


Discourse Analysis

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Abstract This article presents the basic assumptions of linguistic discourse analysis, particularly regarding how the constructivist understanding of language relieves interpretations of the contextual embedding of linguistic and discursive actions. The method is to focus on practices of machine analysis of discourse. The article analyzes contemporary research approaches (metaphor and frame semantics) combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches.*

Keywords Discourse Analysis, Discourse Linguistics, Metaphor, Frame Semantics

1. Reconstruction of Discourse Formations

1.1 Language, Knowledge, and Society

The concept of discourse is one of the most powerful guiding concepts in modern humanities, cultural, and social sciences (Gardt 2017, 2).

This brief article cannot fully explore the “powerful” and dazzling aspects of the concept of discourse (cf. Göhring 2023, 95–202). Rather, the aim here is to trace a specific conception of discourse as established in discourse linguistics in German Studies (cf. Felder & Jacob 2017). Discourse analysis is characterized by a constructivist understanding of language (Felder & Gardt 2018), the operationalization of which will provide a key element to the current article (Section 2). Fritz Hermanns (1995) posits an apt starting point for this line of argumentation. He asserted that the mentality, “the totality of the collective thinking, feeling, and willing” of a community, could be reconstructed linguistically (Hermanns 1995, 89). Inherent in this assumption is the conviction that conclusions are drawn from the way in which a society linguistically negotiates *about* society and how this society *conceptualizes* specific forms of social interaction, power structures, bodies of knowledge, economic contexts, transcendence, mortality, etc. and *constructs* specific social realities by means of language.

* This chapter, including quotations in foreign languages, was translated from German by Brandon Watson.

Following Michel Foucault, both discourse linguistics in German Studies and critical discourse analysis (CDA) in Germany (with international precursors) have dedicated themselves to analyzing these functional relationships since the 1980s. While discourse linguistics in German Studies attempts to grasp the descriptive connection between language, knowledge, and society with regard to cultural, historical, political phenomena, and over the years has turned to cognitive linguistic research perspectives (cf. Spieß & Köpcke 2015 on *Metonymy and Metaphor*), the CDA is primarily concerned with uncovering the connection between power and ideology on the basis of linguistic analyses to show how social hierarchies are reproduced through language, which is always used ideologically to maintain established power structures, particularly in a stage of globalized capitalism (for an introduction, cf. Jäger 2015, for a critical appraisal, see Niehr 2014, 51 f.). Busse, an important representative of discourse linguistics in German Studies, rightly sees that

this needs to be emphasized in the present context – that the category of ‘power’ is fundamentally not an ideological and evaluative one, but is in principle descriptive (and was also meant as such by Foucault, who introduced it into discourse analysis, see Busse 2013, 35 f.) (Kämper 2017, 265).

The brief differentiation between discourse linguistics in German Studies and CDA suffices to show that the focus of this article is the German Studies’ discourse linguistic approach; nevertheless, the CDA approach will help develop (disruptive) potential in the theological, church-historical, or general religious studies context. However, it remains

a fundamental problem that many critics have pointed out [...] that many representatives of CDA do not put into practice the claim they have formulated themselves to reflect critically on their own point of view [...]. These studies [run] the risk of projecting a result assumed for the time being based on preferred social models onto the data and thus only ever confirming their own views themselves (Spitzmüller & Warnke 2011, 112 f.).

All forms of discourse analysis rely on both qualitative and quantitative methods (Section 2.2). The methods are both classic hermeneutic methods of textual content and argumentation analysis, such as analyzing political speeches or debate contributions in national newspapers as well as statistical evaluations of machine-readable collections of spoken and written language. What is important here is that the researchers always relate their research question, the research material, and thus the subject matter closely to one another and increasingly adapt them in iterations, so that discourse analyses are characterized by a rich set of methodological instruments and are open to theoretical and methodological expansion, which is essentially a consequence of the version of the concept of discourse coined by Dietrich Busse in

