The OSCAR PUBLISHING Services
International Journal of Pedagogics

VOLUME Vol.06 Issue03 2026
PAGE NO. 441-445
DOI 10.37547/ijp/Volume06Issue03-91

Linguistic Interpretations of The Concept of Discourse: Differences from Text, Speech, And Communication

Imamalieva Manzura Anvarovna
Senior Lecturer of the "Philology" Department of Renaissance Educational University, Uzbekistan

Received: 12 February 2026; **Accepted:** 08 March 2026; **Published:** 31 March 2026

Abstract: This article clarifies how the notion of discourse is interpreted in linguistics and how it differs from the related concepts of text, speech, and communication. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably in everyday academic practice, they refer to distinct levels of language organization and analysis. The study adopts a conceptual-analytical design and synthesizes major linguistic traditions that have shaped discourse studies, including text linguistics, pragmatics, conversation analysis, functional linguistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis. The results show that "text" primarily denotes a structured linguistic product, "speech" foregrounds an event of language use by a speaker, and "communication" describes a broader social process that includes multimodal and institutional factors. "Discourse," by contrast, functions as an integrative category: it treats language as socially situated meaning-making, linking textual form and speech activity to context, ideology, power, and interactional goals. The discussion argues that discourse is best understood as a dynamic configuration of linguistic choices and social constraints, where meaning arises not only from grammar and cohesion but also from participants' roles, presuppositions, genre conventions, and interpretive frames. The article concludes by proposing an operational distinction useful for linguistic research: text is an analyzable artifact, speech is an enacted performance, communication is an interactional system, and discourse is the contextualized semiotic practice that connects all three.

Keywords: Discourse; text; speech; communication; pragmatics; context; text linguistics; Critical Discourse Analysis; functional linguistics; conversation analysis.

Introduction: The term discourse has become one of the most frequently used labels in modern linguistics, yet its popularity has not eliminated conceptual ambiguity. In many publications, discourse is treated as a synonym of text, speech, or communication; in others, it is positioned as a higher-order category that includes them. The ambiguity is partly historical. In the second half of the twentieth century, the focus of linguistic research shifted from isolated sentences to language-in-use. This transition required new conceptual tools capable of describing meaning beyond grammatical structure, especially meaning shaped by participants, institutions, genres, and cultural norms. Discourse emerged as a candidate for such a tool, but it developed differently across research traditions. In text linguistics, discourse often relates to cohesion, coherence, and textual organization. In pragmatics and conversation analysis, it refers to interactional sequences and the pragmatic conditions of utterance interpretation. In sociolinguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, discourse becomes inseparable from social practice, ideology, and power relations.

The central problem is not merely terminological. When researchers treat discourse as interchangeable with text, they risk reducing socially embedded meaning to purely formal properties. When discourse is equated with communication, it may become so broad that its linguistic core disappears. When discourse is identified with speech, analysis may be

confined to individual speaker intention and overlook institutional constraints. Therefore, a principled differentiation among discourse, text, speech, and communication is necessary for methodological clarity. Such clarity determines what counts as data, what units are analyzed, and what explanatory goals are pursued. For example, a study of cohesive devices in newspaper editorials needs a concept of text as a structured product; a study of turn-taking requires a concept of speech interaction; an investigation of political legitimacy strategies requires discourse as a nexus of language and social power. Without specifying the concept, the same linguistic material can be interpreted inconsistently.

This article aims to systematize linguistic interpretations of discourse and to specify how discourse differs from text, speech, and communication. The research questions are: what conceptual features are stable across major discourse traditions; which features differentiate discourse from text, speech, and communication; and how can these distinctions be operationalized for linguistic research and analysis. The study is theoretical and integrative: it does not propose a new grand theory but seeks to provide an analytically usable model that supports consistent terminology and research design.

