

Using Discourse Theory for Analysis Social Text and Context of Thought

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to discourse theory for text analysis and social context of thought. How do social situations influence language use and discourse? This article is the first writing to present a multidisciplinary theory of context. Traditionally, context was defined as "objective" social variables (such as gender or class of Thinkers). This analysis shows how context analysis may be applied in, and be inspired by, political science. The main focus in this article is upon those aspects of text analysis that relate to the ideational function of language and to ideational meanings - to 'constructing social reality'. A desirable and anticipated effect of the study of discourse is also the development of an open and tolerant mind which will eventually lead to a better understanding of the different and varied manifestations of language, culture and communication in human society.

Keywords: discourse, political thinking, text, social context.

Introduction

The basic assumption here is that the construction of sociology takes place within the context of the discourse of modernity. It is thus a matter of discursive construction. The discourse of modernity opened up the space or field and thus made and, indeed, still makes possible the construction of sociology. Political thinking tries to unravel social and political complexities and is directed toward human beings' endeavors to establish a political society (Dabashi, 1993). Therefore, the general characteristic of any political thinking is a comprehensive description

and definition of the social interactions human beings have in their encounter with political life. In the history of Islamic and Iranian political thinking, due to the existence of an all-inclusive whole which dominates all aspects of the society and social and individual life, namely Islam as a religion, political thinking has had a religious quality. The theory of discourse became a possibility as a result of the so-called 'linguistic' (Rorty 1967) or 'pragmatic turn' (Evaldsson, 2005) in twentieth-century philosophy and the philosophy of the sciences which also affected the human and social sciences. It provides the framework within which societal problems are first collectively identified and defined, and then addressed from the point of view of finding a collectively acceptable solution. The identification, definition and solving of societal problems involve the production of knowledge of various kinds. The participants – social actors, collective agents and social movements, but also social scientists, particularly sociologists – take part in the production of collective interpretations and definitions, explanations and theories, and orienting knowledge, thus carrying the process of the self-interpretation and self-diagnosis of society. The societal discourse produces general, collectively shared social knowledge as well as more systematic and specialized moral philosophical and social scientific or sociological knowledge. These different types of knowledge all play a part in structuring and organizing the experience of the participants and providing cultural resources, such as a horizon of expectations, orientations and goals.

This article cover a range of actors, causes, and contexts, but they share a concern with the interaction of challengers and authorities over a more extended time period. Each offers a professorial analysis of political opportunities, politics, culture. It is here that the ultimate rationale of discourse and conversation analysis should be assessed, namely in the multiple social, political and cultural functions of text and talk in society. It is precisely the socio cognitive interface that links such forms of language use to their social and communicative situations that has been missing so far in the increasingly complex theories of language, discourse, conversation and communication of the last decades.

Methodology

The discourse analytical methodology that emerges from these assumptions focuses on a discourse or discursive field in the sense of the structured context of the constructive activities of collective actors who produce and reproduce reality. This methodology provides the framework for the analysis of the construction of sociology within the context of the discourse of modernity in the remainder of this study. The present study uses a historical analysis method. Accordingly, this study is characterized neither a text-oriented nor a context-oriented study, but one based on an amalgam of both. According to this combined approach, thoughts are born out of interactions between text and context which makes understanding thoughts with regard to these interactions indispensable (McGuire, 2002; Tully, 1988. According to this methodological approach, the orientations of contemporary scholars are, on the one hand, born out of the sociopolitical conditions of this age and on the other hand, they are influenced by their particular mentality and thinking which, as religious texts, are based on the Koran and ..(Sunnah.

What is context?

In order to account for the many possible meanings and definitions of Social Context and to clearly explain what we mean by Situated Social Context, we elaborated the following four-dimensional Social Context definition space, where each specific definition of Social Context is characterized by its spatial, temporal, inference and target people's characteristics. (King, 2000). The same is true for the notion of "context." Perhaps seeing it as slightly more formal than related concepts, such as "situation," "circumstances" or "environment," we use the notion of "context" whenever we want to indicate that some phenomenon, event, action or discourse needs to be seen or studied in relationship to its environment, that is, its "surrounding" conditions and consequences. (Van Dijk, 2004) The clearest index of this context is represented by the cultural or cognitive structures or frame dominant in relation to the issue at stake at the time. Looking at discourse in terms of its twofold phase structure punctuated by a critical turning point, however, it typically moves between two semantic worlds. We thus not only describe but especially also explain the occurrence or properties of some focal phenomenon in terms of some aspects of its context. (Van Dijk, 2008)

Also, there seems to be a mutual relationship of conditional influence between events and their contexts. We see that the notion of "context" is frequently used in order to place or explain things. One puts or sees things in their "proper context," and we are often urged not to take or describe things "out of context." This is also why news report schemata in the press typically have a special Context category that places current events in their political, social or historical context (Van Dijk, 1988).