Discourse Semantics (1987) in contrast to Foucault's discourse analysis. Together with Wolfgang Teubert, Busse asked as early as 1994 whether a discourse was a linguistic object. At that time, the potential of the term *discourse* could not yet be assessed. Currently, many linguistic discourse studies following Busse and Teubert show that the options offered by Foucault's extension of the term were highly adaptable. For example, the underlying Foucauldian idea of knowledge formation being embedded in language was adopted in the concept of discourse proposed by Busse and Teubert. At the same time, their model emphasized how language also produces knowledge formations. There is more conceptual work to be done here: The concept of discourse (Section 1.2) also establishes an understanding of the corpus (Section 1.3), which generations of scholars have worked on, and which will be discussed in more detail, as it has far-reaching consequences for possible forms of analysis. The same applies to Fritz Hermanns' supplementation and expansion of this understanding of the corpus. Unlike Busse and Teubert, Hermanns no longer focused on the *relevant change of discourse* in the texts as a relevant criterion for corpus creation. The focus had been proposed to demonstrate (telic) discourse development by analyzing the texts that shape and change a discourse. Hermanns, on the other hand, pointed (implicitly) to the *relevant confirmation of discourse* of texts and their significance for a history of mindsets as the "royal way of language history" (Hermanns 1995, 71) (Section 1.3). Methodologically, this differentiation opens two historical forms of discourse-linguistic analysis. The studies emphasizing the *relevant change of discourse* are often qualitative and make use of *traditional* hermeneutic methods of interpretation. However, if *relevant confirmation of discourse* is used as a criterion for creating the body of data, quantitative studies are to be expected, the results of which are passed on to qualitative analysis (Section 2).

1.2 Discourse

From the very beginning, the fundamental codes of a culture that govern its language, modes of perception, interactions, technology, values, and practical hierarchy, set the empirical orders for every person, with which one will have to deal, and in which one finds oneself (Foucault 1996, 10).

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault developed a concrete research program to analyze (historical) knowledge formations and their conditions of possibility by uncovering cultural sediments, to which he also counted textual traditions and contexts of statements as "fundamental codes". In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault then refers to contexts of statements and their networking as a "discourse [which is] a set of statements that belong to the same formation system" (Foucault 1981, 156). At the end of the 1980s, Busse associated Foucault's concept of discourse to "discourse semantics" (Busse 1987, 251). Discourse semantics is interested in the reconstruction of

“knowledge” and the “conditions of knowledge,” which elude the conscious access of the speaker (Busse 1987, 256). Discourses are constituted by communicative actions embedded in a concrete context (Busse 1987, 259), in which, along with Foucault, the knowledge of a culture is, to a certain extent, sedimented. However, it is not possible to deduce knowledge formations and their conditions exclusively from these sediments. Busse also points to the pragmatic dimension of action in language and to the fact that language itself constitutes knowledge. Busse thus focuses on the

scenario of the collective knowledge of a given discourse community in a given period with regard to the thematic area or field of meaning or discourse formation chosen as the object of investigation (Busse 1987, 267).

Busse and Teubert established a research program on this basis, which (with Pêcheux) is oriented entirely towards the analysis of texts:

By discourses we mean, in a practical research sense, virtual text corpora whose composition is determined by content-related (or semantic) criteria in the broadest sense (Busse & Teubert 1994, 14).

For *practical research reasons*, Busse and Teubert do not take up Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif*, which is once again gaining importance in the implementation of multi-module approaches in discourse linguistics. Instead, they concentrate exclusively on what linguistics had to investigate in the 1990s: Texts. These clarifications (knowledge constitution of language, grouping of statements and contexts in a virtual text corpus) proved to be extremely fruitful, for which Busse & Teubert could only hope (1994, 13; cf. parenthetically the contributions in Warnke 2007). But what exactly is the virtual corpus?

1.3 Corpus

A virtual corpus includes *all* texts that demonstrate semantic relationships to one another, i.e., they are related in terms of content. To be an object of research, however, they must satisfy specific qualifications (time period, territory, sector of society, text type, area of communication, etc.) (cf. Busse & Teubert 1994, 14). If *all* texts on a specific topic were examined, the scope of virtual corpora in the 1990s would have pushed all studies to the limits of feasibility, given that until the end of the 2010s, quantitative methods in discourse linguistics were still the exception rather than the rule (cf. Bubenhofer 2009). Busse & Teubert refer to the pieces of virtual corpus as the concrete corpus, which forms the basis for a discourse analysis. These parts of the virtual corpus are the “subsets of the respective discourses” (Busse & Teubert 1994, 14) not formed based on quantitative (representativeness), but qualitative cri-

teria (“relevance criteria”), which researchers define based on their own research interests. Along with the limitations mentioned above, the availability of sources and their *relevance to changes in discourse* must be taken into account:

Redundancies [are to be avoided] and primarily those texts [are to be included] that have significantly influenced the structure and course of the discourse [...]. [The] constitution of the discourse [...] thus always presupposes interpretative actions on the part of the researchers (Busse & Teubert 1994, 16).

