Problems of Reconnecting the 'Science of Language' to Discourse

Jurgita Kerevičienė, Jūratė Patašiūtė

Abstract. Reconnection of language and discourse is a problem of modern linguistics. The two domains of the linguistic science were studied separately in traditional linguistics. Nowadays new approaches can broaden the linguistic view of language phenomena, which disclose different relationship with non-linguistic knowledge, human environment, culture, etc. Such connections give new ideas, new methods for analysis and language understanding. Thus, there are different attitudes towards the development of language. Some grammarians seek to study language from the traditional, i.e. grammatical point of view, however, modern linguists try to implement modern ideas and methods of reconnecting language and discourse. This article deals with problems related to the analysis of linguistic issues on discourse and language science in the English and Lithuanian languages and analyses the problem of interconnection and interdependency of language as a theoretical subject and discourse as a practical linguistic adaptation in the modern world. There is also presented a comparative approach to the problem based on the ideas of well-known both Lithuanian and English grammarians.

Since ancient times language science was studied mainly from the grammatical point of view. Grammatical scholars believed that the only purpose of grammar was to give strict rules of writing and speaking correctly. For this reason linguists paid attention only to the main domains of language: phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicology and this attitude was popular up to the new modern times. Each of the language domains has been studied disconnected from the rest of the system and thus presents different descriptions of language itself. Nevertheless, language even then was treated as a creative and analytic systematic subject.

M. Y. Blokh illustrated that situation by saying that:

the rigid regulations for the correct ways of expression, for want of the profound understanding of the social nature of language, were often based on purely subjective and arbitrary judgments of individual grammar compilers. The result of this 'prescriptive' approach was, that alongside of quite essential and useful information, non-existent 'rules' were formulated that stood in sheer contradiction with the existing language usage, i.e. lingual reality' (Blokh, 1983:7).

A similar linguistic approach has been practised and propagated by Lithuanian grammarians J. Balkevičius (1963) and V. Labutis (1998) who have collected and studied not only authentic data of language, but also their own invented data. The facts show that they were not unique in such practice. A famous contemporary linguist R. de Beaugrande in his 'Introduction to Discourse Analysis' (1996) points to the fact that such "language guardians have been rallying to 'preserve good language' and 'rescue it from destruction by vulgar speech'. They invoked such lofty ideas as 'logic' and 'purity', but their real motive was to legitimise the language variety of powerful people as the only 'correct' or 'proper usage' (Beaugrande, 1996).

Another linguist R. Fowler broadened the importance of the problem by the factor of legitimation of the linguistic code meanings which have not been created by an individual himself, but

"they were already encoded in the language he acquired as a child. It is the language of his society, not his own individual code, which he speaks and through the medium of which he sees the world. This language (or so called linguistic data) is an 'official' language in the sense that it comprises the structures and the meanings authorized by the dominant interests of the culture" (Fowler, 1986:29).

Language cannot be treated as invented data, because native speakers get accustomed to the meanings, structures even terminology that they have used all their life. At first, they learn their own language from parents who are in absolute authority over them; later education carries this process of initiation into the linguistic codes of State authority. R. Fowler remarked that even textbooks children have to work with, and the books that are available or allowed in public libraries, are 'standard' texts, approved and usually 'well-tried' and eventually published by respected and large publishing houses. Throughout their life native speakers are exposed to an official language of legitimated meanings in newspapers, films, and TV, all of these media the products of vastly powerful business and state enterprises, controlled by regular inspection state institutions, etc. The linguist is concerned with the objective linguistic data in saying that:

'Real' language is that of school, book, radio, newspaper, and government. Our private language is minimal and mundane and, in so far as it discourses on social, personal, and political topics, it is deeply ideological because of its dependence on legitimated concepts (Fowler, 1986:30).

Thus, real language is only a state language, though, in reality, in any human environment natural language is mainly used as means of communication and knowledge. In this context another problem more sociolinguistic than just linguistic arises, namely, the relationship among an individual language user, the language and the society.

On the other hand, traditional grammarians have always tried to disconnect language as science from anything that is non-linguistic like our reality, inventions in the world, our daily communication, etc. The American linguist B. L. Whorf was extraordinary honest in expressing his point of view:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages… We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds through our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees (Whorf, 1956).

