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## Discourse Spaces: a Systemic Approach

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*Discourse spaces are approached in linguistics from two perspectives. First, they are viewed as intra-discursive universes. One such universe would be a discourse space which represents a text world. The elements of this kind of discourse space include the deictic center from which the narrative is done, the narrator's point of view, the displacement of the point of view and its vector orientation. A different kind of intra-discursive universe would be a discourse space as a cognitive and pragmatic context generated by knowledge (propositions) contained in a discourse. Second, discourse spaces are considered as extra-discursive universes, such as text spaces created by special categories of authors. In this article discourse spaces are understood as extra-discursive universes encompassing interdependent discourses which coexist and function together within the space boundaries. The systemic criteria of acceptability, consistency and disambiguation / interpretation are singled out. These criteria provide the operational basis for the collection of data on variation of discourse spaces. Three types of them are distinguished: physical, virtual and logical discourse spaces. Viewed in this perspective, the notion of discourse space allows to go beyond an individual discourse to the level of systematization of discourses.*

*Keywords: discourse, discourse space, discourse system, systemic criteria, physical discourse space, virtual discourse space, logical discourse space.*

*Research area: philology.*

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### Introduction

Spatial representations traditionally play an important role in the meta-language of linguistic research. Outstanding Russian linguists were engaged in spatial modeling of language systems. O.N. Seliverstova points to the importance of identifying different types of spaces for language analysis (Seliverstova, 1977). Iu.S. Stepanov explains

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language as a multidimensional space in which various semiotic dimensions interact (Stepanov, 1985). E.S. Kubriakova puts forward the notion of language space by which she understands the space of existence of linguistic facts as the reality of language (Kubriakova, 1967, 1978, 1997).

V.N. Toporov raises the question of the correlation of space and text and comes to the conclusion that text is spatial, i.e. it is placed in a particular space, such as scientific, mythopoetic, religious, philosophical, etc. The notion 'text space' means that text is included in the set understood as space. Text spaces are created by special categories of authors. As explained by V.N. Toporov, some authors create texts which most adequately correspond to mythopoetic space. On the one hand, this space precedes the texts that fill it, but on the other hand, is formed by them. Mythopoetic space does not exist outside the texts. They constitute the space through defining its boundaries. In addition to space, there is its absence, non-space, the embodiment of which is chaos. Mythopoetic universe is not just a wide space; it also has a common content, a hierarchical structure of meanings subordinated to the whole. The common content organizes and integrates text space semantically (Toporov, 1983).

The above-mentioned approach to text space lays down the theoretical foundation for the understanding of discourse space in this article. But in contrast to text space, discourse space has its own specific features conditioned by such a complex phenomenon as discourse. According to the generally accepted definition given by T. van Dijk, discourse is text and talk in context (Dijk, 1997: 3). Thus, discourse is to be understood not just as text space, but also as space of talk, conversation. The relation of context to discourse space is also to be clarified.

The term 'discourse space' is problematic, and to date very little work has been done to determine the criteria by which it is possible to reach valid judgments about discourse space taxonomy. This article offers an overview of the field of studies of discourse space which today extends to discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics and pragmatics and proposes a systemic approach to discourse space.

### **Theoretical framework**

It is hard to say who first introduced the term 'discourse space'; it began to appear in linguistic and sociological works in the 1990s, for the most part without definition. Obviously, this notion arose by analogy with the already existing notions of social, cultural and language space, as a necessary tool in the analysis of discourse. The first linguistic theory of discourse space was proposed by B. Moulin (1995) who equates

discourse space and context. He defines discourse space as a cognitive and pragmatic form of context which is used by language users to structure knowledge contained in a discourse. In the process of knowledge transfer the speaker assumes that the interlocutor understands what context (discourse space) this knowledge refers to. If the contextual attribution of the statement is not clear, the addressee usually asks to explicate the relevant context. For example, the context for the statement “I love you” differs depending on who says it and in what circumstances: John says it to Mary or the actor to the actress in the movie. As B. Moulin points out, discourse spaces are created, updated or evoked by an agent who tries to generate or understand a discourse. B. Moulin draws on the theory of cognitive context by J. Sowa (1984) who postulates the presence of such a context for each proposition. According to J. Sowa, a context exists whenever some proposition is asserted: a proposition is true in a particular context. B. Moulin and other followers of J. Sowa define discourses as worlds of assertions / propositions, and each proposition creates its own discourse space, its own context. In other words, discourse spaces arise from sentences that make up a discourse, and there are as many of these spaces as there are sentences, and even more.