In the study of literature and the arts, at various moments of history, scholars were urged to study works of art and their structures "in their own right," and to ignore the social context or psychological conditions of the author. Eventually, such "isolationist" or "autonomous" positions (l'art pour l'art, formalism, New Criticism, close reading, etc., Bell-Villada, 1996; Gibbons, 1979; King, 2000) were rejected in favor of a more "contextual" approach that accounts for many properties of works of art in terms of psychological, social, cultural or historical "circumstances." This does not mean that we should be less precise and systematic in describing the structures of a poem or a novel, but our understanding is surely more complete when we are able to describe and also explain many more properties of such literary texts in terms of their various contexts. Contextualization is a fundamental part of our understanding of human conduct, in general, and of literature and other texts and talk, in particular. Indeed, contexts are called that way, because etymologically they come with "texts." (Van Dijk, 2008)

One does not need much historical knowledge of linguistics to know that the discipline for decades was limited to a "formalist," "structuralist" or "transformational" study of signs, sounds, words, sentences, meanings or speech acts (see, e.g., the chapters in Aronoff, 2003). In such studies lip service tends to be paid, if at all, and typically in introductory chapters only, to the fact that language and language use are of course social phenomena, and need to be studied in their social and cultural contexts. Few linguistic schools, originally interested only in

grammar, have explored the role of context, except systemic and other functional approaches, to which we shall turn in Chapter 2 – see, for instance, the work of Givo'n (see, e.g., Givo'n, 2005).

Discourse studies

The emerging discourse studies of the 1960s brought important new ideas to the study of language and communication (Van Dijk, 1985, 1997). However, many of its first contributions were rather structuralist and formal. Early text grammars often emulated generative sentence grammars (Van Dijk, 1972), although with attempts to incorporate a formal account of context as part of a pragmatic component (Van Dijk, 1977). The second major starting point for the development of the theory of discourse was provided by the German tradition of transcendental hermeneutics, particularly as represented by Karl-Otto Apel (1950; 1973) against the background of Heidegger compared and contrasted with Wittgenstein.

Early genre studies (e.g. of narrative and argumentation) generally followed a formal paradigm, and seldom used more contextual approaches. The cognitive psychology of text processing later offered insight into what could be called the “cognitive context” of discourse, but – with some exceptions – would do so itself in terms of a socially isolated mind (Van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983). Language is the unique and irreducible medium in and through which it is possible for human beings to constantly integrate a universalistic and hence eccentric viewpoint with their bodily-bound, perspectival world views (King, 2000)

These first discourse analyses made one step forward in the direction of an account of context, but mostly limited such a context to the verbal context or co-text (Peto'fi, 1971) for units of language or language use. Many studies of “context,” both in linguistics as well as in other more formal approaches, still limit this notion to the “verbal context” of previous (and sometimes following) words, sentences, propositions, utterances or turns of conversation. Foucault's employment of the concept of discourse dates from the first of the three phases of his intellectual development, his quasi-structuralist ‘archaeological phase. His central idea was the linguistic nominal's one according to which ‘things attain to existence only in so far as they are able to form the elements of a signifying system’ (Foucault 1970, 328).

We had to wait until the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s before discourse structures were more systematically studied in their social, historical and cultural contexts – something already done in part in sociolinguistics (Labov, 1972a, 1972b) and in the ethnography of speaking (Bauman and Sherzer, 1974; see below, and for greater detail Society and Discourse). Discourse for the first time played a crucially central role in *The Order of Things* (1970), originally published in 1966, but Foucault systematically theorized his historical discourse analysis later in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). Foucault initially developed his concept of discourse along these quasistructuralist lines for an entirely plausible critical purpose.

In the course of time, therefore, many of the characteristic features of his position have attracted criticism. Among those worth mentioning are the following four. First, various critics

(Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 79; Hoy 1987, 4; Fink-Eitel 1989, 57) many critics have attacked Foucault's historically relativist conception of discourse, to which is tied a critique of his consequent inability to deal with the problem of truth or, more broadly, validity (Habermas 1987b, 238–65; 1987c, 108; Taylor 1986). The transition that difficulties such as these compelled Foucault to make from a semiological analysis of cultural knowledge systems to a power-oriented social analysis involved not merely a radical reversal of position, as many critics hold (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982).

