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Discourse - from the theoretical and methodological perspective

ABSTRACT: Undertaking the issues addressed in this article was influenced by at least a couple of reasons, among which especially the fact of spreading the concept of discourse in various spheres of social life, despite the vague, imprecise meaning of the term, the sense of which usually emerges from the context in which it is used. Moreover, what seems interesting is the broad enough discretion in the use of the category of discourse by the authors of papers of various problem scope and level and singling out different types of discourse in the considerations undertaken (i.e., political, legal, historical, philosophical, educational, scientific, etc.) without clear criteria of this typology. What is more, the issue of qualitative research on discourse, which is still not adequately appreciated, not only in the sciences of education, also appears to be important.

I begin my considerations with a few introductory remarks, and then refer to the more important etymological issues, and consider the question of importance of discourse. Furthermore, I pay attention to the emerging problems with the concept of discourse and refer to some selected aspects of discourse research, including the role and position of the researcher. Finally, I attempt to summarize the discussion.

KEYWORDS: axiological issues, discourse, epistemological, terminological, theoretical and methodological perspective.

"It would be nice if we could put all that we know

about discourse into some handy definition. Unfortunately, similarly to

the case of related concepts, such as 'language,'

'communication,' 'interaction,' 'society' and 'culture,' the notion

of discourse is inherently blurred in nature"

Theun A. van Dijk (1997)

A FEW REMARKS AT THE OUTSET

Over at least several decades (especially since the 1970s), the concept of discourse has been disseminated in various spheres of social life, despite the vague, imprecise meaning of the term, the sense of which usually emerges from the context in which it is used. In the case of scientific considerations, that sense constitutes––in addition to the context––the theoretical background and is sometimes enriched with epistemo-logical-exploratory results of the inquiries conducted. The perceived phenomenon of popularity of the polysemic word 'discourse' in almost all areas of communication in Polish literature has made itself present over the past (approximately) twenty years to the extent, that it seems that even today this term is overused and its use is some-times dictated by intellectual fashion (e.g., a potentially impressive "return to the rhetoric" or, indeed, to the "new discursiveness of social sciences," etc.). Marking its presence here and there, "intellectual fashion" sometimes leads to a rather "careless" use of the category of discourse as more of a "fancy word," a "decoration," a call sign, and sometimes the loss of this keyword in the content of texts of various scope of generality of considerations. In other words, although many authors use the concept of discourse, their texts are not necessarily devoted to it, supposedly they do not concern discourse; for example, it happens so that apart from the title no more space has been allocated for the term 'discourse' in the content subordinated to it (cf. e.g., Pomieciński & Sikora, 2009).

As it results from the review of the still richer resource of literature of the subject, dealing with discourse in its various aspects, the concept is still vague, fuzzy and problematic, which often triggers off a series of misunderstandings and controversies introducing "disorder" in its understanding and use, instead of bringing about the "*order of discourse*," which Foucault called for in the inaugural lecture delivered at the College de France on 2 December 1970 (see Foucault, 2002).

Thus, it is no wonder that Jerzy Szacki's opinion, expressed more than a dozen years ago on the impressive spread of discourse (it falls to add, not only in the humani-ties) does not fail its relevance to this day, namely,

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the word 'discourse' has made a stunning career in the contemporary humanities and it is more and more difficult to find certainty whether it still means anything, because it is used in many different ways, and quite often simply as a 'scholarly' determination of any long expression or a text. (Szacki, 2002, p. 205)

Indeed, reading texts on discourse can lead to the impression that the category considered is regarded as a more solemn, elegant and refined one than, for example, such a term as a conversation, communication or dialogue, etc. Probably, especially for the reason that this state of affairs is accompanied by a belief that discourse refers to more important and complex social issues, dealing with which requires not only communication skills, but also a large enough body of knowledge, education, eloquence, proficiency in solving problems of increasing complexity, i.e. discursive competences.

Admittedly, succumbing to fashion in a rational way can sometimes bring refreshing inspiration also with regard to the created theoretical attitudes or research applications of a specific portion of reality. Most fashions, however, are accompanied by a variety of trends that often drive their supporters into amazing traps. For on the one hand, the tendency to follow fashion induces attestation of its relevance and importance, and on the other hand, for various reasons, it is impossible to remain endlessly under its dictates (any fashion passes with time). However, the consequences of this state of affairs tend to be different, from bringing something new to the existing resource of knowledge or explored research area, by consolidating the achievements so far, to plunging into terminological inconsistencies and into the chaos of meanings included. Possibilities of this kind can be experienced performing preliminary research of the richer and richer literature on discourse. It may make us wonder that in some compendia of knowledge, somehow in their nature predestined to deal with issues of discourse, this category has been interestingly signalled and then downplayed. An example can be the extensive work edited by Bartmiński (2001) under the title *The contemporary Polish language*. Namely, the text on the cover of this work informs readers in a very encouraging way that "in 40 chapters, 35 best specialists from all major academic centres in Poland present their opinions . . . . [in addition the authors assure that the book - added by U.O.] provides a complete picture of the Polish language of the late twentieth century in the context of national culture" (Bartmiński, 2001, p. 338). Meanwhile, when confronted with the subject index of terms, this impressive promise is kept on only one page with regard to the word 'discourse' (p. 338), where it was used only once, in the following way: ". . . phrasemes . . . are used to orient the recipient in the course of discourse and the structure of the text" (p. 338).

