

The organization or unit of language above sentence (Stubbs 1983:1, Schiffrin 1987a: 1, T. Onadeko 2000: 82).

Discourse is language beyond sentence. It is referred to as language use larger than sentence. Connected sentences in a naturally occurring utterance play a crucial role in the formation of discourse. Discourse is not just a combination of sentences; it must occur in a particular context unified and convey a social meaning.

It is possible to combine sentences together without a cohesive unity. Such combination of sentences cannot be referred to as ENGLISH STUDIES IN FOCUS: READINGS IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE. E. A. ADEDUN & YAW SEKYIBAIDOO (EDS). 2014. FACULTY OF LANGUAGES, UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA, GHANA 201 discourse it does not possess the features that discourse is expected to have. Crystal (1992) explains that,

“Discourse: a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative” (25). His explanation validates that discourse is not formed by any disjointed stretch of sentences, but

Coordinated language in a social context. Discourse is found in all fields of learning where language is used for interactive purposes such as law, science, medicine, education, fashion, engineering, sport, politics, media and more.

From the above, Crystal as well as other scholars limit discourse to spoken language. We should, therefore, know that discourse can either be spoken or written. Egbe (1996: 72) supports our view when he refers to “talk and text” as “connected speech and continuous writing” respectively, and contextualizes both as “a stretch of natural language that is longer than the sentence,” which is discourse. Discourse formation, which is organization of language not only beyond the sentence but more than a paragraph, requires skills. We can say that discourse has two major structures: micro and macro. The micro-structure of discourse involves the combination of smaller bits of language to make up the word, the phrase, the clause and the sentence. The macro-structure of language organization is the discourse proper because it helps in the analysis of language beyond the sentence level. At this level of language organization, important factors such as purpose, the topic or subject matter, thesis statement and the audience are to be considered to produce a meaningful discourse. These factors are better discussed in the composition section. In another stance, discourse is viewed from the social function of language as language in use.

Schiffrin (1994: 20) gives a comprehensive meaning of discourse when she explains discourse as “a particular unit of language (above the sentence), and a particular focus (on language use).” The explanation covers both perspectives of scholars on discourse as a fragment of language beyond sentence and as language in use.

The two perspectives are formalist and functional approaches to discourse. Fasold (1990: 65) is among the scholars who approached discourse from the functional point of view. He says that,

“the study of discourse is the study of any aspect of language use”. Language is not used in a vacuum; it is used in a context by participants to perform certain functions. That is why utterance is situated in a context. Schiffrin (1994) corroborates with this view when she explicates that, “discourse is viewed as a system (a socially and culturally organized way of speaking) through which particular functions are realized” (32). Social functions performed by discourse delineate the communicative role of discourse and the various fields of endeavours to which discourse belongs. Discourse is both structural and functional in nature and the best approach to discourse is to explicate it from both structural and functional perspectives to show how language is used in social context, and what it is used to do.