LENQUAS PARA FINES ESPECÍFICOS

INVESTIGACIÓN Y ENSEÑANZA

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The vast tradition of studies on discourse analysis highlights the need for systematically describing underlying reiterative features, which are prototypically present in particular groups of texts within a specific discourse community, as well as explaining their relationship to its immediate context (Austin, 1962; Barber, 1962; Halliday et al. 1964; Searle, 1969; Widdowson, 1979; Selinker 1976; Trimble 1978; Lackstrom, 1972; Todd-Trimble, 1978; Van Dijk, 1977, 1985, 1997). Discourse analysis also fell within the interests not only of linguists and critical theorists but also of anthropologists1, sociologists, philosophers and psychologists, widening its scope and transforming it into a multidisciplinary tool that included language teaching in their research. Advances in the theoretical basis of register soon proved to be very limited for the explanation of different linguistic patterns naturally occurring within the same discourse community that revealed different key genres to be identified. Further discussions followed, foregrounding the genre-based approach, such as Hasan's (1989), who analysed spoken genres for specific contexts using Halliday's descriptive categories of field, tenor and mode.

In order to provide an answer to how genre-based approaches can describe language and how these descriptions influence teaching materials, numerous researchers in the eighties and the first half of the nineties tried to set out a theoretical framework to define the characteristics of spoken and written discourse either in general language or specialist languages (Swales, 1981, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). Basically, from our contemporary perspective, we may say that the results of a traditional discourse-based view of language involved examining how contextualized bits of language contribute to meanings above sentence-level of complete texts.

The most outstanding concepts of discourse practice are closely linked to pragmatics and focus on its communicative nature, as a means of interaction between a producer, an interpreter, and other texts2 within a specific context, and on its social dimension as a means of constructing identities and communities- (Swales, 1981, 1990; McCarthy, 1991; Bhatia, 1993; Schiffrin, 1994). It is worth mentioning here Fairclough's views (1989) on the social practice of discourse, who emphasizes that "language and society partially constitute one another" (23) and defines discourse as "more than just language use: it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice" (1992: 28). His starting point is that social context intervenes on "how texts are produced and interpreted, and therefore how genres and discourses and drawn upon and combined" (1999: 206).

We would like to single out Fairclough's (1992) proposal of intertextual analysis as the linkage of text to context by means of a three-dimensional model view of discourse and discourse analysis -analysis of context, analysis of processes of text production and interpretation, and

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1 One of the approaches to discourse analysis is called "interactional sociolinguistics" (Schiffrin, 1994: 97). It was first introduced by the anthropologist Gumperz (1982) and the sociologist Goffman (1967, 1974). It was also integrated by linguists who shared views on the relationship between interpersonal meanings and social structure. Later, these ideas were expanded by Brown and Levinson (1987). This approach is grounded on the functional view of language led by many key writers who influentially contributed to spread this theory (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1973).

2 We refer here to the intertextual dimension of discourse, that is to say, every text is the result of the interaction of other texts, social, historical, cultural, or ideological.
analysis of text-. These views are shared by other authors, such as Candlin, who considers discourse as a construct of social practices:

In this sense, discourse is a means of talking and writing about and acting upon worlds, a means which both constructs and is constructed by a set of social practices within these worlds, and in so doing both reproduces and constructs a fresh particular social-discursive practices, constrained or encouraged by more macro movements in the overarching social formation. (Candlin, 1997: ix).

This need to consider both text and context also widens the scope of discourse analysis, since considerations on context involve culture, society and their interaction. Recent trends in discourse analysis are oriented towards the interactive nature of discourse or *interdiscourse communication*. This is a recent term in discourse analysis theoretical framework that seeks to cater for the language needs to cross boundaries of discourses of different groups, gender, age, and professional specializations groups, which is our case, providing the professional communicator with a given discourse system³. As stated by Scollon:

> In interdiscourse analysis we consider the ways in which discourses are created and interpreted when those discourses cross the boundaries of group membership. We also consider the ways in which we use communication to claim and to display our own complex and multiple identities as communicating professionals. (Scollon, 1995: xi)

Within our own field of study, the range of discourses in English for specific purposes belong to the same discourse community but multicultural differences may block the professional communication and discourse studies should account for this emergent factor too.

In the present study, we suggest that discourse can be defined as language use after being shaped by social, political, and cultural formation that transmits the dynamism inherent in either spoken discourse or written discourse and is invested with ideologies, which, in turn, depend on the set of assumptions or beliefs that conform the speaker or reader as an individual. In order to bring a stronger orientation to context into textual analysis, and cross the boundaries from a simple text description to text interpretation, our method is a double-oriented approach to Maritime English documents, based on both a language description at the discourse level -text as a linguistic form-, and contextual description -which encompasses intertextuality and social practices-.

