

## Lesson One: Introduction to Text Analysis

Language is realized, first and foremost, as texts. Not as isolated sounds, words, or even sentences but as whole texts. Thus, users of language have to cope with texts. This is as true for second/ foreign language users as for first language users. In fact, we live in a world of text; we are surrounded by text: in our homes, in the streets, at school and elsewhere. You may wake up in the morning listening to radio text, you can take a glance at the cereal box as you skim the morning news, your fridge might be festooned with reminders and messages, you go online and check your e-mail, and you read the ads on the bus on the way to school or work.

## 1. Definition of Text

**text, n.** *A continuous piece of spoken or written language, especially one with a recognizable beginning and ending.*

*Trask (1999, p.132)*

The original meaning of the word **text** meant something woven (Latin *texere, textum*; to weave), and you can see a relationship between **text, textile** ('capable of being woven') and **texture** ('having the quality of woven cloths').

The modern meaning of **text** is even broader; whenever we produce an interpretation of something's meaning—a book, magazine- we treat it as **text**. Written and printed texts such as shopping lists and newspaper articles are '**texts**', but so also are transcripts of (spoken) conversations and interviews, as well as television programmes and Web pages.

In popular usage and in literature courses, text often means a formal publication: a book, an essay an article in a magazine, a poem. However, in this module we take text to include any written inscription. Street signs, notes passed among students in the classroom, the words on a cereal box, an animated banner running across a Webpage, a grocery list, a student paper written in a class, a teacher's responsive comments in the margin of that paper, a classified advertisement for renting an apartment, comments posted in an electronic chat space, an income tax form, all are **texts**— and all are written by people, with **processes, genres, and contexts** that may be quite different from what is normally thought of when people talk about texts and their authors.

## 2. Definition of Discourse

**1:** verbal interchange of ideas *especially* conversation.

**2a:** formal and orderly and usually extended expression of thought on a subject.

**b:** connected speech or writing.

**c:** a linguistic unit (such as a conversation or a story) larger than a sentence.

Originally, the word *discourse* came from Latin, '*discorsus*', which means 'to run'; 'to run on', 'to run from and fro'. Historically, it has been applied more to rehearsed forms of *spoken language*- like speeches. The modern meaning, however, is the real language that real people use in the real world.

A helpful definition is found in Cotterell and Turner (1994): "The term 'discourse' is used generally for any coherent stretch of language." That is, language is very much more than just the sum of the linguistic elements that compose it and discourse is, at the very least, language plus its context. As Gee (1990, p. 142) put it: "discourse ( not capitalized) is simply "connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays; 'discourse' is part of 'Discourse'- 'Discourse' with a big 'D' is always more than just language".

### 3. Text Analysis Versus Discourse Analysis

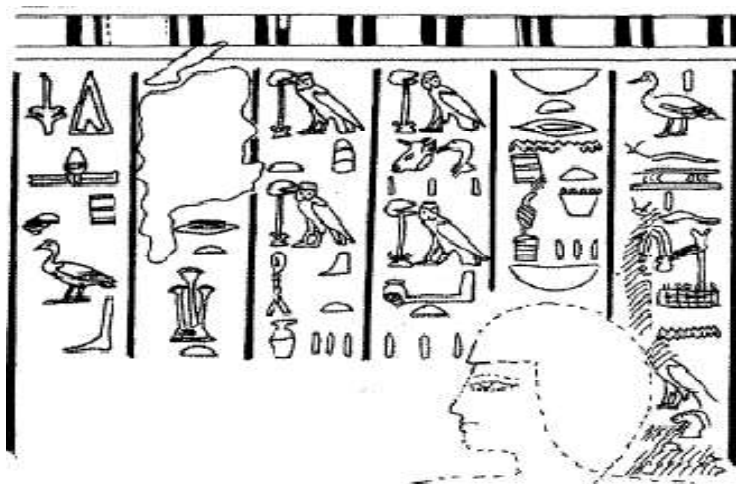
*Text analysis* was earliest developed within scriptural religions, where people were highly motivated to find all the meaning they could out of holy books such as the Holy Quran. The emergence of philosophy and other intellectual endeavours involved criticizing claims of opponents, which motivated analysis of texts to find flaws in reasoning, confusions, or other limitations. Similarly as law became a matter of written law, written court precedents, and written legal briefs, it became important to determine what the law really said, what the loopholes were, how precedents could be used to argue one side or another, what the weaknesses and strengths were of opposing arguments, etc.

