Different Definitions Of Discourse

Discourse as Nunan (1993) defines it is ‘a stretch of language consisting of several sentences which are perceived as related in some way’; Within the definition of discourse, it can be found that discourse refers as much spoken as written kind of languages. However, many analysts distinguish that the term “discourse” refers to spoken discourse, while “text” to the written one; but being spoken does not mean that it just has to be personal and social, it can convey important information as the written one. But although they can be used in the same situations, that does not mean that they have the same features.

In contrast, there are two expression which should not been misunderstood, discourse and discourse analysis, since each term refers to different terminology. Thus, discourse analysis is the analysis of language in use, that is, what is language used for; Alba-Juez (2009) declares that what discourse analysts do is to study the social activities implied in the process of discourse, helping as much speakers to indicate what their purpose is, as hearers to interpret the message. Hence, its interdisciplinary nature, which means that it takes a concern in lots of disciplines such as Anthropology, Philosophy, Sociology and Linguistics.

The form of communication called ‘conversation’, as part of the disciplines discourse and discourse analysis, reminds to the word talk that although it is placed as the central aspect in a conversation; a conversation includes more aspects apart from the action of talking. Those aspects deal with the linguistic and non-linguistic behavior that one has in the talk and the interaction in between the participants. That is what the field of Conversation Analysis (CA) deals with and will be analyzed through this essay, focusing on features that are part of the conversation and also how participants interact in between them.

Focusing on the spoken representation of discourse, it can be found that Conversation Analysis is one of the dominant approaches of Discourse Analysis dealing with this kind of discourse. As it has been said before, within the phenomenon of discourse analysis, there are different approaches; one of the most used when analyzing spoken texts is CA. According to Cameron (2001), “many practitioners label their object of study not as ‘conversation’ but ‘talk in interaction’. Conversation Analysis began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Markee (2000) states, some analysts have placed CA as a subdiscipline of Sociology, although some sociologists disagree with this, since it does not just focus on the process of interaction in between participants; it also approaches to the other disciplines such as Anthropology (Ethnography), Linguistics and of course, Sociology, obtaining its own autonomy over the years. It was Harold Garfinkel one of the pioneers in the emergence of CA as a discipline by his research called “ethnomethodology”. According to Roger and Bull (1988) “the term ethnomethodology refers to the study of ways in which everyday common-sense activities are analyzed by participants, and of the ways in which these analyses are incorporated into courses of action.” Other sociologists such as Sacks, who got interested in this research and used it in one of his projects which later it will become in the initial research that made Conversation Analysis appears. Besides, CA has also changed its interest in just analyzing the process of talk, focusing also in the context of every talk either ordinary or institutional. Although as Heritage and Atkinson (…) discuss analysts tend to prefer the ordinary situations, since it is not ruled and the interactions in between the participants are more random. That is, it does not deal

just with the process of conversation; CA also gather the setting, manner of speech and genre, which points out the interactional process added to the term conversation. Besides, doing conversation analysis is not an easy issue, since analysts have to record data through audio recordings, as in this case, or video recordings when the analysis is larger and the analyst want to analyze other matter apart from the conversation. After that, a transcription of the recorded data should be done to see the means in which the words were said to make it available for analysis. Hence, Have (…) remarks that “transcripts are the base images a CA researcher works with”. As I have said CA has different influences which help this discipline to analyze the data that is recorded; Linguistics helps with the understanding of the language in the utterances, for example, grammar and the extension of turn units. Within Linguistics, Pragmatics and Semantics are the major influence since the meaning and structures of utterances are necessary to make a positive analysis; Ethnography, which focus on the behavior and conduct of people’s lives, is a discipline that is connected with CA, considering that to analyze the behavior of people you need conversation; and Sociology, the “mother” of CA. These disciplines have made CA a broader and more researched system in the field of Discourse Analysis.

After the background about Conversation Analysis that have been done, the essay will focus on the analysis of the conversation from the BBC’s Listening Project called “The Proposal”. Schegloff (1996) proposes, there are three requirements to make the analysis as an ideal one; first, exemplification of the data to know the actions; second, demonstration of the understanding of the actions by the participants; and finally, the interpretation of utterances. So, these elements are really useful when analyzing a conversation.

