Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics

Approaches to Discourse

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To David

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1 Introduction

Discourse analysis is widely recognized as one of the most vast, but also one of the least defined, areas in linguistics (e.g. Stubbs 1983: 12; Tannen 1989a: 6–8). One reason for this is that our understanding of discourse is based on scholarship from a number of academic disciplines that are actually very different from one another. Included are not just disciplines in which models for understanding, and methods for analyzing, discourse first developed (i.e. linguistics, anthropology, sociology, philosophy; see van Dijk 1985), but also disciplines that have applied (and thus often extended) such models and methods to problems within their own particular academic domains, e.g. communication (Craig and Tracy 1983), social psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987), and artificial intelligence (Reichman 1985).

The goals of this book are to describe and compare several different approaches to the linguistic analysis of discourse: speech act theory, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, pragmatics, conversation analysis, and variation analysis. My aim is not to reduce the vastness of discourse analysis: I believe that at relatively early stages of an endeavor, reduction just for the sake of simplification can too drastically limit the range of interesting questions that can and should be asked.[1] Thus, I view the vastness of discourse analysis not as a weakness, but as a strength, and as a sign of interest and development. What I hope to do, however, is clarify the scope of discourse analysis in such a way that it can continue to deal with a wide range of problems and phenomena – but in a more systematic and theoretically coherent way.

Before describing the ways that I hope to accomplish this goal, I want to briefly introduce each approach with the help of a prototypical example from each perspective (section 2). I then go on to an overview of the book (section 3).

2 "Core" examples from different approaches to discourse

The examples in this section reveal some important similarities, and differences, among the approaches to be discussed in the book. I have chosen examples used by those scholars who were instrumental in developing an approach; sometimes these examples also reflected, or led to, controversy that motivated the development of theory and methodology within each approach. Since other kinds of data and other ways of presenting data (including methods of transcription and analysis) have developed within each approach, the examples here might not seem exactly like those from more recent literature representing the different perspectives, e.g. conversation analysts now pay much more attention to transcription than will be illustrated here. But rather than try to reflect current diversity within an approach through these examples, I want to reflect (at least in part) the most salient features, and the conceptual core, of each approach. Finally, as noted above, the examples here are from seminal works in each perspective: thus, they also suggest the sort of data that first prompted scholars to begin to think about language in a different way.

My presentation of approaches to discourse (part II of the book) begins with the *speech act* approach to discourse (chapter 3). Two philosophers, John Austin and John Searle, developed speech act theory from the basic insight that language is used not just to describe the world, but to perform a range of other actions that can be indicated in the performance of the utterance itself. For example, the utterance "I promise to be there tomorrow" performs the act of "promising." The utterance "The grass is green" performs the act of "asserting." An utterance may also perform more than one act, as illustrated in (1).

(1) SPEAKER: Can you pass the salt?
     HEARER: /passes the salt/

S's utterance *Can you pass the salt?* can be understood as both a question (about H's ability) and a request (for H to pass the salt to S). Although these two understandings are largely separable by context (the former associated, for example, with tests of physical ability, the latter with dinner table talk), this utterance has also been labelled an indirect speech act whose illocutionary force is an outcome of the relationship between two different speech acts (e.g. Searle 1975; compare the analyses in Clark 1979; Davison 1975; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Gordon and Lakoff 1975; Green 1975).

The speech act approach to discourse focuses upon knowledge of underlying conditions for production and interpretation of acts through words. In (1), we saw that words may perform more than one action at a time and that contexts

(hypothetical contexts supplied along with hypothetical utterances) may help to separate multiple functions of utterances from one another. The literal meanings of words and the contexts in which they occur may interact in our knowledge of the conditions underlying the realization of acts and the inter-pretation of acts. Although speech act theory was not first developed as a means of analyzing discourse, particular issues in speech act theory (e.g. the problems of indirect speech acts, multifunctionality and context dependence illustrated in (1)) lead to discourse analysis. Speech act theory itself also provides a means by which to segment texts, and thus a framework for defining units that could then be combined into larger structures.