Social Theory

Social action that makes a difference depends for its effect not on the subjective meanings, intentions or goals of the actors involved but rather on being objectively defined in the social situation as significant action. According to new social movement theorists, identity movements seek to transform dominant cultural patterns, or gain recognition for new social identities, by employing "expressive" strategies (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1985, 1989; Touraine 1981). In the course of the production and reproduction of society, times of relative stability and order are followed by times of instability and disorder, times of certainty by times of uncertainty, and so forth ad infinitum (Evers and Nowotny 1987, 17–25).

This context takes the form of public communication or discourse. The actors and observers are all components of this public domain, and these components are all related to each other through the communication that takes place within that context. Such movements challenge dominant cultural norms, seek to democratize relationships, and operate on a different logic from "instrumental" movements (King, 2000). The development of NSMs is "ultimately rooted in structural and cultural transformations that characterize all Western European countries" (Van Dijk, 2008). Discourse in this sense not only allows us to gain access to society and to grasp the process of its construction.

A set of related problems present in the way sociologists generally deal with the history of the discipline includes the myth of the creation or founding of sociology, often regarded in a serial fashion, and the myth of a lineage. A product of this kind of thinking, for instance, is the notion of the 'father of sociology', whether Auguste Comte, as is widely maintained, or more esoterically Ibn Khaldun (Conyers 1972; Restivo 1991, 25; Ritzer 1992, 8), or the baseless debate about 'the first real sociologist': Montesquieu (Gay 1969, 323), Ferguson (MacRae 1969, 27), Millar (Habermas 1969b, 216), Comte (Horn and Ward, 2004), or Durkheim and Weber

This occurs by being made a medium of communication or being thematised and thus being coordinated with one another. A characteristic effect of this tendency, which helps to account for the crucial role played by the public, is that in proportion as actions and relations are coordinated by communication, power becomes dependent on the acceptance of definitions of reality (Eder 1993a, 12). implying that new identities are either chosen or result straightforwardly from the declining significance of class, religion, and family ties in a "postindustrial" society (Kriesi and Giugni 1995; Touraine 1981). Yet the processes by which these identities are constructed and why they often take contradictory forms remain unclear. In

contrast to NSMs, instrumental movements are said to be externally oriented, aimed at achieving concrete goals, rather than challenging dominant cultural patterns or seeking the recognition of new identities .(Van Dijk, 2008)

This characterization of movements as instrumental or expressive stems in part from the conflation of goals and strategies (i.e., that instrumental strategies are irrelevant to cultural change, while expressions of identity cannot be externally directed) (.(Van Dijk, 2006)). This distinction assumes a priori the role of identity for different types of social movements, ignoring the different constructions of and roles played by identity within the same movement. Studies of the lesbian and gay movement similarly distinguish between “ethnic-identity” and “queer” strategies. Ethnic-identity strategies rely on fixed notions of identity and seek to secure recognition for that identity in the political realm (Altman 1982; Epstein 1987; Escoffier 1985; Gamson 1995; Paul 1982; Seidman 1993; Vaid 1995). Queer theorists, post-structuralists, and many feminists (King, 2000) decry what they see as the reliance of identity movements on fixed fundamentally exclusionary, notions of identity. Essentialism homogenizes groups of people who often have little in common either politically or otherwise when differences of race, class, gender, and sexual style are taken into account. For example, the category “women” typically ignores differences of race, class, and sexual orientation. Others charge that identity movements and their reliance on essentialism inhibit coalitional politics and even blame such movements for the decline of the Left (Horn and Ward, 2004).

Discourse of Modernity

The discourse of modernity emerged in the sixteenth century against the background of the breakdown of the medieval feudal order and the religiousmetaphysical worldview. The assumptions on which the sociological idea of the discourse of modernity is based admit of brief restatement. Modern society is spanned by a permanently live network of public communication in the medium of which collectively shared interpretations, definitions, meanings, knowledge and even rational disagreements are developed and revised throughout the process of its construction.

The discourse of modernity formally refers to this feature, so characteristic of modern society, of agitated public communication around a societal problem in which the collective activities of identification and definition are discursively coordinated with a view to resolving it. It thus links up with the experience and processing of social change and transformation and the ensuing problems. In contradistinction to the many local discourses continually under way, however, it does so at the macro-level of fragile public communication where society forms knowledge of itself as a whole, organises itself and takes action to determine itself. The discourse of modernity is a practical discourse of societal scope, the discourse of modern society, that is generated by public communication at the macrolevel and, in turn, coordinates and organises that very communication. The resolution of the problem requires creativity, cooperation, conflict resolution, collective opinion- and willformation – in short: permanent discourse .(Martins and Ogborn, 1977)This problem made its first appearance in the sixteenth century and

in its general thrust has since become a defining characteristic of modern society. (Horn and Ward, 2004).

