginning with Thomas Aquinas, philosophers use the term ‘discourse’ in its etymological meaning going back to (Lat.) *discurrere* – ‘to run’, *discursus* – ‘to escape, to give information’: it is a discussion, an exchange of information, reasoning. The logical-philosophical tradition, based on the etymology of the term ‘discourse’, opposes discursive knowledge (a result of reasoning) to intuitive (arising

from insights). According to Kant, human knowledge is gained through concepts, it is not intuitive, but discursive [Kant 2003]).

Understanding discourse as a chain of reasoning M. Foucault proceeds to its treatment as a way of obtaining such reasoning (= knowledge) which he calls the ‘archeology of knowledge’, and further – to the practice of learning. In his theory discourse is a social practice [Foucault 1972].

Being viewed as an action or discursive practice discourse becomes the object of modern discourse analysis. According to R. Wodak,

"critical discourse analysis examines discourse - the language used in speech or in writing - as a form of 'social practice', dialectical relationship: on the one hand, discourse constitutes a situation, objects of cognition, people – subjects of cognition and, on the other, it is being formed by these parameters [Wodak 1996, c.15].

From the cultural and situational point of view discourse is treated as a text in its context, as an event (from the perspective of action) [Dijk 1977]. It is a coherent text taken together with extra-linguistic (pragmatic, socio-cultural, psychological and other) factors; it is regarded as a purposeful social action, as a component involved in people's interaction and in mechanisms of reasoning (cognitive processes). In this article I understand discourse as

“an integral phenomenon, a cognitive-communicative activity which takes place in a broader socio-cultural context; it is a unity of the process and the result, characterized by continuity and dialogic nature”[Shevchenko Morozova 2005: 28].

The text as an ontology serves a linguistic embodiment of discourse as a phenomenon ‘unfolding’ in time. It is the text that reveals discourse characteristics which are not reduced to the properties of the text itself. Discourse viewed as an event is not ontological, its properties are construed and go beyond the scope of linguistics in accord with the principles of cognitive-discursive paradigm.

3. Discourse categories

Philosophy states that our knowledge of the world is given in the form of concepts and categories. The category is the broadest fundamental concept that reflects the most essential, natural connections and relationships between reality and cognition. Among the main categories are those of matter, motion, space, time, and others. As a result of the reflection of the objective world in the process of practical transformation, the category becomes a means of cognition and further transformation of reality. Text and discourse categories are interrelated: the former makes a meaningful basis of discourse. Most linguists agree that text categories comprise cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability (*here* - interpretability), informativity, situation and intertextuality [Beaugrande, Dressler 1981].

In linguistics, so far there is no universally accepted classification of discourse categories. Thus, V.I. Karasik offers a four-member classification of discourse categories:

“1) discourse-constitutive categories differentiate text from non-text (relative structure, thematic unity, stylistic and structural integrity, and the relative semantic completeness); 2) genre-stylistic categories characterize texts in terms of their compliance with functional speech varieties (stylistic identity, genre canon, clichés, the degree of compression); 3) meaningful categories (semantic and pragmatic ones) reveal the meaning of the text (addressee, image of the author, informativity, modality, interpretability, intertextual orientation); 4) formal and structural categories organize texts (composition, segmentation, cohesion)” [Karasik 2002: 241].

I claim that clarified parameters of categories allow to single out three groups of discourse categories: cognitive, communicative and metadiscursive, as well as highlight an interdiscursive hyper-category [Shevchenko 2010]. The first two groups of categories give an idea of meaningful aspects of discourse and metadiscursive category – of its structuring.

In particular, cognitive categories include informativity (meanings construed in communication); cohesion as a semantic-cognitive discourse connectedness (causal, referential, temporal).

Communicative categories of discourse cover social and pragmatic properties of communication: the parameters of intentionality, addressee, and situation – the correlation of verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication (a list of subcategories within the group could be continued).

In contrast to the cognitive and communicative categories metadiscursive categories reveal the plane of expression: discourse structure, organization, development. I argue that metadiscursive group includes four categories: (1) means of discourse processing – discourse strategies and tactics; (2) genre and stylistic features of discourse; (3) phatic metacommunication (regulation of linguistic interaction, maintenance of speech contact), and (4) turn-taking as an operational category. Thereby, discursive and metadiscursive categories are complementary, they are connected like content :: expression, dictum :: modus.

The concept of ‘the metadiscursive’ suggested by Diane Vincent [Vincent et al 1998] refer to discourse strategies by which the speaker maintains the order of speaking only creating the impression of passing the turn of speaking to the hearer [Heisler et al 2003]. In verbal interaction, metadiscursive comments are intended to attract the hearer’s attention (i.e. “*Do you understand what I want to say?*”). At the textual level they draw attention to certain conversational elements (*I’m telling you this because...*), at the emotional level they emphasize the speaker’s attitude to discourse (*It makes me sad to say...*) [Heisler et al 2003: 1615-1616].