The approach to discourse that I am calling *interactional sociolinguistics* (chapter 4) has very diverse origins, for it stems from anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, and shares the concerns of all three fields with culture, society, and language. Some interactional approaches (especially those influenced by John Gumperz) focus on how people from different cultures may share gram-matical knowledge of a language, but differently contextualize what is said such that very different messages are produced. Other interactional approaches (especially those influenced by Erving Goffman) focus on how language is situated in particular circumstances of social life, and on how it adds (or reflects) different types of meaning (e.g. expressive, instrumental) and struc-ture (e.g. interactional, institutional) to those circumstances. (2) is an example (from Gumperz 1982a: 30) that illustrates the interactional approach.

(2) Following an informal graduate seminar at a major university, a black student approached the instructor, who was about to leave the room accompanied by several other black and white students, and said:
  a Could I talk to you for a minute? I'm gonna apply for a fellowship and I was wondering if I could get a recommendation?
The instructor replied:
  b OK. Come along to the office and tell me what you want to do.
As the instructor and the rest of the group left the room, the black student said, turning his head ever so slightly to the other students:
  c Ahma git me a gig! (Rough gloss: "I'm going to get myself some support.")

(2) is a report of an actual interchange. In addition to what is said (lines a, b, and c), the example itself includes the context of the interchange (e.g. the physical setting, social roles, relationship of speech to other activity) and other information about what participants are doing (e.g. the physical stance of the interactants). The example also replicates what is said in a way that reveals the use of a particular variety of speech. (Many of Gumperz's own examples, as well as other interactional analyses, rely upon a more precise transcription of linguistic, including prosodic, detail.) Gumperz's analysis of the utterance *Ahma git me a gig!* focuses upon how interpretations of the speaker's intent are related to different linguistic qualities of the utterance (e.g. phonological

and lexical variants) as well as the way the utterance is contextually embedded (e.g. what activities it follows, to whom it is directed). These interpretations are gathered by asking listeners (including, but not limited to, those present during the actual interchange) what they thought the speaker meant to convey, and relating those situated inferences to the means by which the speaker actually presented the utterance. As (2) thus illustrates, the interactional approach relies upon actual utterances in social context: the focus of analysis is how interpretation and interaction are based upon the interrelationship of social and linguistic meanings.

The *ethnography of communication* (chapter 5) is an approach to discourse that is based in anthropology, and it shares with much traditional anthropology a concern for holistic explanations of meaning and behavior. Much of the impetus for this approach was Dell Hymes's challenge to Chomsky's well known refocusing of linguistic theory on the explanation of competence, i.e. tacit knowledge of the abstract rules of language. What Hymes proposed instead was that scholarship focus on communicative competence: the tacit social, psychological, cultural, and linguistic knowledge governing appropriate use of language (including, but not limited to, grammar). Communicative competence includes knowledge of how to engage in everyday conversation as well as other culturally constructed speech events (e.g. prayer, public oratory). (3) is an example that illustrates the inclusive thrust of the ethnography of communication – so inclusive that cultural interpretation and difference permeates even what seems to be so basic a notion as what "counts as" communication. (This example, quoted from Hallowell 1964: 64, is cited in Hymes 1972a.)

(3) An informant told me that many years before he was sitting in a tent one afternoon during a storm, together with an old man and his wife. There was one clap of thunder after another. Suddenly the old man turned to his wife and asked, "Did you hear what was said?" "No", she replied, "I didn't catch it." My informant, an acculturated [Ojibwa] Indian, told me he did not know at first what the old man and his wife referred to. It was, of course, the thunder. The old man thought that one of the Thunder Birds had said something to him. He was reacting to this sound in the same way as he would respond to a human being, whose words he did not understand.

Hymes (following Hallowell's discussion) uses this example to point out that even so fundamental a notion as "communication" cannot be assumed to be constant across cultures. Cultural conceptions of communication are deeply intertwined with conceptions of person, cultural values, and world knowledge – such that instances of communication behavior are never free of the cultural belief and action systems in which they occur. Other ethnographic analyses focus on how grammar itself reflects cultural knowledge and action systems (e.g. Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990); still others focus on communication through other verbal media (e.g. Feld 1982 on weeping) or even on the social

distribution and meaning of silence (Basso 1972; Bauman 1974; Philips 1985; Saville-Troike 1982). Like the example in (3), such analyses depend upon extensive familiarity with speakers and with their culture. They also depend upon the analysis of what is particular about each act of communication – particular to a people, to a setting, and so on. Finally, they all seek to locate each particularity within a set of universally available possibilities, but at the same time, to build those possible generalizations from a representative collection of particular instances.