THE ISSUE OF MEANING

With its ancient polysemic origin, the term *discourse* comes from the Latin word (see Kumaniecki, 1965) *discursus,* from *discurro*––to scatter, run here and there, back

and forth and *dicurere*––to disperse, run in different directions, rush, [also] stray from each other [in the course of discussion on various subjects]. We interpret this term as a controversial conversation, polemical dialogue, hearing, speech, and the adjective *discursive* means comprehensive, logical, reflexive, based on inference from the previously accepted statements (premises), supported by arguments, unintuitive (cf. Kopaliński, 1988). I have already discussed the issue of the meaning of the category of conversation, discussion, dialogue and discourse in more detail elsewhere (see Ostrowska, 2011, pp. 113–127).

In modern times, especially philosophers, including René Descartes, the author of *Discourse on the method* ("Discours de la methode"; Descartes, 1637/2003) significantly contributed to the dissemination of discourse. Owing to this philosophical-mathematical treatise, the ancient idea of the new skepticism, i.e. doubting anything on the way of reaching the truth, was revived. Descartes' famous philosophical statement *cogito ergo sum*––I think, therefore I am––invariably constitutes one of the foundations of modern science and philosophy. However, undertaking a kind of discourse on this subject, the contemporaries, inter alia, refer to the doubts expressed by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), regarding the translation of the conjunction *'ergo'* in his famous statement, for the reasons that this conjunction can be misleadingly understood in this very sense, that in this argumentation it is not about the consequence of deducing, but about the intuition of thinking. Undertaking this thread, a contemporary English philosopher Martin Hollis has justified that the verb *think*, being a part of this sentence, "is not the best translation of the Latin 'cogito,' [in his opinion––added by U.O.] 'to consciously experience' would be better . . . . Similarly, 'sum' could be better translated as 'exist'" (Hollis, 1998, p. 88). Following this discursive trail, one comes to the conclusion that the Cartesian metaphor "I think, therefore I am," which has been rooted in our culture for centuries, should thus take the form of "I consciously experience, therefore I exist" (I tackle this issue in a bit broader perspective on another occasion; Ostrowska, 2000, p. 107). Thus, the discourse taking place today and inspired by this motto may lead to a variously evolving continuation, widening the circles of consideration, to varying degrees and scope going beyond the work of Descartes.

Although in ancient times discourse was called a conversation, dialogue, debate, speech, or dispute, during which the positions of interlocutors diverged differently, it is worth noting that using them interchangeably today or equating the meanings of these categories is unjustified for many reasons, and especially for this one that this state of affairs results in a lot of misunderstandings, which among other things prevent positive attitudes with regard to specifying and clarifying the essence of the term *discourse*.

Now, both all types of discussion[1], as well as a wealth of varieties of dialogue (see Ostrowska, 2000)[2] and different versions of conversation[3] can, which is obvious, to varying degrees, constitute elements of discourse, which, however, should face the requirement of expression on the highest degree of organization and assign an appropriately broader and deeper range of meaning especially in this sense that it implies,

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not only etymologically speaking, the indispensability of demonstrating by the people participating in it specialist "skills" of multifaceted embracing and deliberating represented positions and exchanged views on a specific topic (which is emphasized by the phrase "to run in different directions"). Thus, it is essential in discourse to argue, polemicize with others, engage in multifaceted interpretation of stands/positions, explore and articulate alternative hypotheses or theories. So, not every conversation or, indeed, discussion or dialogue can be a priori attributed the name of discourse, and not every academic text, written even at the highest level, is discourse in itself, as long as its content does not become for its reader the subject of logically ordered, competently justified exchange of ideas, inspiring challenge of positions, creative design of alternative propositions, constructing theories and attempting to prove them, justify and defend them, persuade their case, etc.

The semantic scope of the specified terms focuses attention on these distinctions for adopted considerations as significant. Namely, a conversation as an archetypal way in which people communicate clearly constitutes a fundamental basis for the emergence of different varieties of dialogue and discussion, whose components can build a more complex architecture of discourse. Discourse, however, requires a proper resource of competencies, erudition and commitment of those involved in it, so that they can meet the requirements of logical, reflexive, based on inference from the previously accepted statements (premises), unintuitive, and supported by arguments, communication.