First and foremost, the participants of the conversation are Bill (B) and Madelaine (M). They met 40 years ago, they were two young people in the same circle of friends, but Bill hoped for more. So, he asked her for a date, but Madelaine had to ask for permission to her father, who refused to it. Then, they continued their lives separated until they began to work together. The actual context in which the participants are settled is Madelaine interviewing Bill for a drama project she is working on. The conversation revolves around their past and how life has made them come together again, having the opportunity to be together again and even get married.

When having a conversation, participants take turns in order not to talk at the same time, and not make their talk spoken just by one participant, so they change their roles as speaker and hearer. The turns do not follow a pattern, it is supposed that when a speaker has finished talking, the other one can start, for example, the majority of interventions respect a turn in the conversation analyzed. However, there are exceptions, a speaker can self-select him/herself when the other speaker does not clear the way for him/her to talk. For example, there are different cases when Bill self-selects himself to talk in the conversation with Madelaine; she does not open the way for him, she just makes a little pause which cause that Bill begins talking:

M: At the same time, it’s wonderful that we have had the opportunity to come together again.

B: I, I don’t know how to say this, my sister phoned up me yesterday, I can’t even say it, and she said I should propose to you… um, on this program.

In addition, there are parts in the conversation in which one participant overlaps the other one. For example, Bill tries to interrupt Madelaine when she is finishing one of her interventions, ‘you

bounced back from this heavy heart take', but as he sees that she is concluding, he decides to wait and tries to hide his interruption with laugh. This last element, laugh, is the most used when the participants overlap; Bill interrupts Madelaine by laughing, although this does not make her hesitate and continue talking.

Besides, another cue when taking turns is adjacency pairs, that is, the development of pairs when one speaker is talking and demands the second part of the utterance to be said by the next speaker. In this case, the adjacency pairs are created by question-answer patterns; as much Bill as Madelaine use this kind of patterns, when he asks 'might we?' and she answers 'we may, yes, we may have'. Also, there are adjacent pairs that expand, for example, Madelaine tries to lengthen her answer in order not to give the response during the interview, so se uses 'Really?'; making another adjacency pair, which is answered with an interjection, 'Hmm'. Adjacency pairs show the phenomenon of turn-taking

Furthermore, another feature which can be used as adjacency pairs are the repairs, due to the fact that there are repair strategies that use this method to analyze conversations. The feature of repair, as Gardner (..) states is "to deal with troubles of hearing, production or understanding in talk"; so, in the analyzed conversation there can be seen some self-repaired strategies, which just involve the speaker who has commit the mistake and try to repair it, that the speakers deal with when talking; hesitation pauses, which are silences that occur in the conversation when the speakers find difficult to express themselves or they want to say another issue. Bill is the one who most hesitates in the conversation; he might be nervous of talking about their past that he uses "uhm" as an element to pause and reconsider what he wants to say; repetition, which in this case is the recurrence of the pronoun 'I'; it also can be allocated as a strategy due to hesitation, since the expression 'umm' manifests that nerves he is feeling during the interview. Besides, the rectification with the clause 'I mean' marks that Bill does not know how to express what he is feeling. Here is the example,

B: No, no, it's, umm, I, I was disappointed and I assumed, I mean, one hopes at that age, one's a young gentleman and therefore if, if you say no, then you say no, that's, that's how it is.

searching for a word is a repair strategy in which the speaker extends his/her turn until he/she finds out the words he/she wants to say. Bill uses it when he cannot think about another clause to finish his turn, so, in this case, he finally uses the clause 'on this program, and again after a mark of hesitation.

B: I, I don't know how to say this, my sister phoned up me yesterday, I can't even say it, and she said I should propose to you… um, on this program.

And immediate lexical changes, in this case, Bill changes his mind about what he wants to say, and he immediately replaces the pronoun 'I' by 'it'. Perhaps, his hesitation makes him modify his words.

Conversation analysis, as a discipline inside discourse and discourse analysis, deals with the spoken (talk) and written (transcripts) forms of language, but not just focusing on the form of communication, the interaction between participants also plays an important role in conversation. That's why other disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology and Linguistics cooperate with it. After a process of transcription, it has been analyzed the conversation

between Bill and Madelaine finding and showing features such as turn-taking, overlapping, adjacency pairs and repair strategies, which characterize what conversation and interaction are. These methods have shown the interaction in between participants and how the conversation flows, although there are parts where the participants hesitate due to their nervousness, but these are repaired with the features mentioned above. This conversation analysis has analyzed and given proof of what Schegloff (1996) talked about, that is, the requirements an analysis should have.