The study applies a conceptual-analytical methodology based on qualitative synthesis of foundational and widely cited scholarship in discourse studies and adjacent fields. The procedure consists of three steps. First, representative theoretical positions are identified in traditions that commonly employ the term discourse: text linguistics, functional linguistics, pragmatics, conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Second, definitional components are extracted and compared, focusing on what is treated as the core unit of analysis, how context is conceptualized, and what explanatory aim is prioritized. Third, the extracted components are integrated into a comparative framework that distinguishes discourse from text, speech, and communication in terms of ontological status, analytical units, contextual scope, and interpretive assumptions. The method is interpretive rather than statistical: its output is an explanatory classification supported by theoretical coherence rather than by corpus frequency counts.

Because the goal is conceptual clarification, the study uses illustrative examples only as explanatory devices and avoids limiting the argument to a specific language or genre. At the same time, the synthesis prioritizes approaches that have established methodological consequences for linguistic analysis, such as cohesion-coherence models, speech act theory, interactional sequence models, systemic-functional linguistics, and CDA's focus on ideology and power. This selection criterion ensures that the proposed distinctions can be used in actual research practice.

Across linguistic traditions, the most stable feature of discourse is its treatment of language as situated action. Discourse does not merely refer to linguistic material; it refers to linguistic material functioning in a context that shapes interpretation. This contextual dimension can be narrow, such as the immediate conversational situation, or broad, such as institutional settings and cultural histories. Yet even when context is defined minimally, discourse implies that meaning depends on more than lexical and grammatical forms. In this sense, discourse is an integrative category because it links the structural properties of language to the pragmatic conditions of use and the social consequences of meaning.

A second stable feature is the processual nature of discourse. Unlike text, which is often treated as a finished product, discourse is commonly understood as unfolding in time, either in real-time interaction or in the interpretive process of reading. Even written discourse, which is materially stable, is treated as dynamic in interpretation: readers construct coherence, infer presuppositions, and align the text with genre expectations and social knowledge. Thus discourse is not simply "the text"; it is the text functioning as a communicative event within interpretive frames.

A third stable feature is the multi-layered organization of discourse. While text linguistics foregrounds cohesive ties and coherence relations, and conversation analysis foregrounds turn-taking and repair, most discourse approaches converge on the view that discourse has structure above the sentence but also beyond formal cohesion. This structure includes topic management, information packaging, evaluation, stance-taking, and strategic selection of linguistic resources to achieve goals such as

persuading, legitimizing, or refusing responsibility. Consequently, discourse is defined not only by what is said but also by how it is organized and what it accomplishes.

Text, in linguistic usage, most often denotes a semiotic product with internal organization. It may be written or transcribed, brief or extended, but it is typically treated as a bounded artifact that can be analyzed for cohesion, coherence, thematic progression, genre markers, and compositional structure. Text linguistics offers frameworks for describing how sentences connect through reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, producing unity. In this view, the defining property of text is not its social embedding but its textuality: the capacity to function as a coherent whole.

This does not mean that text is context-free. Many text-linguistic accounts recognize that coherence depends on shared knowledge and communicative purpose. However, the analytical emphasis remains on describing the artifact and its internal relations. The researcher can examine a text even when the original communicative situation is partially unknown, because the text itself provides signals for reconstructing coherence. Text is therefore particularly suited for product-oriented analysis: what linguistic features make a sequence of sentences a "whole," how information is packaged, and how genre conventions stabilize meaning.

The distinction becomes clearer when considering the same material from different angles. A transcript of a classroom interaction can be treated as a text for analyzing cohesive devices or thematic progression, but the "text" perspective may not capture the interactional work done by pauses, overlaps, adjacency pairs, and participant roles. In that case, discourse analysis becomes necessary because the meaning of the transcript depends on interactional and institutional context.