The response to such a statement came from the earlier mentioned linguist, namely R. Fowler, who reacted by simply stating that the language does not exist on its own:

"Whorf's claimed that language determines the categories of thought that can be accepted so long as we qualify the argument somewhat: the semantic categories are not simply properties of the language, but products of the society in which the language is moulded" (Fowler, 1986:32).

The same point of view was shared by other modern linguists and their language understanding can be best illustrated by a quotation from R. de Beaugrande's works "linguists have tried to reconstruct language disconnected from discourse, believing it should be done to create a proper 'science' (Beaugrande, 1996).

Sticking to current linguistic investigation methodology in cases of disconnecting language from discourse, one may have only *language as a system of underlying patterns and rules that arrange and transform the data.*

The simpliest example from the domain of syntax can serve as a proof of such a status. It is a commonly known and widely accepted statement that the minimal and main unit of syntax is <u>a sentence</u>. There exist lots of definitions of a simple sentence. According to different scholars, their ideas, aspects and trends, a simple sentence can be understood and explained in various ways.

In Lithuanian grammar books (Lietuvių kalbos sintaksė, 1998; Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos gramatika, 1997) a sentence is mainly treated in two ways:

▪ either it is considered to be a syntactical unit with meaningful relations and interrelations among words. Then it is called a minimal communicative unit, which should have **grammatically independent form** from other language forms, and in speech it is defined by intonation, in written language - by punctuation;

▪ or a sentence might be treated as an idea, which is uttered or put on paper.

Lithuanian linguists (V. Labutis (1998); J. Balkevičius, (1998)) have tried to explain *a sentence as a predicative word combination* from the grammatical point of view. One of the representatives of traditional grammarians Jonas Balkevičius states that a sentence is defined according to its principal features: a sentence is mounted with its predication and intonation, word order and grammatical relation among words.

In the first half of the twentieth century some Lithuanian linguists such as Jonas Jablonskis (Rygiškių Jonas), P. Meškauskas and some present day linguists as V. Labutis, B. Kalinauskas and V. Sirtautas treated a sentence as being a mental human product realized in oral or written ways: 'a sentence is one predicative form of a word or it is a predicative combination of grammatically related word-forms by means of which are pronounced or written relatively completed ideas. A sentence helps to express emotions, feelings, wishes, intentions and it is used for human communication purpose' (Kalinauskas, 1980:49). For instance, J. Jablonskis defined a sentence as "a thought, which is uttered or written in words", or "a sentence is a grammatical combination of words and it is used to express a completed idea". In "A Grammar of Modern Lithuanian "a simple sentence is defined as "the whole complex of interconnection of words and their meaningful relations. A sentence is the minimal communicative unit, which has a grammatically independent form, i.e. with its grammatical means it is not included to the structure of other language forms" (Grammar of Modern Lithuanian, 1997:476). In the school textbooks (Lietuvių kalbos vadovėlis 10 klasei, 1965; Lietuvių kalbos vadovėlis 9-11 klasėms, 1980; Lietuvių kalbos vadovėlis, 1993) a sentence is defined as "the principal meaningful unit of language, because we communicate using sentences. We can share information, express wishes and emotions using sentences. Then we can ask, answer even urge".

Contemporary Lithuanian linguists like V. Labutis or B. Kalinauskas try to extend this definition by saying that nowadays it is difficult to define a sentence, because of the risk of losing some important details and features of this syntactical unit. Nevertheless, it is urgent to start revising and newly describing this particular communicative unit. If linguists do not define a sentence in a proper scientific way, they will face some problems of drawing boundaries among a sentence, an utterance, a text or discourse later on.

V. Labutis claims that a sentence must be defined only by explaining its main aspects: formal, structural, semantic and functional. For instance, from the semantic point of view, a sentence is a special report about a real situation (a fact, an event). Announcing facts we simultaneously express our attitude toward such a report. Formally, a sentence is treated as a specific grammatical construction consisting of forms of words related via grammatical relations. From this aspect a sentence is realised through its main feature – intonation. Structurally, a sentence must have at least one predication, i.e. we choose a thing or a fact and add any additional properties or characteristics to it. From the functional point of view, a sentence must possess its own communicative value which consists of two parts: rheme and theme. Summing the existing situation up, V. Labutis presents a revised definition:

"A sentence is a syntactical unit which has a communicative function. The basis of the sentence is organised according to one

grammatical construction formed from the structural schemes, and has its unique predication and uttered situation."

