



Reading and Analyzing Discourses

Abstract of *Reading and Analyzing Discourses*

Discourse analysts are necessarily readers of the texts they analyze and their analyses are, in effect, readings of the texts. Logistical Discourse Analysis (LDA) is based on a conceptual blending theory of reading and a cognitive linguistic view of construal. It is designed to analyze the relations between the conceptual structures expressed in discourses and reading (conceptualization). In this study conceptions are understood as discursive structures which are the outcomes of conceptualization involving conceptual blending. LDA focuses on conceptions as discursive structures that guide readers into constructing texts in very specific ways.

LDA describes the language of a text with respect to its *typical construal*. The framing structure constituted by the linguistic devices that instruct readers determines the construal sequence. This overarching structure is generated by the interplay between clauses on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of the discourse from which readers construct a text-world. The interplay creates a complex framing structure or scaffold from which readers are given perspectives for construing the text. This structured framing is a dynamic process, operating prospectively and retrospectively, constructing and reconstructing the meaning of the text. Within this general framework, different types of LDA are distinguished by their objectives which foreground certain components of the text and background others. This study offers a model of the analytic reading of discourses together with examples of four types of LDAs:

1. linguistic-oriented analyses of *the frame/reframing dynamic* that structures the reading of discourses,
2. analyses of *the conceptualization of a specific concept* as manifested in its linguistic expression,
3. analyses of *generic narrative structures*, and
4. *evaluative* discourse analyses.

FRAME/REFRAMING LDA: Describing a text usually involves reporting the potential meaning of the sequence of textual units. The sequence or succession of topics and comments constitute the syntagmatic axis of a discourse. With respect to framing, any clause on this axis has the potential not only to frame the upcoming discursive units by way of inciting expectations about them, but also has the potential to re-frame units that occurred earlier in the sequence. The scaffold of frames constituting the paradigmatic axis accumulates “meaning potential” as the sequence of TOPIC/COMMENT units on the syntagmatic axis are processed by the reader. The resulting framing/reframing dynamic is characteristic of reading. I include in Part Two of the study an example of this type of frame analysis involving four newspaper accounts of a trial.

CONCEPTUALIZATION LDA: In a given text, for instance a research article, the meaning of a conception develops as concepts are added to the logogenetic sequence governed by a focal concept forming a discursive structure in which that TOPIC accumulates meaning through the sequences of COMMENTS upon it. The objective of this selective type of LDA is to “discover” conceptual changes by analyzing how the focal concept is framed and re-framed in the reading of a text. I include an example of conceptual change involving a sequence of articles by Robert Entman (see “Analyzing Conceptions” 6.3.2).

CONFIGURAL LDA: In analyzing narratives, the objective is to discover similarities in narrative structures in different texts, for example the quest narrative that informs innumerable texts in western cultures. Persistently repeated narrative structures, often unrecognized because their contents differ, constitute cultural configurations which are predominant in cultures because their impact is to reinforce the beliefs on which a culture is based. The femme fatal narrative structure, for example, is a predominant pattern which reinforces the value of the institution of marriage. Fatal Attraction engenders a disposition to avoid seeking sex outside the marital relationship. The narrative structure of the WWII Combat film disposed Americans to support the war effort. Many TV shows have narrative structures that dispose their viewers to believe in cultural institutions, for example, the Perry Mason series in which a lawyer never loses a case no matter how much evidence is gathered against his innocent client inculcated the belief that the law will protect the innocent, a belief that is no longer sustainable and Perry Mason reruns have evaporated. I include examples of Configural LDA involving *Bataan*, the prototype of the WWII Combat film genre and retellings of Aesop’s fable, “The Hare and the Tortoise.”

EVALUATIVE LDA: For the most part, LDA is used to compare discourse structures to other discourse structures usually to discover if they are similar or different and to what extent. However, if a specific discursive structure is stipulated as a criterion, other discourses can be evaluated on the basis of privileging the criterial structure over those in the discourse(s) being analyzed. For example, taking a well-regarded model of argumentation such as Stephen Toulmin’s (*The Uses of Argument*) and matching its linguistic structure against an instance of an argument provides an evaluation of it. Or, taking a model of instruction such as Frederick Reif’s (*Applying Cognitive Science to Education*) and matching it against the instructions given in a textbook provides an evaluation of it. I include an example of an evaluative LDA taken from *An Introductory Textbook for the Field of Communication: A Case Study*.

There are other objectives that can be supported by LDA but these types of LDA have been classroom tested and the results of many of the analyses published.