The interpretive background of the researchers must be constantly and critically examined as the concrete corpus must prove to be a meaningful section of the virtual corpus: Exploration of the virtual corpus and continual specification of the concrete corpus as well as the adaptation of the questions in the constitution of the object are among the basic operations of discourse linguistics. The *discourse* is thus *de facto* the *object, method, and result* of the investigation. Consequentially, Busse and Teubert privileged the criterion of *relevant change of discourse* when compiling the concrete corpus at the expense of the criterion of *relevant confirmation of discourse*. In so doing, they (initially) excluded studies dealing specifically with stable structures, which provide the only framework by which phenomena of change can be adequately analyzed (cf. the works of the French school of Annales, especially Braudel 1977, 50f.). For serial, seemingly uniform bearers of tradition can be used to observe new narrative postures, reinterpretations of ritualized linguistic patterns, expansions and narrowing of conceptual meanings, thematic reorientations etc. particularly well – albeit no longer qualitatively in a concrete corpus compiled by hand. Hermanns extended Busse’s (1987) discourse semantics that tended in this direction. Hermanns questioned the effects it might have on the histories of institutionalized and narrated language if historical semantics and textual linguistics were combined into the “paradigm of conceptual history” (Busse 1987 in Hermanns 1995, 80). He proposes the idea of the history of language as the history of mentality (Hermanns 1995, 70). Relatedly, he speaks of discourse semantics as “linguistic anthropology” (Hermanns 1994) and later develops the notion of a “socio-pragmatic historiography” (Hermanns 2001, 596). The basic idea is to understand the use of language in a linguistic community as an indicator of collective thinking, feeling, and will of the community, in the sense of Foucault, as a mentality, which comprises “1) the totality; 2) of habits or dispositions; 3) of thinking; 4) of feeling; and 5) of willing or wanting in 6) social groups” (Hermanns 1995, 77). Hermanns not only extends Busse and Teubert’s definition of the corpus to include the imaginary corpus (Hermanns 1995, 89), which is a hypothetical quantity encompassing all thematically related texts, yet not fully accessible for practical research. He also calls for an examination of “what is serial, what is usually generally in the group and therefore in the sources” (Hermanns 1995, 89). Along with others, Hermanns argues that *discourse confirming* texts should also be included in

discourse linguistic analyses, since the *discourse changing* quality of texts can only be recognized and described against the background of the serial. Busse also gradually expanded the research program, moving once again in 1997 closer to Foucault. Unlike Teubert, who continued to operationalize discourse strictly as a set of medially written texts (cf. Teubert 2006), Busse was primarily interested in knowledge formations (2007), which were a prerequisite for the genesis of texts and other cultural testimonies, and which he sought to describe as “discourse semantic basic figures” (cf. also Busse 1997 and 2000). Busse mainly understood these basic figures, which will be formative for discourse linguistics, as (textual) semantic features of statements and complexes of statements such as thematic developments, isotopies and isotopic chains, topoi, presuppositions, specific keywords, terms, etc., which are characteristic of a discourse.

2. Perspectives of Analysis

All these proposals were introduced almost simultaneously into the field of research. It is inaccurate to describe these as “extensions” of the concept of discourse. Rather, they are a series of distinct yet interrelated approaches that were further developed and evaluated in subsequent studies over time. Combined with the consolidation of what a *discursive linguistic after Foucault* (Warnke 2007) in fact is, several stages can be observed in the research that served to operationalize the understanding of discourse further. These works are above all in connection with the activities of the research network *Sprache und Wissen* (cf. Felder 2008 as well as Felder & Müller 2009), the publication series by the same name¹, and documented in the *Handbuch Sprache und Wissen* (cf. Felder & Gardt 2015). The results of the work are accessible through innovative online resources such as the *discourse monitor*.²