*Discourse analysis* appeared even earlier to study the relationship between languages, either spoken or written, and the contexts in which it is used for communication in real-world situation. It is the study of such language, and the analysis of the features and uses of texts-or *text analysis*. One way of looking at the distinction between discourse and text is to think of discourse as the *process*, and the text as the *product*. That is speakers or writers engage in a communicative process that involves language and the record of that language used in *discourse* is called its *text*. Hence, *text analysis* is an integral part of *discourse analysis*.

### 4. Discovery Activities

#### Task One: Unlocking texts

- Put yourself in the position of a complete beginner. Here is a text- it comes from the tomb of an Egyptian noble who lived several thousand years ago. Try to study it closely. Can you make any sense of it? Can you at least spot some patterns or regularities?



## Commentary:

The urge to make sense of text -even if the text is of a language that we neither speak nor read- is such that we are quite capable of inventing meaning on the basis of the flimsiest of evidence. It is possible, for example, that you take a guess that the text is about birds, since figures of birds occur frequently. On the other hand, knowing that the text was found in a tomb, you may guess that it had a religious significance; that it was a sacred text or a biography of the deceased for example. You may also notice some repetition of some elements: the four owls, the tree vertical bars...

Learners of English are faced with similar challenges when confronted with English-language texts. They, too, must mobilize a variety of ‘text attack’ strategies in order to glean some kind of ‘sense’ from the text and thus, to have access to the ‘insider knowledge’; about the text language, its meaning and culture.

### Task Two: Texts or non-texts?

Look at the following seven extracts. Which, in your opinion, qualify as texts? What are your criteria?

For the perfect cup, use one tea bag per person and add freshly drawn boiling water. Leave standing for three to five minutes before stirring gently.  
Can be served with or without milk and sugar.

1

Scott,  
Thanks for sending me the disk.  
Sandy mckay

2

- 1 The university has got a park.
- 2 It has got a modern tram system.
- 3 He has got a swimming pool.
- 4 I have got tickets for the theatre.
- 5 Rio has got some beautiful beaches.
- 6 She has got a good view from the window.

3

*I like a pumpkin.*  
*I like a celery.*  
*Go toward the 21st century.*

4

Suzy Stressed gets up late and has a shower. She doesn't have breakfast. She goes to work by car. She gets to work at five to nine. She uses the lift. At eleven o'clock she has a black coffee. Suzy has lunch at half past one. She finishes work at six o'clock. Then she goes to an Italian class. She gets home late. After that she watches TV. She has dinner at eleven o'clock. She goes to bed very late. Suzy is very stressed. Do you live like Suzy?<sup>11</sup>

5

so	go
go	so
sl	ow
go	oh
low	ow
oh <sup>12</sup>	

6

YOU ARE NOW  
ENTERING  
THE HUMAN HEART

7

**Commentary:**

- The first two extracts are:
  - Self-contained
  - Well-formed
  - Hang together (i.e., are cohesive)
  - Make sense (i.e., are coherent)
  - Have a clear communicative purpose
  - Recognizable text types
  - Appropriate to their contexts of use.

On all the above ground, their status as **texts** is **not problematic**.

- The other five “extracts”, however, appear not to fulfil all of the previously mentioned characteristics. *Extract 3* doesn’t hang together; it is just six unconnected sentences. *Extract 4* makes no sense whatsoever and it is difficult to imagine a context in which it would make sense. *Extract 5* is obviously written to display a feature of grammar, but is neither identifiable as a genuine text type nor does it have any apparent communicative purpose. *Extract 6* seems more “playful” than having a “**communicative**” purpose and it is not clear that it is self-contained even as poetry. The last extract is difficult to situate; where would such a text be appropriate.
- In short, those extracts (3-7) fail a number of “text tests”. They are either:
  - Not self-contained, or
  - not well formed, or
  - not cohesive, or
  - not coherent, or
  - not communicative, or
  - not typical, or
  - not appropriate.