A *pragmatic* approach to discourse (chapter 6) is based primarily on the philosophical ideas of H. P. Grice. Grice proposed distinctions between different types of meaning and argued that general maxims of cooperation provide inferential routes to a speaker's communicative intention. Pragmatics is most concerned with analyzing speaker meaning at the level of utterances and this often amounts to a sentence, rather than text, sized unit of language use. But since an utterance is, by definition, situated in a context (including a linguistic context, i.e. a text), pragmatics often ends up including discourse analyses and providing means of analyzing discourse along the way. (4) is an example that illustrates the interplay between cooperation and inference so critical to a Gricean approach. (4 is from Grice 1975: 51.)

(4) A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.
    B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York.

Like the speech act example in (1), the prototypical pragmatics example is a constructed utterance in a constructed context. The issue driving the construction and analysis of (4) is the lack of obvious connection between A's *Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days* and B's *He has been paying a lot of visits to New York*. Grice points out that the lack of connection does not prevent us from trying to interpret B's utterance as cooperative at a level of understanding not readily available from the meanings of the words. What hearers do is supplement the literal meaning of utterances with an assumption of human rationality and cooperation: these allow B to infer that A has implicated that Smith has a girlfriend in New York. In other words, despite the lack of connection between A's and B's remarks, A implicates that which he must be assumed to believe (Smith has a girlfriend in New York) in order to maintain the assumption that he is following the maxim of relation (i.e. being relevant). Thus, what Gricean pragmatics suggests is that human beings work with very minimal assumptions about one another and their conduct, and that they use those assumptions as the basis from which to draw highly specific inferences about one another's intended meanings.

Conversation analysis (chapter 7) offers an approach to discourse that is also based in philosophy, but in the perspective known as phenomenology, associated with Alfred Schutz. Its underlying concerns were more extensively articulated by a sociologist, Harold Garfinkel, who developed the approach known as "ethnomethodology," and then applied specifically to conversation, most

notably by Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson. Conversation analysis (and ethnomethodology) differs from other branches of sociology because rather than analyzing social order *per se*, it seeks to discover the methods by which members of a society produce a sense of social order. Conversation is a source of much of our sense of social order, e.g. it produces many of the typifications underlying our notions of social role. Conversation also exhibits its own kind of order and manifests its own sense of structure.

The example in (5) is an exchange (a telephone call opening) that seems to violate a telephone rule that the person answering the phone is the one who talks first. As Schegloff (1972a) makes clear, however, (5) actually illustrates the workings of a deeper rule of sequencing in talk. (The example is from Schegloff 1972a: 356.)

(5)   (Police make call)
      (Receiver is lifted, and there is a one second pause)
      POLICE: Hello.
      OTHER: American Red Cross.
      POLICE: Hello, this is Police Headquarters . . . er, Officer Stratton (etc.).

(5) is the only case in Schegloff's large corpus of telephone openings in which the Police (the party who had made the phone call) talk first. Although this case seems unusual, Schegloff uses it (treats it "seriously," p. 356) as the basis from which to search for a deeper formulation about telephone openings and about sequences in general. He ends up suggesting that (5) is a summons–answer sequence. The telephone ring resulting from the call made by the Police in (5) is a summons. A summons opens a conditional relevance for a second part of a sequence, an answer. Although a called party typically answers the telephone ring issuing the summons by saying *Hello?*, there is no such answer in (5): "Receiver is lifted, and there is a one second pause." The Police's "Hello" is thus a response to the "empty" answer slot: "Hello" redoes the summons. Far from being an anomaly, then, (5) reflects the regular operation of adjacency pairs in general and summons–answer sequences in particular: the sequencing of moves provides for a coordinated entry into the conversation, and for an orderly exchange of turns within the conversation.