2.1 Characteristics of Established Objects

A crucial momentum for the particular characteristic of discourse linguistic studies is Hermanns’ idea of analyzing “key words,” which are not only the “vehicle or ciphers of thought,” but “indicates, while also propagating, the aim or a program as the aim (program) (Hermanns 1994, 12). Wengeler, whose work on *Topos und Diskurs* (2003) directly correlates with Hermanns’ key words research, emphasizes in 2017 that it was not only Hermanns’ achievement to point out the relevance of ‘key words,’ but also to introduce categories into the discussion with a systematization understood as

1 See <https://www.degruyter.com/serial/suw-b> (Accessed: 17 June 2024).

2 See <https://diskursmonitor.de> (Accessed: 17 June 2024).

indicators of *relevant discourse change* and correlated with various arguments and negotiating positions in discourse:

In a variety of ways, Fritz Hermanns has most clearly and systematically addressed not only the cognitive dimensions of lexical, particularly political semantics. He also directed attention to the appellative, emotive, and volitive dimensions. Terminologically, the differentiation of political catchwords into *flag words*, *stigma words*, *high-value* and *low-value words*, and *affirmative words*, all go back to him (Hermanns 1994) (Wengeler 2017, 25).

Contradictory, or at least strongly varied, contours of social reality, the study of which is inherent in the program of linguistic discourse in German Studies from the outset, can be observed well when negotiated publicly – linguistic discourse studies are thus characterized using easily accessible, mostly public, written sources. Alongside the debate on the type of *discourse* that is actually being depicted (Roth 2015), namely, the discursive positions represented in mass media or on the stages of parliamentary democracy, and not *the* use of language, also became apparent that the relationship of the criteria of the *relevance of the change in discourse* and *relevance of the confirmation in discourse* had to be adjusted under the category of a *corpus pragmatic* when large machine-reading corpora became available from the beginning of the 2000s (cf. Bubenhofer 2009) and quantitative analyses began to compete with qualitative analyses (Felder et al. 2012a; b).

The two characteristics, (1) analyzing divergent drafts of social reality on the basis of (2) specific publicly accessible corpora, so shaped by research in discursive linguistics that dealing with “semantic struggles” has become one (!) of the distinguishing features of discursive linguistic research (cf. also *Agonalität* in the title of Göhring 2023). One can exemplify this relation by looking at the anthology *Agonalität* edited by Ekkehard Felder (2006a), whose essay focuses on these negotiations:

It is considered fundamental that knowledge, in all its fields, is constituted, among other things, by language. In this respect, the “fight over the subject matter” can be a “fight over words”, in short, a “semantic battle”. This semantic battle can arise in three different ways: as a battle over appropriate terms, as a battle over the meaning or aspects of meaning, and/or as a battle over the facts that are only formed and shaped, i. e. fixed, regarding expressions (Felder 2006b, 1).

2.2 Methods

A discussion on the methods of discourse analysis cannot be done without the “Discourse Linguistic Multi-Layer Analysis” (DIMEAN) proposed by Spitzmüller & Warnke (2011). DIMEAN does not present an independent concept but is (1) an attempt to order objects and methods that have been used for discourse analysis in the polyphonic discourse linguistic research according to Busse and (2) an effort to make the results of the discourse linguistic studies intersubjective, reliable, and transparent, as well as to offer the opportunity for critical reflection on the limitations of the investigations. DIMEAN aims at describing complex discourses on various systematic levels of language, which are ultimately used for the interpretation of discursive practices, discursive positions of actors and discursive rules (cf. Fig. 1 on the next page).

The theoretical models of text linguistics, conversation analysis (interactional linguistics), sociolinguistics, such as historical semantics (in the sense of Busse, Teubert, and Hermanns) all become integrated on the *intratextual layer*. On this level, quantitative methods are gradually applied (above all through keyword and collocation analysis) to determine key words, identify specific syntactic structures, ascertain lexical lines of opposition, and describe lexical fields. The *actors layer* and the *transtextual layer* remain in the purview of qualitative description for a long time to come. However, even nowadays, machine methods are being employed to form hypotheses (Topic Modeling).