Although discourse is attributed the purpose of bringing stances together, it must be made quite clear that an exchange of views in discourse does not necessarily always have to be this type of culmination. Working out a common stance is sometimes not accomplished, although the interlocutor can sometimes be persuaded to share a view, to concede the point and so on. Certainly, it is not impossible just to reject two or more arguments presented in a discourse. This does not mean, however, that, time has been wasted, especially if discourse has brought something new, important and valuable into the lives of people involved in it, or indeed helped to broaden their intellectual horizons, perhaps moved their feelings, or inspired to important projects and, all in all, has led to the emergence of new issues, which (it is not impossible that they) will become the subject discourses to come. What is most important in discourse is in fact of achieving a cognitive objective, especially the exploration and formulation of alternative hypotheses and / or theories, broadening, deepening, and creating new knowledge about the surrounding reality or a possibility of undertaking actions inspired by participation in subsequent discourses.

Certainly, views of many philosophers have had impact on constituting the current status and importance of discourse in the course of the history of human thought in its development. Among them there was Gottfried W. Leibniz, who defined discourse as an orderly movement of thought, running from one proposition to another, indeed Immanuel Kant, looking at this category from the perspective of reasoning as a cognitive activity, in contrast to such acts as perception or intuition, or the positions and views of many others, of which the concepts of the German philosopher, sociol-

ogist and theorist of science Jürgen Habermas appear to be particularly important (see Habermas, 1999, 2005), and of the French philosopher, historian and sociologist Michael Foucault (see 1998, 2002), as well as the French sociologist, dealing with the sociology of culture and sociology of education, the founder of the theory of symbolic violence––Pierre Bourdieu (see 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant , 2001). In their deliberations, the issue of discourse locates itself at the epicentre, and the language is unanimously assigned a significant role in the processes of socialization, although the problematic perspective adopted by these philosophers in this regard differs in some respects diametrically. For example, in Foucault and Bourdieu language is regarded as a source of violence and hidden power relations (for this reason in particular, that discourse itself inherently has the characteristics of desire and power), and Habermas emphasizes faith in the executive power of language, which in his opinion, through the consensus achieved by partners, owing to making familiar with appropriately better arguments, restores order to history and constitutes the basis for building a civil society. Nevertheless, propagating the idea of free discourse, which no one would be excluded from, in which all participants would have equal rights, and which would provide everyone with the opportunity to get emancipated, Habermas admires modern societies for this reason that they establish democratic order and create discursive spaces for communication. It is not impossible, however, that possessing excessive power in contemporary societies may induce anxiety and a variety of concerns among their members.

To conclude this part of the discussion I would also like to add that a review of the literature of the subject shows that the concept of discourse is connected to certain ethical requirements, such as freedom of expression, respect for the dignity of persons participating in discourse, etc. Habermas's theory of discourse invoked here evidently refers to ethical requirements. I shall return to some of the issues signalled here in the further part of these deliberations.

AROUND THE CONCEPT OF DISCOURSE

The concept of discourse has variously evolved over the centuries, overgrowing with various interpretations, but to this day it remains a vague term, unstable, fuzzy and referring more, as noted by Stanislaw Gajda (1999), to a family of meanings, rather than tending towards a clearly emerging term. In fact, this term is sometimes used as a very general concept, including in its meaning the scope of language, text, interaction, system of knowledge and the broadly understood communication / communication activity relating to a wide class of phenomena. It sometimes means a specific type of use of language or a domain of its use, such as in the case of medical, legal, political or any other discourse. Still, aspirations of that polysemic category to the status of a concept whose meaning / essence stems mainly from the context in which it is used, rather than constituting it on the basis of a stable tool set of definientia, can be observed.

Regardless of this, the term '*discourse*' remains quite firmly rooted in modern science. It is used by representatives of natural and social sciences, the humanities, as well as various disciplines / sub-disciplines of knowledge striving to determine and solve their specific problems. Outside the scientific domain, types of discourse such as political, journalistic, ideological and others, depending on the adopted criterion of typology, or the established goal of deliberations, are indicated.

A review of the literature of the subject, unfortunately explaining this concept unsatisfactorily, provides a basis for bringing order to the problem area emerging around discourse (a term generally overlooked in various compendia of knowledge). Thus, the previously cited dictionary of foreign words and phrases (Kopaliński, 1988, p. 133) narrows the meaning of discourse to the spoken realm, namely: "discourse, conversation, debate, speech, discursive, rational, logical, reflexive, based on reasoning from the previously adopted statements (premises), supported by argument; unintuitive" (Kopaliński, 1988, p. 133).