Instead of organizing perception, experience, action and communication in terms of social relations or society alone, the discourse of modernity was increasingly compelled through historical developments, events and concomitant experiences to incorporate phenomena that have a bearing on the relation between society and nature. Among these phenomena are the scientific objectification, the technological manipulation and the industrial exploitation of external nature, the relation of modern human beings to their emotions and bodies, gender, and so forth. The general problem addressed by the discourse of modernity thus became collectively regarded in terms of the society-nature master frame of the late twentieth century

Construction of text

Although it is the case, as Habermas (1979) and Apel (1976) plausibly maintain from a philosophical point of view, that a final consensus is necessarily and unavoidably presupposed, communication processes or discourse cannot be sociologically analyzed directly and exclusively in terms of such a consensus. The fluid role of identity in social movements is shaped by the interaction of activists and the broader political environment, including the law; and the law shapes the values, beliefs, and preferences of activists (Auburn, 2005). When activists have recourse to the law, their agenda narrows as they pursue a conventional “politics as usual.” Similarly, Calhoun (1993) argues that “states are institutionally organized in ways that provide recognition for some identities and arenas for some conflicts and freeze others out. By contrast with this proposal by Habermas, it should be pointed out that constructivism, by its very nature, forbids the social scientist to adopt an identificatory procedure. States themselves thus shape the orientations of NSMs as well as the field of social movements more generally”(Barnhurst and Nerone, 2002).

Valocchi (1999) argues that in addition to external pressures, identities are constructed as a result of “internal processes of network building, culture making, and consciousness raising” (207). But activists also deploy identity in self-conscious, strategic ways when pursuing political and cultural goals. It requires that the whole plural range of participants relevant to a given constructive context be taken into account without any tendency to favor one and hence to identify with it. To do so would be to subvert the very constructivist perspective that the social scientist claims to be (Coupland, 2001).

Upholding. Polletta’s (1994) discussion of SNCC shows that in fighting to enfranchise poor, rural, underepresented African Americans, activists sought not only to secure recognition of a new identity but to transform dominant political and economic structures. Polletta’s work shows that constructions of identity can be strategically chosen for political and instrumental goals. The relationship between internal struggles the political context, and the opposition led activists in Vermont to pursue human rights legislation. This pursuit may have consolidated an identity but did not dictate its content or rely on an essentialist understanding of that identity. While lesbians and gay men claimed rights based on a particular identity, knew that this identity

was partially imposed from the outside, only provisionally adopted by activists, and did not adequately represent their constituents. (Martins and Ogborn, 1977)

Constructivism even requires that disagreeable social agents be included in social scientific research. From a constructivist point of view, the moral point of view or the normative reference point making critique possible admits neither of being projected beyond society nor of being tied to any one social actor or agent. It is rather treated as forming part of and being carried by the communicative or discursive process. The normative reference that serves as the foundation of critique is thus to be located in the objective features structuring the situation within which the different communication partners or discourse participants relate to one another.

Conclusion

Although it is generally recognized that context plays a fundamental role in the production, properties and comprehension of discourse, theories and analyses of context have been scarce. Contexts tend to be conceptualized intuitively in terms of properties of communicative situations, such as the gender, age, class or ethnicity of the speakers. Moreover, where the influence of context is being studied, for instance, in sociolinguistics, anthropology and Critical Discourse Analysis, it is generally assumed that these properties of social situations have a direct impact on the structures of text and talk. From the viewpoint of this study, these differences arise from the social context those scholars have been living in. A quick look at the sociopolitical events and changes in the present age clearly shows preparations for presenting political ideas among contemporary scholars. Even though contemporary scholars try to support their claims by referring to the Koran and the Prophet's Sunnah, studying these references indicate that despite providing evidence and deducing from religious teachings, their interpretations and perceptions seem to be different. Sight was lost of the contradictory and conflictual process of the constitution of society. An impediment was placed in the way of the basic type of social conflict that is essential for the production and reproduction of cultural differences and social groups or classes. This dearth of politics, this lack of a sufficient level of politics, not only constituted the crisis of early modern society, but also provided the point of departure for the pathogenesis of modern society. For the core of the persistent crisis of modern society has been and remains to this day the absence of a participatory politics of conflict, contestation and compromise and, supporting it at a more fundamental level, a culture of contradictions.

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