As (5) illustrates, conversation analysis is like interactional sociolinguistics in its concern with the problem of social order, and how language both creates, and is created by, social context. Both approaches also focus on detailed analysis of particular sequences of utterances that have actually occurred. But unlike the interactional sociolinguistic willingness to judge participants' interpretation and intent with the help of contextual information, conversation analysts seek generalizations about context – and about social conduct and social life – *within* the progression of utterances themselves.

A *variationist* approach to discourse (chapter 8) stems from studies of linguistic variation and change. Both the initial methodology and the theory underlying such studies are those of William Labov. (Labov and Fanshel

(1977) have also applied a perspective to discourse that is more similar to speech act theory, i.e. "comprehensive discourse analysis.") Fundamental assumptions of variationist studies are that linguistic variation (i.e. heterogeneity) is patterned both socially and linguistically, and that such patterns can be discovered only through systematic investigation of a speech community. Although traditional variationist studies have been limited to semantically equivalent variants (what Labov 1972a calls "alternative ways of saying the same thing"), such studies have also been extended to texts.

An important part of the variationist approach to discourse is the discovery of formal patterns in texts (often narratives) and the analysis of how such patterns are constrained by the text. (6) is an example (from Labov 1972b: 387) that illustrates. (Since Labov's introduction to this example helps to illustrate the approach, I include this in 6.)

(6) One of the most dramatic danger-of-death stories was told by a retired postman on the Lower East Side: his brother had stabbed him in the head with a knife. He concludes:
And the doctor just says, "Just about this much more," he says, "and you'd a been dead."

Labov uses this extract as part of his discussion of the basic structure of narrative. The utterance being presented is a type of evaluation: the means by which narrators highlight different aspects of a reported experience as a way of revealing the point of the story. Although evaluations are sometimes separate sections of stories, they are also distributed throughout narrative and embedded within narrative clauses themselves. (Narrative clauses are typically event clauses that report "what happened.") Embedded evaluations rely upon deviations from the simple syntactic structure typical of a narrative clause. The evaluation in (6), for example, illustrates an evaluative device that Labov (1972b: 387) calls a comparator, a functional classification that includes "negatives, futures, modals, quasimodals, questions, imperatives, or-clauses, superlatives, and comparatives."

As illustrated in (6), a variationist approach to discourse utilizes some of the basic tools of linguistic analysis: it segments texts into sections, labels those sections as part of a structure, and assigns functions to those sections. This approach thus allows more context independence (i.e. a greater degree of autonomy for "text" in relation to context) than would be allowed, for example, in interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, or conversation analysis. An indication of this in (6) is Labov's willingness to discuss the evaluating clause as *separate* from the rest of the story – to treat it as an example of a structural unit and functional type that can be extracted from its story for comparisons with other evaluative devices. The variationist approach also integrates traditional linguistic categories into a framework of textual analysis.

In sum, the examples in this section revealed some important features of the approaches to be discussed in this book: what count as data, what problems

and questions motivate analysis, how to address or resolve a problem. To oversimplify a bit, speech act theory focuses on communicative acts performed through speech: data are typically constructed utterances in hypothetical contexts that are chosen to illustrate the interplay between text and context that mutually informs production and interpretation of the acts performed through words. Interactional sociolinguistics focuses on the social and linguistic meanings created during interaction: although hearers draw inferences about speakers' intent (as in speech act theory and pragmatics), the inferences are considerably broader and more varied and they are based on a wide array of verbal and nonverbal cues that are part of cultural repertoires for signalling meaning (and can be discovered only through the collection of actual utterances). The ethnography of communication focuses on language and communication as cultural behavior: the status and significance of any particular act can be discovered only as part of a matrix of more general meanings, beliefs, and values that extend far beyond the knowledge of the grammar of one's language. Since such matrices pervade and organize a great deal of life within a particular society – and since they are culturally relative – the ethnography of communication requires extensive fieldwork within a community as well as comparisons between communities.