On the other hand, an online philosophical dictionary provides such concise wording in the entry of '*discourse*': "a type of discussion, according to Plato - an indirect way of reaching the truth through reasoning" (http://www.edupedia.pl/words/index/show/493315_slownik_ filozoficzny-dyskurs.html). Explaining *discourse* in the *Dictionary of philosophical terms*, it was first related to the tradition of philosophical considerations, and then summed up as

> in a narrower sense––an internally coherent system of meanings, dominant in some cultural formation, a way of perceiving and conceptualizing the world in a certain era, but also the process of co-constructing a particular vision of the world by people living in it. (Krajewski, 1996, p. 38)

However, in a small encyclopaedia of philosophy (as if prudently?) the term '*discourse*' was not included at all, but it had been decided to allocate space in it for the entry of *discursive thinking*, explaining it in the theory of cognition and in a broader sense as follows:

> from Latin discursus = conversation, reasoning [1] in the theory of cognition: thinking involving reasoning, as opposed to perceiving or other simple acts of perception (sensory or intellectual). It takes place when we come to some knowledge from other knowledge, recognized earlier. Due to the process of gradual achievement of the objective pursued ("step by step" through a series of links and indirect operations), it constitutes a typical variation of indirect learning and, for this reason, it is opposed to intuition and all other varieties of direct cognition. [2] In a broader meaning: thinking inspired by a conversation, dialogue, an exchange of arguments, polemics. It requires the participation of two or more people. Especially appreciated in the dialogic (a philosophy of meeting) and contemporary hermeneutics. (Dębowski et al., 1996, pp. 107–108)

Thus, from the philosophical perspective, understanding the concept of discourse exposes cognition in stages through indirect links, arranged in a logical sequence in the course of analyses and syntheses, i.e. singling out parts of a certain whole, seeking their nature and mutual relations as well as the formulation of conclusions synthetic in nature. However, discourse most strongly belongs to the linguistic domain (in discourse analysis, the linguistic orientation seems to dominate), as it is most strongly associated with it historically. Thus, it is no wonder that in most attempts to define discourse (also used by the representatives of the non-linguistic disciplines) authors refer to the categories of the language or the concept of the text. However, in contrast to linguists, focusing mainly on linguistic issues, philosophers perceive discourse primarily as a cognitive phenomenon of complex activity.

Meanwhile, in the sociological approach discourse occurs primarily in the context of existing standards/norms (e.g., the socio-cultural standard), or patterns of behaviour (typical and repetitive communication behavior, characteristic of a given culture and society) or interaction (e.g., symbolic interaction, in which defining and interpreting a situation takes place with the use of the language). According to the *Dictionary of Sociology*

> [d]iscourse is a system of human expression and a form of thinking developed based on objectives, prejudices and stereotypes common for a given society, which relate to a phenomenon, things, or ideas and express their current attitude to them; in M. Foucault it is associated with the concept of discursive formations - a level of knowledge characteristic of a given era, responsible for the shape of society and culture. (Olechnicki & Załęski, 2000, p. 50)

Also psychology developed research into the text in the 1980s. Understanding discourse as a system of knowledge about the world occurs among psychologists, especially those with the cognitive orientation. In the concepts of "discursive psychology" developed in the UK, the interactive aspect of the psychological phenomena of understanding, explaining and functioning of opinions and ideologies was particularly exposed (see Vank Dijk, 2001, pp. 35–37).

CONSTITUTIVE DIMENSIONS OF DISCOURSE

The turn towards discourse discussed here has to do with factors of various kinds, especially ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological ones, as illustrated in graphic terms in Figure 1, which presents the relationships and dependencies of the constitutive dimensions of discourse. These dimensions mutually condition, complement and verify one another, whereas the introduction of changes and modifications into one of the dimensions is not without significance for the remaining dimensions.
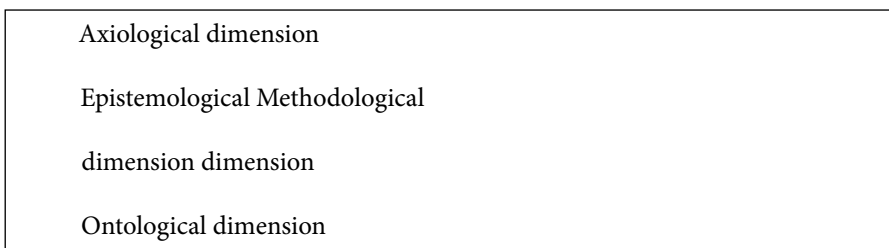
Axiological dimension	
Epistemological	Methodological
dimension	dimension
Ontological dimension	

Figure 1. Constitutive dimensions of discourse (source: own concept).