Our interest in this research is two-fold, we hope (1) to analyse the legal discourse by focusing on the verbal communicative interaction between the author and the reader and by presenting an overall description, functioning and organization of language patterns and (2) to explore how discourse analysis is an important tool for both teachers and learners by revealing the kind of strategies and materials which better fits the needs of Maritime English learners.

**DISCOURSE-LEVEL FEATURES OF MARITIME ENGLISH DOCUMENTS**

The text corpus investigated is the *Bill of Lading* (B/L) which is a document that records the quantity, class and condition of goods. Its main important functions are (1) to serve as a *receipt* for goods signed by the shipping company and given to the shippers, (2) to be *evidence of a contract of carriage/affreightment* between the shipping company and shippers and (3) to be a *document of title* of the goods once they are the responsibility of the carrier. Its terms have to comply with the Hague-Visby Rules and shares both legal and commercial features, being under regulation of law merchant, and above all, the Admiralty Court.

A) Language description

Bearing in mind that the first part of the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis offers a rich array of types of approaches considering the text as a linguistic form, we will choose

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³ Scollon defines *discourse system* as comprising four elements: "the forms of discourse, the socialization, the ideology, and the face systems. Each of these four elements mutually influences the others, and so they come to form a rather tight system of communication or discourse" (1995: 96-97). In this system individuals become increasinlg enclosed and integrated.
the analysis based on matters of cohesion and thematic organization (Danet, 1985; Halliday, 1989; Carter et al. 1997)

a) Cohesion: These devices help to establish links and patterns across a text and we may distinguish five main types:

- Reference (anaphoric, cataphoric): The *Bill of Lading* text was low in anaphoric references, such as *it, he, him, him, they; such (as in all such persons)*
- Conjunction: Time expressions that provide cohesion (before, after); compounds with either the prefixes *there -thereon, thereof-* or *here -herein, hereby, hereunder*; the adversative *but*; aforementioned, aforesaid; phrasal conjunctions: in no circumstances, under this contract.
- Substitution: Are rare in this type of document but we have found some instances, consisting of a switch from a passive verb to a nominalization. Examples are: from shall be limited to from limitation, from shall be liable to liability.
- Ellipsis: No instance was found.
- Lexical cohesion: There is much lexical reiteration because of the main concern for precision and explicitness in legal documents in order to avoid any kind of possible ambiguity. The most prominent examples are those terms referred to the people involved in the shipping business, just to clearly state each others' tasks: carrier, owner, stevedores; repetition of fixed expressions some of them belonging to the legal discourse: in no circumstances, in the event of, to the benefit of, under the rules of, under this contract, subject to, at the disposal of; frequency of any.

b) Thematic organization:

- Thematic progression: According to international regulations it is compulsory to use the same format. The *Bill of Lading* comprises two different parts: a form and a text consisting of a specific number of clauses. Each of them shows a heading title that anticipates the topic.
- Extreme proportional density: The *Bill of Lading* shows a high degree of lexical density together with extremely long sentences. Words are not redundant because every word counts.

B) Some considerations on the contextual description

We shall consider two main factors in the contextual description of the *Bill of Lading*, social practices and intertextuality. Social practice is explored through the author and reader's interaction which is formed by both, linguistic information extracted from the text, and all the gaps which do not appear in the text. In the case of maritime documents, the degree of complexity is higher because the document analysed here have different physical characteristics consists of a form and a text compounded by clauses, the lexical fields belong to the legal and commercial domains, language patterns and organization are rigid and differ enormously from speech. Much of the interest in description of the features of legal discourse is motivated by a search for what makes comprehension difficult in the ESP classroom. Main difficulties to be found in the *Bill of Lading* are not word-bound or form-bound but context-bound because of the ambiguity in specific legal terminology, increasing the complexity in the learning process. This inconsistent text is the result of social, political, business or economical reasons far beyond learner's knowledge, such as the absence of an international normalization of these terms.

Let us consider a practical example on comprehension problems arisen in the interaction between the author and the reader. The focus is on the lack of semantic boundaries between the terms *shipowner* and *carrier* mainly. According to maritime law, shipowner is the owner of a ship who may exploit the vessel commercially. The ship's agent is the mediator between the shipowner and the carrier. But the carrier may coincide with the owner or the charterer -who hires the vessel for a certain period of time-. The *Bill of Lading* informs on the carrier's liability to cargo -without specifying whether it is the shipowner, the charterer or the shipper. Generally, it is necessary to
check the Charter Party—which is another type of legal document—in order to know who is responsible for the safe transport of the cargo to the port of delivery.