Pragmatics focuses on meaning, context, and communication of constructed utterances in hypothetical contexts. The communicative meaning of a particular utterance is derived through general assumptions about human rationality and conduct; together with the literal meaning of utterances, these assumptions are the basis from which to draw highly specific inferences about intended meanings. Conversation analysis focuses on sequential structures in conversation: the mechanics of conversation provide a basis through which social order (including a sense of "context") is constructed. Although conversation analysts are careful to transcribe the details of utterances, they pay little attention to linguistic categories of sound, structure, or meaning. Finally, variation theory focuses on structural categories within texts and the way syntactic structure (and variation) helps to define and realize those structures. Like the other approaches (except for speech act theory and pragmatics), variation analysis requires the close analysis of what is actually said. Although it pays close attention to linguistic structure, it relies less upon non-linguistic (contextual) detail than interactional sociolinguistics or ethnography of communication. In the next section, I describe in more detail how the rest of this book will develop the description of, and comparison among, the approaches that I have just introduced.

3   Plan of the book

Chapters 3 through 8 present the six approaches to discourse analysis just introduced – one chapter for each approach. Within each approach, I provide

a general background with discussion of key issues and critical concepts. My description of each approach will focus primarily upon the work of scholars who have been most central to the development of that approach. However, because the approaches to be described have been so influential not only in discourse analysis, but also for the other domains that they more directly address (as noted above), a substantial body of work (supportive and critical, faithful and revisionist) has developed from the original insights upon which I mostly depend. I do not mean to slight these later works, and I make reference to them in the course of discussion of specific points. However, it is because the original works have spurred so much scholarly discussion and research that I want to take them as the source of the approaches to discourse to be developed in my own discussion.

3.1 Describing different approaches to discourse analysis

My first task in this book is the description of the six different approaches to discourse analysis noted above. Although these approaches often overlap in the work of particular scholars, we have already seen that they differ in several important ways. What underlies my decision to differentiate these six approaches is what I believe to be their most significant characteristic: they have very different origins.[2] The origin of an approach provides different theoretical and metatheoretical premises that continue to influence assumptions, concepts, and methods. For example, different origins may be responsible for different assumptions and beliefs about language – assumptions about the stability of linguistic meaning, the role of speaker intentionality, the degree to which language is designed for communicative purposes, and the contribution of linguistic meaning to interactive meaning.

Other differences that can be at least partially traced to different origins include beliefs about methods for collecting and analyzing data. For example, some approaches focus intensively on a few fragments of talk (e.g. interactional sociolinguistics), others focus on distributions of discourse items across a wide range of texts (e.g. variationists). Some require a great deal of social, cultural, and personal information about interlocutors and may use interlocutors as informants in analysis of their own talk (e.g. ethnography of communication); others assume an idealized speaker/hearer whose specific social, cultural, or personal characteristics do not enter into participant strategies for building text at all (e.g. pragmatics). Methodological differences such as these are due, partially, to different theoretical assumptions – assumptions that are based in the different origins noted above. If it is assumed, for example, that linguistic meaning is less important to interactive meaning than are sequential structures of talk, then an analyst would pay little attention to linguistic form and structure *per se* (e.g. as in conversation analysis). In short, no methodological preferences are reached in a vacuum: they are all the product of more general beliefs in what constitutes data and what counts as evidence and "proof."

Finally, how a perspective developed may continue to provide a set of different practical interests or ultimate goals in addition to (or even, instead of) the analysis of discourse *per se*. This may help us understand why particular findings are expressed in a certain manner (e.g. through abstract rules), interpreted in a certain way (e.g. in relation to cross-cultural communication), or seen as relevant to somewhat different issues (e.g. to semantics rather than linguistic variation).

Also included within each chapter is an extensive sample analysis showing how each approach can be applied to a specific problem. The sample analyses are quite detailed for several reasons. First, the approaches being discussed are supposed to *analyze* discourse (thus the label "discourse analysis," not "discourse theory" or "discourse studies"). It is important, then, to see how they can be applied to concrete problems and to translate the more general overviews within each chapter (and then in a more abstract, comparative mode, in part III; see below) into empirical tools. Second, on a more personal level, I believe that the best way to learn about something is to see how it works. It is in this spirit that I try to provide an account of how each approach proceeds (not so much what it finds, but how it goes about "doing" its finding) and I would encourage readers to do the same either through sample problems suggested at the end of each chapter or through problems of their own making. For these purposes, I strongly encourage readers who want to use this book as a "manual" to have available data of some sort (for suggestions, see appendix 1; some data samples are provided in appendix 3).