Based on the considerations of the specific understanding of discourse and corpus (section 1) and the explicit characteristics of discourse linguistic studies (section 2.1), it is now evident which quantitative methods are particularly relevant: collocation analysis and key word analysis (cf. Bubenhofer 2009), increasingly in recent years colostruational analysis (cf. Stefanowitsch & Gries 2009, esp. Stefanowitsch 2020, among others), sentiment analysis, and (word embedding in) topic modeling, which, among other aspects (Named Entity Recognition) are presented in detail in the following chapters of this volume. The volume *Forschen in der Linguistik* (Beißwenger et al. 2022) provides an excellent overview, not only in the collected case studies, such as Heidrun Kämper’s essay (2022) “Emotion und Spachgebrauch: Ein linguistischer Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus,” which directly identifies aspects of current research interests. The volume also describes the complete methodological repertoire useful in discourse linguistics in German Studies through focused essays on “Daten – Metadaten – Annotationen,” “rechtliche und ethische Aspekte beim Umgang mit Sprachdaten,” “Erhebung und Aufbereitung von Sprachdaten,” “Korpusressourcen zum Deutschen,” and esp. “Werkzeuge für die empirische Sprachanalyse” comprised of machine supported transcription of spoken language (Schmidt 2022), statistical analysis (Wolfer & Hansen 2022), corpus analysis (Haaf 2022), automatic language analysis (Horbach 2022), and possibilities of collaborative annotation (Fladrich 2022).

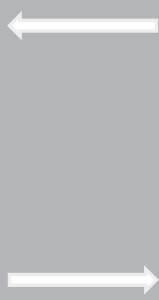
<p>Transtextual Layer</p>	<p>Discourse-based analysis</p>	<p>Intertextuality, schemata, basic discursive semantic figures, topoi, social symbolism, indexical orders, historicity, ideologies/mentalities, general social and political debates</p>
<p>Actors</p>	<p>Discourse shaping</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rules of discourse</p>	<p>Interaction roles</p> <p>Author, anticipated addressees</p>
<p>Intratextual Layer</p>	<p>Text-based analysis</p> <p>Proposition-based analysis</p> <p>Word-based analysis</p>	<p>Discourse positions</p> <p>Social stratification/power, discourse communities, ideology brokers, voice, verticality status</p> <p>Mediumship</p> <p>Medium, forms of communication, areas of communication, textual patterns</p> <p>Visual text structure</p> <p>Layout/design, typography, text-image relationships, materiality/text carrier</p> <p>Macrostructure: Text theme</p> <p>Lexical fields, metaphor fields, lexical opposition lines, thematic development, text strategies/text functions, text type</p> <p>Mesostructure: Themes in subtexts</p> <p>Microstructure: Propositions</p> <p>Syntax, rhetorical figures, metaphorical lexemes, social, expressive, deontic meaning, presuppositions, implicatures, speech acts</p> <p>Multiple-word units</p> <p>Keywords, stigma words, names, ad hoc formations</p> <p>One-word units</p>

Fig. 1 Model of Discourse Linguistic Multi-Layer Analysis (DIMEAN)

3. Prospect

The above outline of the concepts of discourse and corpus, the criteria for the relevance of change and confirmation in discourse, as well as the focus on the analysis of divergent proposals of social reality based on specific publicly accessible corpora of discourse has clearly established that the discourse analysis in German Studies profits greatly from the progress of digitalization of its sources and the use of specific corpus-linguistic means for the forming of hypotheses and the validation of qualitative analyses:

“Semantic battle” is understood here – formulated generally – as the attempt to ascertain certain linguistic forms in a knowledge domain as an expression of specific, interest-driven, and action-guiding thought patterns (Felder 2006c).

In discourse linguistics, particularly within the research network *Sprache und Wissen*, the concept of “knowledge domain” used here by Felder leads to the differentiation of the field of research that is currently being pursued, almost 30 years after the seminal contribution made by Busse & Teubert. This differentiation can be seen in the still incomplete *Handbuch Sprache und Wissen* (cf. Felder & Gardt 2015), which remains the most important resource for documenting the current state of discourse linguistics in German Studies, alongside the “Werkzeuge” in *Forschen in der Linguistik* (Beißwenger et al. 2022) as well as the ongoing publication series *Sprache und Wissen*³.

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³ See <https://www.degruyter.com/serial/suw-b> (Accessed: 17 June 2024).

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Figure Credit

Fig. 1: Model of Discourse Linguistic Multilevel Analysis (DIMEAN) according to Spitzmüller & Warnke 2011, 201.