Another approach to discourse space is developed by P. Chilton (2005). He proposes DST (discourse space theory) as a formalized version of P. Werth’s (1999) theory of text worlds. In this view, as discourse unfolds, a discourse space ontology is constructed as a representation of the narrated world. The basic notions of this theory are the deictic center from which the narrative is done, the narrator’s point of view, the displacement of the point of view, its vector orientation. According to P. Chilton, while text worlds are mental representations, discourse spaces are mental meta-representations where a discourse space is viewed as a particular kind of mental space. This theory is developed by A. Kedra-Kordela (2010) who studies discourse space building in short stories and argues that discourse space is created in the process of subjectivizing the deictic center.

In my earlier work (Plotnikova, 2005, 2008) I define discourse space as an environment for coexistence and common functioning of certain discourses. I equate a discourse space with a system of discourses. A discourse space is understood as a complex system (Nicolis, Prigozhin, 2003), the parameters of which are set by the possibility of combining discourses. Discourse space makes it possible to analyze the position of a discourse among other discourses, in the aspect of their interaction, taking into account an interactive discursive process the participants of which are interested in coordinating their discourses on the basis of the background spatial consensus. In a common discourse space there appear special interactive standards, such as the need

of participants for consent or disagreement, solidarity, joint responsibility, and mutual influence. A discourse space is a 'natural' environment for its discourses. 'Naturalness' means that only certain types of discourses can coexist in this space, but not others. It is ontologically impossible to impose a discourse on the totality of discourses to which it does not belong by its own right, naturally, due to its content and form.

While the understanding of discourse space as context and text world allows for a more complete interpretation of a particular discourse, all the nuances of its content, the understanding of discourse space as a discourse system enables to analyze discourse in its natural environment, in the totality of other discourses.

### **Statement of the problem and method**

There is still a tendency in linguistics to view discourse in isolation without taking into account its influence on, and interdependence with other discourses in vast discourse spaces. The basic problem of this article is to reassess some of the issues associated with discourse space and set out a view of discourse space based on systemic criteria.

The method of study is systemic modeling which implies the identification and application of systemic criteria for the classification of discourse spaces. The systemic approach adopted in this article centers on the analysis of complementations and synergies of individual discourses and their dynamics as a discourse system emerges out of them.

### **Discussion**

Discourse spaces, as they are understood in this article, fall into three types: 1) Euclidean, or physical space; 2) virtual space; 3) logical space.

Euclidean, or physical discourse space is discourse space of everyday life and everyday communication. It is established between speakers in the course of any direct face-to-face interaction, even the most short-term one. In such interaction discourse space arises in and coincides with Euclidean space due to the co-presence of speakers during an encounter. In an everyday conversation on the street, in the store, in transport, etc., speakers are involved in a common discourse space generated by the cause-effect interrelationship of their conversational turns. As M. Merlot-Ponti points out, the words uttered by people become the territory of these people. "In a dialogue between me and the other, a common territory is established, my and his thinking are woven into a single fabric. There are two of us and our existence takes place in the

same world. Only then, when I leave the dialogue, the other returns to his absence” (Merlot-Ponti, 1999: 451).

In this view, discourse is conceived as a kind of additional territory projected onto the geographical territory. Geographical and social space is embodied in a certain discourse space. For example, University as a physical and social space is embodied in buildings, classrooms, equipment, and people performing various institutional roles. These people are also in a common discourse space encompassing their daily discursive interactions.

The idea that discursive interactions can be thought of in spatial terms implies that space includes time as one of its parameters. Discourse space of everyday life is inextricably linked with the period of time during which certain discourses coexist. Discourse space can be created only here and now, or for a certain fixed period of time, or it can be permanent and expanding over more and more periods of time (such as a University discourse space). As long as in everyday communication people connect their discourses with discourses of other people, their common discourse space will be preserved and continue to develop.