We will see that the sample analyses draw upon data in ways not always typical of the approaches being illustrated, e.g. I have never seen a Gricean pragmatic analysis of referring terms in a story (although this is what I present in chapter 6). I am intentionally relying upon the use of transcriptions of language use (see discussion of sociolinguistic interviews in appendix 1, also chapters 5 and 8), simply because I believe that the approaches to be discussed allow (indeed, demand) such data not only if they are to be seen as comparable, but if they are to be examined for signs of synthesis. The data that I use are primarily from sociolinguistic interviews. Elsewhere (Schiffrin 1987a), I have argued that sociolinguistic interviews provide data well suited to the different purposes of discourse analysis. We will have a chance to examine sociolinguistic interviews themselves as discourse – their status as a kind of "mixed genre," i.e. a mix of interview and conversation – in the ethnographic chapter, chapter 5. That chapter will also draw upon a small set of tape-recorded library reference interviews. Appendix 1 provides further discussion of how different corpora can provide data for the analysis of discourse.

In addition to drawing upon data in ways that may differ from the approaches being illustrated, I will also use discourse transcription conventions that may differ from those used by other approaches. Specifically, I will not adopt the transcription conventions used by most interactional sociolinguists for my analysis of data illustrating that approach (chapter 4); nor will I use those conventions used by conversation analysts (in chapter 7). Rather, I will

use a single set of conventions in all the analyses, the one I use in my own work (e.g. Schiffrin 1987a), not because I believe that it is best (in fact, it provides no way to represent many of the qualities that can be represented by the others), but because I want to use one system throughout, and this is the one with which I am familiar. Readers interested in selecting a system for their own use, or in comparing different conventions, will find four different sets of conventions in appendix 2.

Each approach to be discussed adopts a slightly different view of discourse, and provides a different (sometimes radically different) way of analyzing utterances. Indeed, the term "discourse analysis" is not used by all of the perspectives to be discussed. Although variationist approaches do refer to discourse (or sometimes, text) analysis, pragmatics and speech act theory refer instead to analyses of "language in use" or "in context"; "conversation analysis" is a term used by scholars with an ethnomethodological orientation; interactional approaches refer to "interactional sociolinguistics"; ethnographic approaches share with pragmatics and speech act theory a focus on "language in use" or "in context" (although their conception of "use" and "context" differs from that of the philosophically based approaches). These differences in terminology do capture slightly different domains of interest (both analytical and theoretical). Finally, as noted earlier, not all the approaches to discourse to be reviewed explicitly concern themselves with discourse; even with those that do, there are often other wider (or overlapping) domains of interest. The broader topics to which discourse is seen as relevant have important influences on the way in which its analysis is approached.

3.2 Comparing different approaches to discourse

In addition to describing different approaches to discourse, I will also compare those approaches. I will try to facilitate a comparison among approaches in two ways: through the focus of my sample analyses in chapters 3 through 8 (section 3.2.1), and through the discussion of key concepts and assumptions in chapters 9, 10, and 11 (section 3.2.2).

3.2.1 Ongoing comparisons: comparing sample analyses

To enhance the comparative value of my descriptions of the approaches, I have decided to orient my sample analyses around two phenomena: (a) questions (and the sequences they initiated) to be analyzed in terms of speech act theory, interactional sociolinguistics, and ethnography of communication; (b) referring expressions (in referring sequences) to be analyzed in terms of pragmatics, conversation analysis, and variation analysis. We see not only that the different approaches provide different answers to some of the same questions, but that they highlight different facets of both questions and referring expressions.