Speech foregrounds the act of speaking as an event. It is anchored in a speaker, an audience (even if imagined), and a moment of production. In linguistic theory, speech is connected to the notion of utterance and to pragmatics: a spoken or written utterance is not only a sentence but an action performed under conditions of intention, felicity, and accountability. Speech act theory illustrates this orientation: to speak is to do something, such as promise, request, accuse, or apologize. These acts cannot be fully defined by syntax alone; they require contextual conditions and participant recognition.

Speech also highlights features of performance: prosody, rhythm, hesitation, repair, and stance. Even in written contexts, "speech" can be used metaphorically to refer to the authorial voice or rhetorical performance, but the core idea remains: speech is language activity produced by an agent in a concrete situation. For this reason, speech is often the preferred term when the analytical interest centers on speaker intention, audience design, and pragmatic force.

Speech differs from discourse in scope and abstraction. Speech can be a single utterance or an individual's performance, whereas discourse usually refers to a broader configuration of meaning-making that includes patterns, norms, and social constraints. A politician's sentence is a speech act; the recurring ways political actors frame migration or security across speeches belong to political discourse. Discourse thus extends beyond individual speech events to social regularities in language use.

Communication as social process and multimodal system

Communication is the broadest of the four concepts. It refers to the social process through which information, intentions, and identities are exchanged or negotiated among participants. Communication includes language but also gestures, images, material settings, technologies, and institutional channels. In many contexts, communication is not limited to verbal code; it involves multimodality and infrastructure. A televised debate is communication because it includes speech, camera framing, studio design, audience response, and media editing, all of which influence interpretation.

From a linguistic perspective, communication becomes relevant when meaning cannot be explained by language alone. Yet communication can be too broad for linguistic analysis if it dissolves the specificity of linguistic structures. The challenge is to keep communication as a contextual horizon while maintaining analytical focus on language. Discourse serves as a bridge here: it allows linguists to analyze language as social practice without losing the linguistic

dimension. Discourse is narrower than communication because it centers on semiotic practices in which language is primary, but broader than text and speech because it integrates social and contextual factors.

The comparative synthesis indicates that discourse can be operationally defined as contextualized semiotic practice realized through texts and speech events within communicative systems. This definition positions discourse as a linking category. It includes textual structure and pragmatic action but interprets them through contexts that may be institutional, cultural, historical, or ideological. In Critical Discourse Analysis, discourse is explicitly tied to power: linguistic choices are seen as participating in the reproduction or contestation of social dominance. In functional linguistics, discourse is tied to function: linguistic resources are selected to enact interpersonal relations, represent experience, and structure information. In conversation analysis, discourse is tied to interactional order: meaning arises from sequential organization and participant orientation.

Despite differences, these perspectives converge on a core insight: discourse is not only what is said or written but the socially organized way of saying and writing that makes certain meanings possible, natural, or authoritative. Therefore, discourse differs from text in that it cannot be fully captured by internal cohesion alone. It differs from speech because it is not reducible to individual intention or performance. It differs from communication because it is specifically concerned with semiotic practices, especially language, rather than with all channels and modes equally.

The results suggest that terminological confusion often arises from shifting analytical purposes. When scholars focus on linguistic form, they prefer text. When they focus on pragmatic force or speaker agency, they prefer speech. When they focus on broader exchange processes and multimodality, they prefer communication. Discourse becomes the umbrella term when the goal is to interpret language as socially situated meaning-making. The problem is not that one term is correct and others are wrong; the problem is when a term is used without signaling which analytical level is intended. In such cases, theoretical claims can become unstable. For instance, stating that “discourse has cohesion” is misleading if discourse is used in the CDA sense, where cohesion is only one small part of a broader social practice. Conversely, stating that “text is ideology” may be misleading if text is used purely as artifact rather than as discourse in context.