Discourse spaces of everyday life are many and varied, and each space is structured by its own specific discourses. These spaces are created by many different social and personal interests and activities. Socially relevant discourse spaces should be studied because the conceptual content of discourses circulating in them contributes to the construction of social reality. Just as people exist in the physical and social space of everyday life, among things, they also exist in discourses they produce, in the space of these discourses. Shared discourses, while they are used to communicate shared messages, at the same time tend to create a specific social reality to which those messages correspond, into which they fit. For example, if in a particular community people produce mostly discourses of terrorism, their value judgments and evaluative strategies might lead to the construction of the physical and social reality of terrorism. Respectively, the destruction of terrorism as a social structure should be accompanied by the elimination of the discourses of terrorism in everyday communication.

So, people have the ability to accomplish a structuring of a shared everyday reality, a structuring in which discourse plays an all-important role. The notion of discourse space of everyday life offers a method to analyze this ability in terms of consistent, systemic discursive choices which build up a continuous, pervasive reflection of the social world in collective cognition. Though individual discourses that fill a discourse space are unique in all their details, they are built up of meanings that are also found in the discourses of others. Discourse space of everyday life is concerned with the expression in language of the integration of individual and collective cognition.

Virtual discourse space arises out of physical discourse space. As bodies and biological individuals, human beings do not have the physical omnipresence, i.e. the physical ability to speak or write in multiple places at the same time. However, people have the ability to virtual presence in places remote from their surroundings, e.g. through letters or the Internet.

Philosophers define virtual reality (from lat. *virtus* – potential, possible, energy, force) as a set of objects of the next level in relation to the reality of the lower level. The lower-level reality is constant and is able to generate through a certain force (*virtus*) another, virtual reality as an upper level in their hierarchy (VEF, 2001).

Virtual discourse space is generated on the basis of physical discourse space and ‘grows out’ of it as its continuation. This kind of ‘spatial growth’ can be illustrated by the example of discourse produced in response to political discourse (Plotnikova, Domyshcheva, 2009). The politician intends his speeches primarily to the social addressee, the whole society. The social addressee is materialized in particular addressees, people living at different places who can be either active or passive recipients of political discourse. If they are politically active they usually produce discourses of reaction which form a virtual discourse space surrounding the initial political discourse. Thus, George Bush’s speech of May 1, 2003, delivered against the background of a banner with the inscription “Mission accomplished” about the end of the war in Iraq caused numerous critical discourses of response pointing to the untruth of the inscription. Individual reactions arose in the virtual space simultaneously, and one after another, and sporadically, from time to time. However, over time the response to Bush’s speech has stopped due to the emergence of new politicians and new political challenges. This discourse space has stopped its development and although it still exists somewhere in the virtuality, as a virtual continuum, but only as a reminder of a physical reality which once existed and generated it.

Virtual discourse space is created by a certain discourse-stimulus which opens up a place next to it, a place for a reaction that can be filled with a response discourse. The principle of response is the essence of the topology of virtual discourse spaces which differs from the topology of physical discourse spaces (physical co-presence of speakers). Virtual communication is based on a purely spatial relationship, without the physical factor of corporeality. Virtual discourse space is formed by the interaction of the discourses themselves. The discourse-stimulus creates a space for a discursive reaction which becomes an incentive for another reaction and the process of the formation of discourse space continues in this way to its natural limit, the cessation of the exchange of discourses.

The only difference between physical and virtual discourse spaces is the transition to a virtual dimension. Virtual discourse space is formed purely by the communicative principle. It is a kind of invisible hyper-reality in which a person is immersed not as a biological, but as a discursive personality. Taking again the example of University as a discourse space, it can be not only visible but also invisible when vast virtual discourse spaces unite researchers with the same interests working in different universities all over the world.

Logical discourse space is understood as a space organized by the logical principle which provides the possibility of combining certain discourses within a single topological dimension. The relations between the constituent discourses here, as well as in virtual space, are purely spatial, but the inclusion of individual discourses is achieved not so much by response (although it also takes place) but on the basis of the logic of the abstract and the concrete, identifying and generalizing abstraction from concrete elements (VEF, 2001). Logical discourse space is a logically abstracted unity, such as scientific discourse, political discourse, media discourse, fiction discourse, etc. Each such discourse can be viewed as a concrete and an abstract unity. For example, a particular scientific discourse belongs to a certain author and was written at a certain time. Scientific discourse as a space combines individual scientific discourses according to their most common semantic and formal properties. These properties form ideal / typical constructs related to the same set of empirical data and specific discourses.

