Teacher’s Name: **Dr Fatma Kherbache 2020/2021**

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Lecture Number: **3**

Lecture Title:  **Discourse Analysis**

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**2. 1.3 Conversational maxims and politeness**

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1. **Introduction**

“Discourse analysis provides a tool for sociolinguists to identify the norms of talk among different social and cultural groups in different conversational and institutional contexts, and to describe the discursive resources people use in constructing different social identities in interaction […] Among sociolinguists, the term ‘discourse’ is generally used to refer to stretches of spoken or written language which extend beyond an utterance or a sentence”. (p. 364)

1. **Approaches to Discourse Analysis**

Five approaches to the analysis of discourse will be identified:

1. Pragmatics and politeness theory
2. Ethnography of speaking
3. Interactional sociolinguistics

4- Conversation Analysis

5- Critical Discourse Analysis

**2.1 Pragmatics and politeness theory**

**2.1.1 Pragmatics:** The study of how **context** affects linguistic interaction.

relationship between participants the analysis goes beyond grammar

background knowledge and word meaning

**2.1.2 Conversational maxims and implicatures**

Assumption with regard to conversations: the speakers conform to the *cooperative principle* in accordance to four maxims (Grice, 1975):

*Quantity*: say as much as but no more than is necessary

*Quality*: do not say what you believe to be false, or that for which you lack evidence *Relation*: be relevant

*Manner*: be clear, unambiguous, brief and orderly

Study the following two examples: do speakers always follow these maxims? Say which maxim is *not* being followed? Give possible reasons?

Example 1

*Sally’s father, Sam, has promised to give Sally a lift to the gym when she has finished her homework.*

Sam: Have you finished your homework?

Sally: (with *a smile)* I’ve got my kit and I’m ready to go

Sam: Ok we’re off.

Example 2

*Harry does not like lending the family car to the children. Joyce knows this but she has just lent their car to their son Dan.*

Harry: Where’s the car?

Joyce: Dan needed to do some shopping

**2.1.3 Conversational maxims and politeness:** One of the reasons people do not follow conversational maxims is their attempt to be polite. Robin Lakoff introduced three rules of politeness:

**1.** *Don’t impose:* e.g. use modals and hedges: *I wonder if I might just open the window a little*

**2.** *Give options:* e.g. use interrogatives including tag questions: *do you mind if I open the window? It would be nice to have the window open a little wouldn’t it?*

**3.** *Be friendly:* e.g. use informal expressions, endearments: e.g. *Be a honey and open the window darling.*

The first two rules express the notion of negative politeness, while the last rule relates to the concept of positive politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987) identified three social factors which they suggested qualified as universal influences on linguistically polite behaviour:

The first two are very familiar to sociolinguists:

1. *how well you know someone*
2. *what is their status relative to yours*
3. *The ranking of the imposition*

For a better understanding of these three factors, analyze the following example:

*Rick makes a request to his mother in the family living room.*

[Pauses are indicated in tenths of a second: e.g. (0.5) is half a second.]

Rick: um mum (0.5) um do you think um I could possibly just borrow your car

Mother: [frowns]

Rick: um just for a little while

Mother: um well [frowns]

Rick: it’s just that I need to get this book to Helen tonight

**2.1.4 Sociolinguistics and politeness:** Politeness strategies are *not* universal – they are social and culture specific. Look at the example below:

*Igbo proverb*

“O ji isi kota ebu ka ebu ga agba” Igbo language

English translation: ‘He who disturbs the hornet’s nest gets stung by hornets’ i.e. expect negative consequences from unwise behaviour.

The concepts of positive and negative politeness, and the idea of rules or strategies for expressing politeness, have generated a good deal of research. One area of this research has involved exploring how different speech acts are expressed appropriately and politely in different social and cultural contexts. In Nigeria, for instance, the Igbo people use proverbs as one indirect and socially acceptable way of criticising the behaviour of others. The proverb above could serve as an admonition to someone with a serious drinking problem, for instance. In some Asian cultures, it is inappropriate and regarded as very odd, to say *thank you* for service in a shop.

Rather than focusing on the social distance or solidarity dimension, politeness in Asian cultures tends to emphasise socio-cultural values such as ‘sincerity’, ‘respect’ and ‘consideration’, and negative politeness strategies of avoidance and mitigation are favoured to express these values. So, for example, in asking a friend for a loan of some money, a Chinese speaker will typically express reluctance, and provide reasons, as ways of mitigating the request as illustrated in example (3) below:

**1.** Shizai bu hao yisi, **(Chinese)**

‘It’s truly quite embarrassing **(English)**

**2.** you ge shiqing xiang he ni shangliang yixia.

but I’d like to discuss a problem with you

**3.** Wo erzi jiu yao qu Aodaiya shang xue le.

My son is about to go to Australia to study

**4.** Xianzai qian hai mei chouji.

Right now the money is insufficient

**5.** Bu zhi nimen shoutou shi bu shi fangbian?

I was wondering if it would be convenient for you people to help us out’

**Explanation:**

The request is introduced with an explicit statement in line 1 indicating reluctance to impose on the addressee. Then the speaker prepares the way for his request in line 2. The next discourse move in line 3 involves providing a reason for the request, a discourse move known as a ‘grounder’. The reason for the need is expressed rather obliquely, a strategy which saves the speaker’s face, while it is also suggested that this is a temporary situation, *right now the money is insufficient.* Line 5 finally presents the request in a very mitigated form, using a negative politeness strategy which provides a way out for the addressee if it is not *convenient* to provide some financial help. The request thus expresses respect for the addressee and consideration for both participants’ face, important values in Chinese culture.

By contrast, in other communities, such as Greek, Turkish and Moroccan Arabic, politeness typically involves positive politeness strategies, and the expression of concern, consideration, friendliness and intimacy, rather than imposition-avoidance and distance maintenance strategies. The following example illustrates requests from a Greek study of politeness (Kouletake, E. 2005)

. In both cases, the speaker explicitly expresses positive feelings towards the addressee.

**(a)** Little sister, I love you so much, give me your ear-rings. I’ll look after them

**(b)** Mum I wish I was drinking a coffee now from your little hands (In Greek, the phrase *from your little hands* is a compliment on the high quality of the coffee that the mother makes.