A practical way to stabilize usage is to treat the four terms as complementary layers. Text can be treated as the artifact layer, analyzable for cohesion, coherence, genre, and compositional patterns. Speech can be treated as the event layer, analyzable for pragmatic acts, prosody, stance, and audience design. Communication can be treated as the system layer, analyzable for channel, multimodality, institutional mediation, and interactional ecology. Discourse can be treated as the practice layer, analyzable for how language choices enact social relations, identities, and power within contexts. Under this layered model, the same data can be approached differently depending on research questions. A courtroom transcript can be a text; the lawyer’s objections are speech acts; the trial is communication within a legal institution; and legal discourse is the socially stabilized practice that legitimizes decisions through language norms and procedures.

Theoretical traditions differ primarily in how they conceptualize context and stability. Conversation analysis treats context as endogenous: what counts as relevant context is what participants orient to in interaction. CDA treats context as exogenous and structural: institutions, ideologies, and histories shape what speakers can say and what becomes acceptable. Functional linguistics positions context as semiotic environment realized through genre and register. These differences influence what discourse means in each tradition. Yet the layered model can accommodate them by allowing multiple contextual scales: micro-context for turn-taking and repair, meso-context for institutional roles and genres, and macro-context for ideology and power. Discourse, on this view, is the analytical category that allows movement across scales without losing the linguistic anchor.

Another implication concerns methodological alignment. If discourse is treated as practice, then purely formal analysis is insufficient. Researchers must justify how linguistic features connect to social meanings. Conversely, if discourse is treated too broadly, linguistic evidence can be replaced by sociological speculation. A balanced approach requires explicit linking: showing how lexical choices,

grammatical patterns, and textual structures index stance, identity, evaluation, or authority within a given context. This linking principle explains why discourse analysis often relies on triangulation: textual evidence, contextual knowledge, and interpretive reasoning. It also explains why discourse cannot be reduced to "communication" in general, because it demands attention to linguistic material as the primary site where social meanings are constructed.

This article has systematized linguistic interpretations of discourse and clarified its differences from text, speech, and communication. The synthesis supports an operational distinction. Text is a bounded semiotic artifact characterized by internal organization and textuality. Speech is an event of language performance grounded in speaker agency and pragmatic action. Communication is a broader social process that includes multiple modes, channels, and institutional mediations. Discourse is contextualized semiotic practice that connects texts and speech events to interpretive frames, social roles, genres, and power relations. These distinctions are not merely terminological; they determine research design, data selection, and analytical claims. When used consistently, they help scholars avoid conceptual overlap while enabling multi-level analysis of language as both structure and social action. Future work can apply this layered model to specific languages and genres, demonstrating how the same linguistic material changes meaning when approached as text, speech, communication, or discourse.

REFERENCES

1. Фуко М. Археология знания / пер. с фр. — М. : Наука, 1996. — 416 с.
2. van Dijk T. A. Discourse and Power. — Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. — 308 p.
3. Fairclough N. Language and Power. — 2nd ed. — London : Routledge, 2001. — 208 p.
4. Gee J. P. An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method. — 4th ed. — New York : Routledge, 2014. — 256 p.
5. Schiffrin D. Approaches to Discourse. — Oxford : Blackwell, 1994. — 470 p.
6. Brown G., Yule G. Discourse Analysis. — Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983. — 288 p.
7. Halliday M. A. K., Hasan R. Cohesion in English. — London : Longman, 1976. — 374 p.
8. Halliday M. A. K. An Introduction to Functional Grammar. — 3rd ed. — London : Arnold, 2004. — 689 p.
9. Austin J. L. How to Do Things with Words. — 2nd ed. — Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1975. — 168 p.
10. Searle J. R. Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language. — Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1969. — 203 p.
11. Grice H. P. Studies in the Way of Words. — Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1989. — 406 p.
12. Levinson S. C. Pragmatics. — Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983. — 420 p.
13. Bakhtin M. M. The Problem of Speech Genres // Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. — Austin : University of Texas Press, 1986. — P. 60–102.
14. Wodak R., Meyer M. (eds.) Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis. — 2nd ed. — London : SAGE, 2009. — 200 p.