IS IT POSSIBLE TO CONSTRUCT OF MEANING OF THE SOCIAL WORLD THROUGH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS?

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Abstract- **Discourse analysis is paramount in the negotiation and construction of meaning of the social world. This paper discusses knowledge as situated and contingent and thus an explanation or interpretation of people's perception or attitude about a psychological phenomenon should take into account the context or culture and circumstances of social interactions.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Psychologists were deeply immersed in a regimented methodological approach in the production of knowledge in which one variable was experimentally manipulated and its effect on the other variable closely observed and recorded. However, the trend has greatly shifted lately with researchers examining the performative and productive functions of language in contexts.

Discourse is situated sequentially, in the sense that the primary context within which social interaction occurs comes first and largely shapes accounts and constructions of participants involved in discourse. It is contingent because of the inconsistency of language use in different cultures and contexts. Discourse analysis provides various way of positing language. It is more apprehensive with the analysis of texts or utterances within specific socio-cultural context and indicates a method of data analysis that can tell researchers about the discursive construction of a phenomenon. Primarily, discourse analysts advocate the principle that people construct versions of their social world through the instrumentality and functionality of language. Thus, discourse analysis involves a theoretical way of understanding the nature of psychological phenomena.

A. Meaning and Norm of Locating in Discourse Analysis:

The concept of positioning has been an influential frame of thought for conceptualizing context and culture in social interactions. People discursively construct their versions of social reality from their personally taken positions informed by discursive practices embedded in their socio-cultural environment. Discourses of people are grounded in subject positions so that when participants in a social interaction take up particular positions, they see and interpret the world from and through that chosen strategic position in terms of images, symbols, metaphors, values, story lines and the socio-cultural concepts available to them within a given discursive environment in which they are positioned. In other words, there are a cluster of rights and duties available to and accessible by participants involved in social interactions in a given context which inevitably shape their public discourses in everyday conversations. It can be argued that people's discourse and positioning in social interactions reflect, to a large extent, the available interpretative repertoires or discursive practices embedded in their specified framework, and can be understood by accumulating their belief systems, values and socio-cultural experiences over a period of time.

It is therefore believed that a position taken by a participant in a social discourse and interpersonal interaction may be informed by the rights and duties available to him and thus, the anticipated position limits the "catalogue of possible social acts available to the individual" In this view, positioning creates a space in which members participating in a conversation are assigned a series of specific positions. It is however conceded that sense of positioning in discourse is not static; it fluctuates and can easily be altered to suit the discourse environment, time space and circumstances. It is important that in the analysis of discourse of research participants, the discursive context within which people take positions is critically examined in order to have a fuller appreciation of what is said or not said about a given psychological phenomenon.

B. Intertextuality, Meaning and Discourse Analysis:

Another fundamental principle in discourse analysis is the concept of intertextuality. The concept of intertextuality holds that meaning and intelligibility in discourse and textual analysis are dependent on a network of prior and concurrent discourses and texts. A spoken or written language may depend on other background information within a given social context in which it is discursively deployed for its meaning. Discourses or texts are dialogical, in the sense that meanings and interpretations of texts or utterances are relational. The production and the meaning of a language in social interactions are shaped by the socio-cultural experiences of speakers in their given contexts. The position of language and discourse is the fact that language deployed in social discourse may lend itself to multiple interpretations and conceptualizations on the basis of socio-cultural contexts and intentions. The concept of intertextuality is the foundational activity behind interpreting cultural meaning in any significant social discourse and by which meaning discovery in a text is made possible. Thus, discourses or texts are organized out of, and understood in relation to the historical and socio-cultural experiences of speakers in a particular environment. Intertextuality as that all written and spoken texts, signs or language emerge from a single network; what refers to as 'the web of meanings'. The broader view of texts in terms of meaning making and how texts may be attributable to other

meanings held in the society or context within which discourse occurs.

C. *Language use and Meaning in Context:*

Discourse analysts contend that beliefs, attitudes, attributions and perceptions of people are not stable and enduring across contexts; rather, they are constructed in accordance with historical and socio-cultural contexts of discourse and relational interaction. To fully understand the perceptions of people about a given psychological phenomenon, it is crucial to understand how, within a given environment, people strategically draw on available discursive devices to negotiate and represent their reality of the phenomenon. This is consistent with the theory of intertextuality which conceptualizes textual analysis as a function of a particular context or background. Adequately asserts that the fourth possible and useful approach to discourse analysis is to search for patterns within much larger contexts, such as those referred to as "society" or "culture."

The production of language and meaning making significantly depend on the context of language use and repertoires available to people involved in social discourse. The truth about phenomenon is not given by individual participants in a social discourse but through the lenses of their given society or context. This is because participants in a social interaction are both producers and products of culture within their communal environment. It should be noted that when people state a belief or express an opinion, they are taking part in a persistent discussion in which they all have a stake. In other words, to make sense of what people say, we need to take into account the social context within which they speak.

Discourse analysts do not concentrate on internal psychological conditions, that are pre-existing and fixed, instead, they investigate how people flexibly deploy available discursive resources within their environment to create and negotiate representations of social reality. If people express certain attitude on one circumstance, it should not necessarily lead us to expect that the same attitude will be espoused on another; rather, there may be orderly deviations in what they say. This casts doubt about the enduring homogenous nature of the supposed internal mental attitude of people.

D. *Respondents, Researchers & Meaning:*

In discourse analysis there is the implications of the position of both respondents and researchers regarding meaning for the construction and representation of social reality. Researchers have thus, suggested that the concept of validity could be redefined to suit the circumstances of discourse analysis and to validate a qualitative research approach. For example, call for validity to refer to the "coherence" and "fruitfulness" of research findings and the new areas of research interest raised in respondent's orientation in the rambling context. It must be noted however, that the notion of validity is hard to associate with discourse analysis given the difficulty in pointing to externally agreed upon criteria that would serve as the basis for validating knowledge produced by discourse researchers.

The analysis and construction of psychological phenomena may be subjective in terms of people's assumed position in social discourses and in terms of the analyst's interpretation of the broad maneuvers. Thus, the analysis of a phenomenon cannot be said to be a finality as the analyzed data can further be interpreted in respect of context and positions of other analysts. "An interpretation of meaning ends, when one has reached a 'good gestalt or the inner unity in the text, which is free of logical contradictions".

Surely, meaning can never be permanently static because of the functionality and variability of language. As indicated earlier, the meaning of a social discourse is significantly shaped by a specific time space, context and circumstances of talk. It is therefore the position of discourse analysts that "the world is a 'shifting' and 'negotiable' place that cannot be understood or read, except through language and that since language is constructive and functional, no one reading can be said to be 'valid' or 'right'".

II. CONCLUSION

Discursive psychologists contend that our knowledge of the social world should not be treated as objective truth and that our knowledge and representation of the world are not reflections of a reality "out there;" rather they are products of our ways of constructing versions of the world through language. The discourse researcher also actively participates in the examination, negotiation and representation of people's beliefs, attitudes and values about a psychological phenomenon within a historical and socio-cultural context. Thus, discourse analysts and other qualitative researchers do not operate with "variables" that are defined by the researcher before the commencement of the research process; instead, they are particularly concerned with meanings attributed to a psychological phenomenon by respondents themselves. Discourse analysts should reflexively adduce reasons for their interpretations and categorizations throughout the process of research, from conception to publication, in order to validate their knowledge claim and enhance a possible extrapolation of findings to similar settings.

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