"Sakinys – tai komunikacijai skirtas sintaksinis vienetas, kurio pamatą sudaro pagal vieną iš struktūros schemų suformuota gramatinė konstrukcija, turinti atskirą predikatyvumą bei pasakymo situaciją" (Labutis, 1998:109).

According to Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1985) sentence is defined as 'the largest unit of grammatical organization within which parts of speech (eg. nouns, verbs, adverbs) and grammatical classes (eg. word, phrase, clause) are said to function. In English a sentence normally contains one independent clause with a finite verb' (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985:255). A more specific definition can be found in other sources:

'Sentence is the largest purely grammatical unit. The items in the sentence are linked by rather rigid grammatical rules about such things as the order of words, the endings on particular words, and the elements which particular words (especially verbs) require to be present or absent. It is important to note that a sentence, in linguistic usage, is an abstract object conforming to grammatical rules' (Trask, 1997:197).

Alongside there were linguists who tried to emphasise the importance of the grammatical parts and functions of the sentence. They paid little attention to the communicative aspect of the sentence, at the same time employing greater efforts introducing the idea that language is a system of meaningful units, which are closely interconnected and interdependent within the framework of the whole language. In their case, sentence is treated as

'the immediate integral unit of speech built up of words according to a definite syntactic pattern and distinguished by a contextually relevant communicative purpose. Any coherent connection of words having an informative destination is effected within the framework of the sentence. Therefore the sentence is the main object of syntax as part of the grammatical theory' (Blokh, 1983:236).

Summing up all the variety of definitions the principal features of this syntactical unit, would be :

◆ its **content** (words or syntactical forms of words in synthetic languages);

◆ a completed or semi completed **idea** (a sentence without any idea is not a sentence, it might be either a phrase or a group of sounds);

◆ **intonation** (a sentence differs from a phrase because of intonation);

◆ and what is very important it must contain its own **communicative value** (it shows the unity of dialectic content and form. There is no content without a form and no form without content).

Nowadays linguists devote more energy to investigation of a larger syntactical unit, i.e. discourse. Discourse is often as a linguistic product, which has been received as a result of an act of communication.

Discourse is a continuous stretch of speech (or less commonly writing) which can reasonably be regarded as forming a unit, in that it has some kind of recognizable

structure. The clearest examples of discourse are speech events, but an ordinary conversation may also be regarded as a discourse (Trask, 1997:71).

If grammar refers to the rules a language uses to form grammatical units such as clause, phrase, and sentence, discourse refers to larger units of language such as paragraphs, conversations, interviews, etc.

In the sources mentioned above the study of both written and spoken discourse is treated as discourse analysis; some researchers use the terms 'discourse' and 'text linguistics' to refer to the study of written discourse. In that case, *discourse analysis is the study of how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units such as paragraphs, conversations, interviewers, etc.* Consequently, discourse analysis can be defined as:

1) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence;

2) concerned with the relationships between language and society;

3) concerned with the interactive properties of everyday communication.

Thus discourse analysis deals with:

1. the choice of articles, pronouns, and tenses effects the structure of the discourse (address forms, cohesion);

2. the relationship between utterances in a discourse;

3. the moves made by speakers to introduce a new topic, change the topic, or assert a higher role relationship to the other participants. [Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics 1985:84]

The term *discourse* is used extremely diversely, but a key definition can be accepted as follows:

"Discourse in its rather strict linguistic sense refers to connected speech or writing occurring at supra-sentential levels (at levels greater that the single sentence" (Beaugrande, 1996).

Such approach was pioneered by Harris (1952), who argued that formal linguistic methods could be used for understanding how sentences are connected, being not simply collections of formal structures which exist within the sentence itself. At present most discourse analysts are engaged in analysis of naturally occurring data and try to stick to local-contextual features and social functions of them , rather than their purely "linguistic" properties.