From the perspective of the humanities and social sciences, including educational sciences, the first of these dimensions includes in particular the deep and widespread socio-cultural changes, among which the vision of a society dominated by communication practices is particularly promoted, together with accompanying this state of affairs a belief that reality is constituted, constructed and designed in the process of communication, including various forms of discourse.

The epistemological factors in the humanities and social sciences, including educational sciences, include primarily the desire to get to know the role and place of man confronting new tasks and challenges in a changing world, as well as the investigation of significance of these changes, their causes and consequences, which is clearly associated with an increased interest in issues of communication and knowledge in the information society (aspiring to the name of a society of knowledge and wisdom). The turn towards man's cognitive processes, as well as towards discourses from the perspective of organized systems of knowledge, stems out of these undertakings.

The axiological dimension, on the other hand, places discourse in the anthropo-spheric universe, in which man, being a value himself, functions in a rich and diverse world of values. A human being needs for his or her life and development various assets, whose number and importance, depending on external and internal conditions, change, sometimes quite extensively. In the course of processes of valuation (experience(s), views, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, positions held) accompanying man since the beginning of his rational existence down to the very end of life, evaluation of the same facts, states of affairs, events often tends to be varied and is subject to change, situating itself on a continuum beginning from positive valuations (acceptance, approval), through neutral stances (lack of judgement, distancing) to negative ones (disapproval, condemnation), thus being inclined to a discursive exchange of views. Certainly, not in every case can we say that all singled out elements successively manifest themselves during the processes of valuation, which has been signalled in the figure below (see Figure 2).
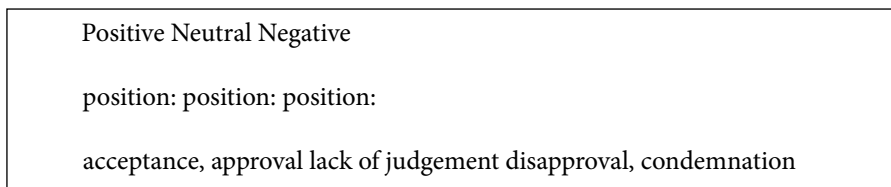
Positive	Neutral	Negative
position:	position:	position:
acceptance, approval	lack of judgement	disapproval, condemnation

Figure 2. The continuum of valuation processes (source: own concept).

Establishing the discursive interpersonal relationship I––you, others (not only in discourses) always creates an ethical dimension. The sincerity of expression, achieving understanding and agreement based on truth and fairness, or situating themselves at the opposite problematic pole interpersonal relationships, dominated by manipulation, deceit, hypocrisy, etc. are not axiologically indifferent in any case. In turn, methodological factors revolve around seeking the most appropriate ways to learn about these changes and man immersed in them, being a participant in them, a perpetrator and initiator. This category gains particular importance especially given that in the humanities and social sciences, including educational sciences, in research procedures both in the quantitative and qualitative approaches, it is dominated by methods, techniques and research tools discursively oriented, or being discursive in nature (e.g., questionnaires, surveys, instructions for interviews and document analysis, scenarios, worksheets, observation journals) as well as those concerning different types of discursive practices (e.g., dialogues, panel discussions, group discussions, public debates, personal and official documents, scientific disputes, etc.). Thus, a perspective of perceiving research processes in the field of the humanities and social sciences, including educational sciences, emerges, among others, through the prism of discursive architecture of research procedures.

The concept of discourse designed by Habermas is multi-inspiring for educational research (see Habermas, 1983)[4]. An extensive theory of communication activities lies at the core of the discourse theory of this 84-year-old philosopher, whose achievements go far beyond the world of philosophy (due to, among other things, connecting philosophy and the theory of sociology or psychology and political analysis). He distinguishes theoretical discourse (reconciliation of statement/propositions) and practical discourse (agreeing on standards), whose goal is to reach an agreement (consensus) in respect of disputed validity claims among the participants of social interactions. In his opinion, it is possible to reach a consensus provided the rules of speech ethics and an ideal speech situation, i.e. one that guarantees equality and symmetrical distribution of opportunities and the convertibility of dialogue roles in the discourse, are observed by discourse participants. Thus idealized a construct (an ideal partner, ideal speech situation based on recognized values and standards, the approval of voluntarily conducted discourse by everyone) is frequently questioned because of the impossibility to materialize in practice the ideal of society in the form of a communicative "world of life," with all its members' equal opportunities to argue and showing responsibility for others. However, the works of Habermas, who is con-

sidered the most famous living philosopher, are quoted almost all over the world. In fact, some gaps have been perceived in the concept of discourse ethics; especially the descriptive layer of his theory induces dissatisfaction when facing strong argumentation. However, it must be noted that being aware of this state of affairs, Habermas––as befits a great philosopher––also calls into question his own ideas and in such a convention they are read and interpreted. According to Lech Morawski, for example,

> discourse is for Habermas not just a way to justify norms and sentences, but also a model of an ideal social form i.e. such organization of institutions and decision-making processes, so that they can count on unforced consent of all those who are involved in the life of society. Habermas is certainly aware of the idealizing nature of his theory and admits that no historical or contemporary society coincides with that form of human life, the anticipation of which is discourse. Thus, discourse is rather––as Habermas puts it––an assumption or objective, than a real social fact relating to the way of functioning of a particular society (Morawski, 1988, pp. 94–95).