An analogy may help. Imagine that we are trying out a number of different tools (a saw, a butter knife, a screwdriver, and a pair of scissors) to accomplish one particular task (we want to cut a piece of bread). We would probably learn not only about the tools, but also about the task that we are trying to accomplish (cutting) and the material that we are handling (bread). This analogy suggests that different analyses of referring terms (or questions) may tell us something about the analytical tools provided by the approaches themselves (e.g. pragmatics, speech act theory, etc.), and reveal something interesting about question–answer sequences and referring expressions. Those who expect to find exhaustive analyses of either phenomenon, however, will be disappointed: both are vast topics to which linguists have devoted a great deal of scholarly attention. Rather, what I try to do is find particular issues pertaining to either topic that can be understood through the approach being described in each chapter.

Notice, then, that not *exactly* the same problems or issues will be addressed in each chapter. Returning to my "breadcutting" analogy, for a moment, I noted above that we would learn about three things if we were trying different tools to accomplish one particular task: the task we are trying to accomplish, the material we are handling, and the tools we are using. One way of organizing this book would have been to keep the task completely constant, e.g. analyze the distribution of "there is" constructions (as in chapter 7), or keep the material completely constant, e.g. use a single episode for data. I felt, however, that this would have been difficult since different approaches define even what seems to be the "same" topic differently. (It also would have resulted in an overly redundant – and perhaps boring – set of chapters.) Indeed, even though we will see some of the same sample utterances reappear in different chapters as they are used and reused to make different points, I would maintain that even though the utterances might seem like the "same" examples, they should not necessarily be interpreted as the same "data." In the sample analyses, then, I decided to maintain some constancy (the two general phenomena) and allow some diversity (different aspects of the two general phenomena).

Although there are many other issues and problems that discourse analysts address in their research, I have chosen questions and referring expressions for several reasons. First, questions and referring expressions have both been said to be central concerns of discourse analysis. Question–answer sequences, for example, are a paradigm example of adjacency pairs (a construct central to conversation analysis (chapter 7)): adjacency pairs not only illustrate the sequential foundation of discourse, but play a key role in the view of discourse as fundamentally organized on a pairwise (two part) basis. Questions are also puzzling in and of themselves: some sentences that might be syntactically identified as questions are functionally not questions at all: one could not respond with just *Yes* to the syntactic question *Can you pass the salt?* (our earlier example 1) without being considered rude, making a joke, or having misunderstood. Similarly, some sentences that would not be syntactically

identified as questions act like questions in that they "expect" an answer. A therapist's *I notice you're late again*, for example, is understood to demand an explanation (an answer) as certainly as *Why are you late again?* Examples such as these suggest not only that questions are difficult to define, but that what "counts as" a question (chapter 3) is strongly tied to the interactional (chapter 4) and institutional (chapter 5) contexts in which it is produced.

The study of referring expressions also plays a central role in forming some scholars' views of what discourse analysis is about: "the study of the functions of syntax and reference (e.g. matters of definiteness/indefiniteness) has come to represent, for certain linguists, the proper domain of discourse analysis" (Prince 1988: 166). One reason why discourse analysts are concerned with referring terms is that the processes by which expressions allow one to refer to an entity (person, thing, concept, etc.) in the universe of discourse involve not only speakers (their intentions, actions, and knowledge) but also hearers. Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986), for example, speak of referring as a "collaborative process": they suggest that although a speaker can propose a referent, the identification of the referent needs to be seen as an outcome of speaker-hearer interaction (see also Martinich 1984: 161-2). Establishing a referent that a hearer can identify also involves what Green (1989: 47) calls "the cooperative exploitation of supposed mutual knowledge" – knowledge that is inferrable not just from our world knowledge (our "encyclopedic" knowledge), but from the information made accessible to us from both text (prior and current) and context.

There are other, more specific reasons why I have chosen these two particular areas of research as a basis for comparison among different approaches to discourse analysis. Question–answer pairs capture the syntagmatic thrust of discourse analysis (i.e. questions and answers are sequentially organized) and referring expressions capture the paradigmatic thrust of discourse analysis (i.e. speakers refer to an entity by choosing among various expressions). Nevertheless, analyses of both question–answer sequences and referring expressions also show that sequential location is interdependent with the options provided within a particular sequential slot. The context of a question has important bearings on how we ask and answer that question. The way we refer to something is influenced by where in a discourse we are making that reference, and whether a particular referring expression is an initial (or subsequent) mention of an entity.