Most likely, logical discourse space is ontologically a network in which each cell must be in its own place and all cells must be interdependent creating a stable network system the integrity of which is conditioned by the implementation of all its relevant positions. Thus, a particular scientific discourse cannot be produced by itself but only in the spatial cluster of other scientific discourses necessary for its production and understanding. Space is a universal force that attracts its own discourses determining the possibility of their entry into the system. For example, the author who does not possess the necessary scientific knowledge derived from the given field of studies is not able to create a scientific discourse, so even if he/she wants to call his/her work scientific, it will still not fit into the space of scientific discourse on objective systemic grounds. In the history of Russian science there were examples of the proclamation as scientific of certain theories that in their content were not. In the final analysis, the discourses that presented such false theories were excluded from the scientific discourse space and, on the contrary, the truly scientific discourses that were banned and rejected for ideological reasons in the course of time naturally took their place



in the network among other discourses. In this view, the creation of any individual discourse is conditioned by the spatial network, i.e. the possibility or impossibility of its connection with the already existing discourses.

Despite the fact that each individual discourse has its own author, the network discourse space is a synergetic formation. It has boundaries of what is possible; they are denoted when discourses become incompatible and tensions arise between them. In this case a new discourse space is usually formed (this happens in particular in the formation of a new genre). The most significant and culturally relevant discourse spaces form special, elite discourse spaces of masterpieces, classical works, selected works, the best samples, hits, etc.

So, in a logical space constituent discourses are conditioned by deep cognitive constraints that cause their content to take the shape it does. An individual discourse should be cognitively compatible with an open array of other discourses relativized to different themes and ideas. A logical discourse space determines the interpretation of its constituent discourses and also makes possible interpretative relativism when discourses are construed in different ways.

To recapitulate, I use the term ‘discourse space’ as a cover term for any system of discourses associated with their particular topology, i.e. their configuration in a particular kind of space (physical, virtual, logical). In my view, it is the systemic criteria that determine the inclusion of discourses into a specific discourse space. They are as follows: 1) the criterion of acceptability; 2) the criterion of consistency; 3) the criterion of disambiguation / interpretation.

To be part of a discourse system a discourse must be acceptable on cognitive grounds, consistent with other discourses that are already part of the system and provide a unitary systemic explanation for other discourses. These criteria presuppose which discourses may occur and which discourses they may be combined with.

The systemic criteria are general formatting principles overriding individual features in discourses and clustering discourses into large entities / subsystems (such as genres) and whole entities / systems.

## **Conclusion**

The notion of discourse space gives a special explanatory validity to the interpretation of discourse systems. Discourse space, as it is understood in this article, is not related to a particular discourse; it is a broader notion. Discourse space constitutes ‘openness’ for particular discourses as its constituents. This results in the



deeper explanation of the most salient aspects of variation of discourses. The notion of discourse space also links discourses to the conditions of, and constraints on their production. The systemic modeling of discourse spaces allows for their representation as complex systems emerging from the interrelationship of all constituent discourses.

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## **Дискурсивные пространства: системный подход**

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*В лингвистике дискурсивные пространства рассматриваются в двух ракурсах. Во-первых, они трактуются как интрадискурсивные универсумы. Выделяются два их вида: дискурсивное пространство как метареференция текстового мира и дискурсивное пространство как когнитивный и прагматический контекст дискурса. Элементами дискурсивного пространства как метареференции текстового мира выступают дейктический центр, из которого ведется повествование, точка зрения повествователя, смещение точки зрения и ее векторная направленность. Дискурсивное пространство, понимаемое как контекст, представляет собой фоновое, не эксплицированное знание, с которым соотносятся вербально выраженные пропозиции. Во-вторых, дискурсивные пространства трактуются как экстрадискурсивные универсумы, например, текстовые пространства, создаваемые особыми категориями авторов. В данной статье дискурсивные пространства понимаются как экстрадискурсивные универсумы, объединяющие взаимозависимые дискурсы, сосуществующие*

*и совместно функционирующие в пространственных границах. Определены системные критерии приемлемости, согласованности и интерпретируемости как основа для обработки данных о вариативности дискурсивных пространств. Выделены и проанализированы три типа дискурсивных пространств: физическое, виртуальное и логическое пространства. Выбранный ракурс анализа позволяет перейти от рассмотрения конкретных дискурсов на уровень их систематизации.*

*Ключевые слова: дискурс, дискурсивное пространство, система дискурсов, системные критерии, физическое дискурсивное пространство, виртуальное дискурсивное пространство, логическое дискурсивное пространство.*

*Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.*

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