THE STUDY OF DISCOURSE

In the modern approach to the study of discourse, oral expression (spoken language) and text (written language) are equally taken into account as elements of the analysis. A clear position on this issue was stressed by a Dutch researcher, Teun van Dijk (2001), who wrote among others that "despite a number of significant differences between spoken and written language there are enough similarities to justify the inclusion of both communication modes in the general term of 'discourse'" (p. 11). Qualitative analyses (of written and spoken texts), such as a study of the argumentative strategy of respondents) primarily constitute discourse research. Quantitative analyses, such as e.g., analyses of the frequency of occurrence of various types of expressions or phrases, are sometimes conducted. Researchers often choose to combine both approaches, the quantitative and qualitative ones. Discourse is researched both as a structure (for example, one determining the process of thinking, speaking, acting, as a system of meanings, a system of standards, a system of knowledge, etc.) and as a process, the essence of which is constant transformation and change, including e.g., the impact of relationships between participants in a discourse with one another, power and social control, etc.

There was a clear predominance of linguistic research in the study of discourse in Europe at the beginning of the previous century. A special role was played by Levi-Strauss' and others' structuralism, including Ferdinand de Saussure and Foucault, and Russian formalism, (including Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubiecki), focusing primarily on the form of the work, its specific artistic shape. Moreover, the linguistic studies of that period made Czech functionalism manifest itself, which assumed that any, even the smallest cultural phenomenon fulfils a specific function for the whole of a social system. The list of developers and main representatives of this research

orientation included the Polish anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, the British one––Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, and the Czech linguist Vilem Mathesius.

In the United States, however, the domain of ethnomethodological and cultural research, focusing mainly on spoken language, dramatically expanded. As a result, this approach led to the development of the so-called conversation analysis, represented by the American sociologist and author of Canadian origin, Erving Goffman (1922-1982), along with American sociologists such as Harvey Sacks (1935-1975), Gail Jeefferson (1938-2008) and Emanuel A. Schegloff (born 1937).

An inexhaustible source of inspiration for researchers on discourse are the concepts of already referenced earlier Foucault, for whom discourse is discursive practice, since it is discourses that define the social practice that governs the patterns of thought (epistemes), i.e. certain types of communicative action in the widely perceived context of social life. In their essence, discourses, constituting a resource of social knowledge at a specific time and space, define a framework perspective of viewing the world and functioning in it. Foucault introduced the concept of "discursive formation" and used it to determine discourse as a set of statements belonging to one of them. Looking from thus delineated a perspective, one can see as particularly relevant the investigation of such key issues as for what reasons and why specific patterns / models of thought, in this and not that way, define such and not another perspective of seeing the world and shaping individuals and communities, as well as the surrounding reality, at a given time and place.

Similarly to Habermas, Foucault inspired many researchers attempting to create a new concept of discourse and introduce in this area a specific order, which is conditioned by the questions of who speaks, to whom he speaks, for what purpose and in what circumstances he does so. Foucault's theoretical assumptions, however, do not form a coherent model of discourse, and so the originator of this state of affairs was not immune to the criticism of terminological vagueness in the proposed concept of discourse. However, Foucault's work is in many ways inspiring also for educational sciences. In fact, it is not only the issue of content and subject of discourse in education that is important, or the process of education considered as discursive experience, but also the problem of understanding who in discourse can and who cannot (should not), and why, say something / anything in this and not another way, and who must / should begin or end a conversation at a specific time and place in the educational space (for example, during exams, official academic events, etc.). Seeking a place in the educational space for discourse understood as a bundle (complex) of relationships between the expressions and social processes and standards in force, may be fascinating. Given that power constitutes discourses and legitimizes itself by discourses, the pursuit of knowledge, which can also be / is aspiring to power, appears to be an important issue here. Therefore, among others, the issues of social exclusion of individuals, the issue of loneliness and isolation, and many other important problems located in the educational space arise. Some of them are successfully tackled, e.g., the issue of exclusion as a problem of philosophy of education, including being considered as a fact, standard and a tort. Among many important questions, the author in