3.2.2 Concluding comparisons: assumptions and concepts

In addition to the comparisons available through the descriptions and sample analyses themselves, other comparisons will be made towards the end of the book, following the specific descriptions of each approach. The main part of this concluding comparison will be centered on three issues that are central to discourse analysis and about which discourse analysts must make assumptions:

the relationship between structure and function, the relationship between text and context, and the nature of communication. I believe that these issues are critical to discourse analysis, and that all approaches take a stand (albeit often implicitly) on the relationship between structure and function, text and context, and discourse and communication, simply because these conceptual distinctions are all variants of the dichotomy between what is considered part of language and what is not (see chapter 2). We see that the approaches take surprisingly different positions on issues such as the interplay of structure and function (chapter 9), the degree to which text and context can penetrate one another (chapter 10), and the role of intention and intersubjectivity in communication (chapter 11).

My comparison among approaches also responds to more general issues in discourse analysis and what seem to be two developing needs. We already know a great deal about some very basic discourse phenomena, e.g. turn-taking, repair, topic organization, story telling, discourse markers, conversational inference and style. There now seems to be a need to move from empirical studies of how we use language to (a) the development of models and theories that help us organize our knowledge about how discourse works, and (b) links between our discourse models/theories and our models/theories of language in general. I believe that a less fragmented vision of discourse analysis may very well help us in these endeavors. The debate about structure and function in discourse (alluded to above), for example, could then be considered as one variant of the more general debate about the relationship between linguistic structure (the phonological and syntactic structures making up what is typically thought of as "grammar") and language use (the way people use grammatical resources to communicate with one another).

Given the wide variety of studies that are considered to be discourse analysis, is there any theoretical or conceptual unity to this inquiry? Are there similarities among approaches that override their differences? For example, one of the earliest discourse analysts, Zellig Harris (1951), proposed that the goal of discourse analysis is to discover how it is that discourse differs from random sequences. Many more recent analysts propose a surprisingly similar goal. Michael Stubbs (1983: 15) states: "People are quite able to distinguish between a random list of sentences and a coherent text, and it is the principles which underlie this recognition of coherence which are the topic of study for discourse analysts." It is important not only to know whether such a goal is shared by all discourse analytic approaches, but also to know whether strategies for accomplishing such a goal are shared: Harris, for example, confined his analytic methods strictly to formal patterns within the text, whereas Stubbs includes extensive information from outside of the text.

Chapter 12 is the concluding chapter. In addition to proposing some very general similarities among the approaches, I also try to utilize the two broad problems to which my sample analyses pertain in a still more general way. Questions are considered in chapters on speech act theory, interactional sociolinguistics, and ethnography of communication; referring expressions are

considered in chapters on pragmatics, conversation analysis, and variation analysis. As I will make clear in chapter 12, the order of chapters, and thus the type of inquiry for each area of empirical focus, is not random: they reflect a transition (broadly speaking) from a focus upon the individual (whether the actions, knowledge, or intentions of a self) to a focus upon interaction (how self and other together construct what is said, meant, and done) to a focus upon the semiotic systems shared and used by self and other during their interactions (language, society, and culture). An ability both to build such transitions (from self to self/other to shared semiotic systems) into one's theory, and to allow and account for them in one's practice, is a crucial part of a discourse analysis that seeks to integrate what speech act theory, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, pragmatics, conversation analysis, and variation analysis can offer, both individually and together, to the analysis of utterances.

Notes

1 Van Dijk (1985) shows that discourse analysis really has a rather long history – if one allows classical rhetoric to be considered as discourse analysis.
2 Despite basing my identification and selection of approaches primarily on historical factors, I also believe that my selection is representative of much of the work being done in discourse analysis today. Furthermore, other reviews (that are not as historically based) also differentiate largely the same approaches: Taylor and Cameron (1987), for example, compare social psychological, speech act, exchange structure, Gricean pragmatic, and ethnomethodological approaches to discourse.