In scientific literature, the use of the prefix “*meta-*” has two major trends: on the one hand, it is understood as a synonym of ‘pseudo’ or ‘collateral’: according to the model of H. Bateson, communication takes place on the communicative and metacommunicative levels, where the latter specifies the mode of the message transferability [Bateson 1972]. Metacommunication is of accompanying nature, pragmatically it serves to facilitate speech. On the other hand, in linguistics, meta-language is used to describe natural languages; it is formalized and terminologically specific. In postmodernist philosophy, the interpretation of the meta-language goes back to Roland Barthes’ “Meta-language and literature” [Bartes 1972].

According to the first interpretation of ‘meta-‘ as an accompanying phenomenon I argue that discourse strategies are important means of metadiscursive categories both in dialogic and monological speech. Discourse strategies are usually associated with communication postulates (Gricean maxims) and politeness principle (metadiscursive comments are affecting the interlocutor’s face in a conversation [Heisler et al 2003:1614]).

The genre-stylistic category (formal structural textual category) allows to single out the characteristics of content, being inextricably linked to the pragmatic and semantic categories. The genre-stylistic metacategory determines the choice of text and utterance forms depending on discursive norms of social practice and cultural traditions of a given nation. However, the types of discourse are not identical to functional styles. Types of discourse can be singled out according to their content and meaning, whereas functional styles correspond to forms of social consciousness, their number (journalistic, scientific style, etc.) is limited (usually to five).

Among metadiscursive categories in dialogical discourse I single out two operational categories (ie, occurring spontaneously and in real time [Sacks et al 1974]) – turn-taking and phatic metacommunication. Turn-taking is understood as an internal organization of speech interaction [Ballmer, Brennenstuhl 1981: 36], a ‘fundamental factor’ of its dynamic organization [Makarov 2003: 192]. It is the relationship of individual speaker ↔ hearer moves and interdependence of these moves (thematical, intentional, syntactic, semantic etc) that provides the development of a dialogical interaction.

Turn-taking is defined as the transfer of the role of the speaker from one participant to another; it ensures discourse development and the promotion of information, it “controls the development of the theme and reflects the strategy and tactics of interlocutors” and orderly distribution of opportunities to participate in conversation [Schegloff, Sacks 1973]. As an operational metacategory turn-taking provides structuring and regulation of dialogic interaction in real time and serves an analytic tool for a detailed examination of real-world talk-in-interaction suitable for the analysis of singular episodes of talk.

Phatic metacommunication focuses on switching hearer's attention to the message: opening, maintaining and closing speech interaction [Pochepstov 1981: 52]. Phatic metacommunication serves as a means of dialogic organization, it ensures effective transmission of meaningful information in discourse. Being realized by speech stereotypes it is highly ritualized, conventional, dominated by social and regulatory information. Like a turn-taking category, phatic metacommunication is aimed at regulating talk-in-interaction development by certain social acts – greetings, goodbyes, and others. The interlocutors are guided by the objectives of establishing and maintaining social relationships, rather than cognitive information exchange (meaningful talk) [Berne 1964: 20; Levinson 1983: 44].

However, phatic category is not only operational, completely devoid of cognitive information. On the one hand, the information is of gradual character; on the other, the categories partially intersect due to their transparent and vague borders. For example, metacommunicative situations of small talk and flirtation demonstrate not only dominating phatic, but some cognitive (meaningful) information as well. The same can be seen in greetings, farewells, etc. This limited informativity of phatic metacommunication helps differentiate it from turn-taking since the absence of cognitive meaningful information makes turn-taking purely operational.

Judging by the criteria of cognitive informativity all metadiscursive categories are relatively gradual: communication strategies of discourse, its genre-stylistic categories tend to the pole '*maximum informativity*', phatic metacategory occupies an intermediate position on the scale, and the category of turn-taking belongs to the pole '*minimum*'.

Finally, the interdiscursive hyper-category is realized both through discourse (cognitive and communicative) categories, and through metadiscursive ones. For example, the strategies of the informative discourse may be used in phatic interaction etc. (interdiscursivity on the metadiscursive 'level'), proper names and events from institutional discourse may occur in everyday talk (interdiscursivity on the 'level' of cognitive categories). The interdiscursive hyper-category is well evident in political

discourse, in modern mass media famous for being conglomerates of political, religious, entertaining and other types of discourse.

4. Conclusion

In the article, I have tried to formulate a set of theoretic observations and practical applications of the analysis of discourse categories. I distinguish between discursive (cognitive, communicative) and metadiscursive categories and single out the interdiscursive hyper-category.

Metadiscursive categories which are the focus of attention in this article include a category of politeness and cooperation strategies, genre-style category, phatic category and operational turn-taking category. Metadiscursive categories are an integral and important part of the system of categories of discourse, alongside with cognitive and communicative categories. If the former match structural, the latter correspond to meaningful characteristics of discourse.

Finally, the cognitive-communicative vector chosen in this research offers a deeper insight into discourse and I hope may offer resources to further linguistic studies of the nature of discourse and its categories in English and other languages.

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