her deliberations poses, among others, a fundamental question, sensitizing readers of his work: "Can the greater sum of good justify evil in the life of the individual, his or her exclusion and biographical disaster?" (Kostyło, 2008, p. 27). Certainly, in the study of discourse one can make use of the theoretical concepts of other creators, including for example, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, but certainly it is impossible to refer specifically to such a large group of thinkers and exhaust this interestingly complex issue in just one article.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is also worth mentioning here due to its usefulness in educational research. The beginnings of critical discourse analysis are linked to the publication of a collective work edited by Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew (1979) under the title *Language and Control*, as a result which the category of *critical linguistics* was introduced. In the course of its development and dissemination, it soon evolved into *critical discourse analysis* (CDA) (see Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA does not aspire to belong to a particular discipline, paradigm, or school. In fact, the need for its application clearly results from the existing, usually "urgent," "uncomfortable" social issues requiring to be resolved. Within CDA is possible to use a variety of theories, descriptions, methods, depending on their suitability to attain a preconceived objective (a little more on this topic, see Ostrowska, 2011).

Educational discourses are in our country the subject of educational research, as evidenced, inter alia, by the enriching literature of the subject, although it is impossible to respond to all publications on this topic in a single text (the issue of discourse to a varying degree and extent found its reflection in such other publications in the field of educational sciences as: Klus-Stańska & Szczepska-Pustkowska, 2009; Błeszyński, Baczała, & Binnebesel, 2008; Węc, 2007). However, it is worth recalling here that the concept of discourse was introduced in the Polish pedagogy by Zbigniew Kwieciński, the editor of the avant-garde six-volume series of *Cultural and Educational Studies*, entitled *Absent discourses*, which was published in the years from 1991 to 2000 (Kwieciński, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 2000). The educational thoughts and ideas of Western and American researchers functioning outside our country, and made available then, clearly contributed to the interest in discourse not only in the field of educational sciences and they still play an important, inspiring role in terms of thinking about education.

It should also be noted that the first compendium of knowledge in the field of education, which provided the entry of *educational discourse*, is the PWN lexicon under the title *Education*, explaining the term as historically and epistemologically conditioned rules of construction of speeches on education, as the kind of "speech" currently present in schools and as an interactive event, which is a place for exchange of messages in the educational process (Milerski & Śliwerski, 2000, p. 50).

THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE AND ATTITUDE IN THE CRITICAL APPROACH

In the critical approach, the researcher's task is to expose linguistic violence and hidden relations of power, which is certainly a significant and challenging task for

many reasons. First of all, it requires an interdisciplinary approach because of the issues it deals with, which are situated within the research area, such as the relationships between the text, speech, social cognition, power, society and culture, and many others. In addition, the researcher not only describes and explains the phenomena of interest to him/her, but also assumes the attitude of an active spokesperson and defender of those who are subject to hidden, often unconscious power, taking the form of violence of a symbolic nature. Thus, taking a particular position, the researcher expresses them by engaging in what he researches and is not free from evaluating, which should be considered as an intrinsic property of the humanities and social sciences because of, inter alia, their normative, evaluative point of view (cf. Sztompka, 2002, p. 20). Also Szacki shares this point of view by expressing a conviction that, in the study of broadly understood communication phenomena,

> is not about the mere interpretation of social reality, but about its change, which in this case would consist in establishing social relationships to ensure . . . free communication, that is - to put it otherwise––the liberation of man from any coercion, be it "external" or "internal" one. It is not only about explaining the processes of "interaction," but also about reaching the state in which they would run in an uninterrupted way and lead to reaching a maximum of unforced agreement between its partners. (Szacki, 2002, p. 928)

However, given that human actions and products of human activity are marked by values, reflection cannot escape from valuation in the humanities and social sciences. Values are always associated with the life and functioning of a human being. People evaluate and judge themselves and others, states of affairs, situations, processes, events, actions, etc., using categories such as duty, order, prohibition, obligation, good, bad, preferences, etc. It is true that in the past century, Max Weber, referring to various arguments, called for "value-free science". He argued that facts and values belong to different spheres. However, valuation is an irreducible part of the humanities and social sciences as well as cognition in their area. Since human activities are specific in their nature, requiring accounting for factors such as intentions, goals, motives, standards and values, Weber's thesis can be challenged. It is impossible to remove evaluative predicates, and particularly descriptive and evaluative ones, from the language of science. This view was also shared among others by one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century, Popper, who wrote straightforwardly that ". . . a value-free scientist is not an ideal scientist. Nothing can be achieved without passion, and even more so in pure science. The words 'the love of truth' are not just a metaphor" (Popper, 1997, p. 93). Ossowski previously spoke characteristically about this issue arguing that the humanities and social sciences are more philosophically and ideologically involved than natural sciences: "The results of research or predictions based on it, when they are made known in the environment they concern, become a new part of the social situation" (Ossowski, 1983, p. 181).