In Maritime English documents, the most immediate hindrance is due to the absence of semantic boundaries among certain terms and the lack of a prior subject-matter knowledge. Therefore, our contextual knowledge has a special incidence on the success of the reading comprehension process. The intertextuality factor plays a decisive role once the inferring process has already begun, producing the intervention of other texts, subject-matter, speeches, articles, magazines, world knowledge, and psychological attitudes all along the process.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Regarding Maritime English documents, experience dictates that previous background knowledge on specific subject-matter is essential due to the complex ambiguous nature of the maritime discourse even in L1. The process of constructing and inferring meaning in the reading and interpreting of maritime documents was found to be critical and learners' process was fundamentally intercepted by the lack of specific knowledge on subject-matter. A right supply of these pieces of information would even enable the learner to expand their mental representations to a supra-level that would include knowledge of other subjects and occupations related.

A large body of research gives evidence on how prior knowledge facilitates reading comprehension. The schema theory for L2 reading has been extensively used especially in higher-level comprehension processes (Anderson and Pearson, 1984; Wallace, 1992; Silberstein, 1994). This theory involves a fundamental distinction between formal schemata and content schemata. The former one refers to linguistic and rhetorical features whereas the latter one provides the learner with content-knowledge even beyond the limits of the text. A brief description of a successful process is: (1) learners actively tried to select relevant information and construct mental representation of the text's language structure, (2) then, the learner organizes the pieces of information into a coherent mental representation (3), these mental representations have to be integrated into the existing model of the subject matter, (4) and finally, adequate interaction between the reader and the text is produced.

We have found that learning strategies can be purposefully exploited in order to directly reflect those texts that learners have to comprehend. We shall apply O’Malley and Chamot’s theory of learning strategies (1990: 179, 199) to English for Maritime Purposes, focusing on cognitive strategies and social and affective strategies. The table illustrates the corresponding strategies and tasks developed for the understanding of Maritime English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARITIME ENGLISH LEARNER’S STRATEGIES</th>
<th>HOW USED</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COGNITIVE STRATEGY (FIRST STAGE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFERENCING</td>
<td>Use immediate and extended context to guess new words (e.g.: nautical vocabulary, general English language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDUCTION</td>
<td>Use grammar rules to identify word forms (e.g.: passive constructions, conditionals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELABORATION</td>
<td>Use of prior knowledge, both academic and real world, to make decisions about probable meanings (e.g.: from other written sources, graphs, diagrams...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSFER</td>
<td>To recognise and use cognates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all the strategies mentioned above, we shall single out the elaboration strategy for the specific learning purpose of the Bill of Lading document. Apart from these strategies, learners
should also be encouraged to use social and affective strategies\(^4\), such as questioning for clarification, cooperation and self-talk. (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990: 199). As stated by O’Malley and Chamot one of the objectives of the learning strategies materials is to "teach students learning strategies that will help them become autonomous learners of both language and content". (1990: 210).

Concerning pre-reading materials towards the elaboration strategy, a previous reading text based on simple sentences using devices such as definitions, descriptions or contrast was revealed as a motivating resource as well as activities focusing on cohesion, which as stated by Cook, "they should, however, avoid confusing the use of cohesion with knowledge about cohesion. All these activities can be complemented with graphical aids, flow charts, tree diagrams or discussion workshop, essential tools for enhancing learner motivation and autonomy.

CONCLUSIONS

Interpreting documents requires processes and strategies which differ in systematic ways from those needed to understand other genre-types. We have also found out the relevance of discourse analysis for predicting possible conflicts in reading processing. From our experience, prior subject-matter knowledge was essential for integrated knowledge. It it worth mentioning that all four skills intervene in the process and that the inclusion of social and affective strategies helped to increase learners’ motivation and reduce anxiety. A common shared view was the existence of an optimum learner-teacher interaction in a cooperative learning environment. The study of Maritime English documents should be implemented in advanced-level courses because critical language awareness can be most usefully applied.

Finally, we would like to add that filling in and understanding forms - the annexe form of the Bill of Lading- involves different strategies, skills and tasks and its study is open to further research.

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REFERENCES


\(^4\) It should be mentioned that O’Malley and Chamot (1990: 179-199) do not insert the social and affective strategies in a foreign language course.
Trimble, T. et al. 1978 "Rhetorical functionshifts in EST discourse" TESOL Quarterly, 12 (3).

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