A FEW CONCLUDING REMARKS

I began my considerations in this text with extremely complex, and unsatisfactorily resolved so far, terminological issues addressing, inter alia, the relatively high degree of freedom in the use of the term *discourse* by representatives of the humanities and social sciences, including educational sciences, in their deliberations. Such a state of affairs is undoubtedly a cause of numerous controversies in resolving complex issues of both theoretical and methodological nature relating to discourse. Thus, a need to clarify what is, and what is not discourse, is still open.

Meanwhile, the issue of *discourse*, in addition to the issues of language and communication, occupies a special place in the contemporary humanities and social sciences. Almost every important reflection on society and man begins with turning to linguistic issues, leading to findings within the domain of linguistics or language theory (cf. Ostrowska, 2008b). However, the complexity of the study of discourse results from its interdisciplinary nature of philosophical, sociological, linguistic, psychological, educational and other perspectives that penetrate each other in epistemological and exploratory undertakings.

The abundance of the diversity of views, positions, preferences, ways of doing things in the area of educational sciences on the one hand attests to its growing complexity and, on the other hand, induces to the endless search for the best, most effective ways / methods / procedures / and paradigms of learning and describing the explored fragments of educational reality. The quality of results of such search creates a basis for assessing the scientific level, the nature of constructed knowledge and opportunities for developing educational sciences (I have dealt with this issue from a slightly different problem perspective) (see Ostrowska, 2008a).

The issues concerning the relationship between discourse and reality, as well as those that generate questions about what the study of discourse brings into educational sciences, and the other way round, as well as to what extent and scope they inspiringly mark new areas of research, emerge as significant.

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DYSKURS – Z PERSPEKTYWY TEORETYCZNO-METODOLOGICZNEJ

ABSTRAKT: O podjęciu niniejszej problematyki zaważyło co najmniej kilka powodów, pośród nich zwłaszcza fakt rozpowszechniania się pojęcia dyskursu w różnych sferach życia społecznego pomimo niedookreślonego, nieostrego znaczenia terminu, którego sens z reguły wyłania się z kontekstu w jakim zostaje ono użyte. Ponadto interesująca zdaje się dość duża swoboda w posługiwaniu się kategorią dyskursu przez autorów prac o rozmaitym zakresie i poziomie problemowym oraz wyodrębnianie różnych rodzajów dyskursu w podejmowanych rozważaniach (tj. polityczny, prawny, historyczny, filozoficzny, edukacyjny, naukowy etc.) z pominięciem wyraźnych kryteriów owej typologii. Jako istotna jawi się ponadto kwestia jakościowych badań nad dyskursem, które ciągle jeszcze nie są należycie doceniane, nie tylko w naukach o edukacji.

Rozważania rozpoczynam od kilku uwag wprowadzających, po czym nawiązuję do ważniejszych kwestii etymologicznych, oraz zatrzymuję się przy zagadnieniu znaczenia dyskursu. Następnie zwracam uwagę na pojawiające się problemy z pojęciem dyskursu i odnoszę się do wybranych aspektów badań dyskursu, w tym do roli i pozycji badacza. Na koniec podejmuję próbę podsumowania rozważań.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: dyskurs, perspektywa teoretyczno-metodologiczna, kwestie terminologiczne, epistemologiczne, aksjologiczne.

✍

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1. Discussion, from Latin *discutio*, *discussi*, *discussum* means to break, to shake, from *discutere* – shake, scatter, it is an exchange of views on a topic, deliberating a case, one way of exchanging views of people interested in a particular subject. The most common varieties of discussions are plenary ones, panels, brainstorming, Socratic, focus group, round table debate, informal debate, talk shows, online discussions, and many others.

2. Dialogue from Greek *dia = by + logos = word*; *dialogos = conversation*, *dialegein = to talk*. The ability of engaging in and conducting dialogue, discussion, investigation of truth, seeking wisdom, is what the ancient termed the art of talking – *dialektike techne*. Known types of dialogue include: alleged, social, public, educational, university, ecumenical, therapeutic, negotiation, political, cultural, inter-cultural, national, international, generational, and interparadigmatic and other.

3. Conversation is the basic, primordial way in which people communicate using natural language or speech as a means of communication. The most common types of conversations are friendly ones, private, qualifying, individual, initial, group, phone, chat, Internet chat, ICQ, Skype and others.

4. Habermas's theory inspired Ms. Daria Wojtkiewicz to write an interesting dissertation under the title *Interactions of subjects of education in the context of J. Habermas's theory of communicative action*, under the guidance of Professor Ewa Kubiak-Szymborska. In my role as a reviewer, I had an opportunity to make familiar with its contents thoroughly. The dissertation was defended with distinction at the Faculty of Education and Psychology at the University of Bydgoszcz in 2010.