However, in Lithuanian grammars it is difficult to even trace a term discourse and almost impossible to identify Lithuanian grammarians attitude let alone the description of this phenomenon. One may come across a term 'diskursas', because in the dictionary of international words a discourse is explained as an expression of an expanded idea about some thing.

"Diskursas – lingv. sudarytas pagal tam tikrą sistemą, ppr. Išplėstas minties apie kurį nors dalyką išreiškimas; semiotikoje – kalbinis arba nekalbinis procesas, turintis vienokią ar kitokią prasmę" (Tarptautinių žodžių žodynas, 1985:115).

Lithuanian linguists accept discourse as a speech unit and do not explain it in any grammar book. They do not treat

discourse as other large constituents belonging to the domain of syntax. (Discourse as a linguistic or grammar object is not mentioned in 'A Grammar of Modern Lithuanian', published in 1997) For this reason it is impossible to comment on the Lithuanian approach towards this phenomenon, though discourse and its place in the language forms a very important part of modern study of any language.

According to M. Y. Blokh, it is obvious, that some modern English and Lithuanian grammarians stick mainly to the traditional point of view to the science of language. They try to keep the invented data and their efforts devoted to the problem of reconnecting the linguistic science to everyday use of language are very weak. Speakers stick to the traditional rules (invented data) during learning process. However, in daily lives they use other rules (natural data) widely accepted and applied in their environment. This situation can be illustrated by a practical example – the word order in a simple sentence. It is well known that word order is rather strict in English sentences. However, it might be strict in the grammatically correct written sentences which are singled out of discourse. There are cases when the word arrangement in the language can be inverted. If one tries to explain this from the modern point of view, then such an inverted word order expresses an informative function and its use should be considered as quite correct. In such examples as: *In the centre of the room, under the chandelier, as became a host, stood the head of the family, old Jolyon himself* or *Inside on a wooden bunk lay a young Indian woman* it is evident that the central informative element was placed in the strongest semantic position, i.e. at the end of the sentence (Blokh, 1983:9).

Such theoretical study discloses the synthesis of content and expression of the language, and explains the reconnection language and discourse when a sentence shows the relation of the denoted event to reality. At the same time according to M. Y. Blokh, traditional grammar has never regarded the sentence as a part of a system of means of expression; it has always interpreted the sentence not as an element for constructing speech, but as speech itself, i.e. a set of coherent flow of words of one speaker expressing a complete thought.

In cases when linguistics leaves out discourse from its field of interest it is useless to speak about above mentioned communicative and informative linguistic functions. Consequently, language will predominate and will be treated only as stable and invented data corpus in comparison to the authentic data of natural language. Then linguistic codes do not reflect reality neutrally; they interpret, organize, and classify the subjects of discourse. They embody theories of how the world is arranged, what are world-views or ideologies. Since language is not just internal and passive knowledge, but activity carried out by extensive speaking, listening, writing and reading, the sets of ideas encoded in language are constantly affirmed and revised every day. Linguistic knowledge is not just ideas, it is practical knowledge of the most important nature.

No doubt, there exist lots of contradictions of syntacctictical units (sentence discourse). First, linguists do not pay enough attention to the discourse. Second, up to now pupils and students are still being taught strict rules of English sentences, they are still taught how to organize conversations and any other kind of discourse in a traditional way. They are taught to form and write sentences and use them in a practical way. They are taught to combine theory, i.e. strict, better or worse formulated rules with practical use without any discussions and explanations. But one should not forget the fact that knowledge of one's language comprises one's knowledge of how all the sentences of the language are recognized as sentences, and of how to make and interpret them as such. Alongside with this, an alternative claim can be proposed, namely that "knowledge of one's language comprises one's ability to engage in those communicative events with which one is from time to time confronted" (Gethin, 1991). So, summing up it is said that *the arrangement of words in a sentence is decided not only by syntax, but also partly by speaker's background knowledge of the world and of his or her society.*

Such understanding of a linguistic situation proves that it is necessary to reconnect language (linguistic knowledge) to discourse (linguistic competence, communicative, informative and cultural knowledge). And only then language might be defined as "*a system integrated with speakers' knowledge of the world and society. This system should be described in linguistic, cognitive, and social terms, along with the conditions under which speakers use it*" (Beaugrande, 1996).

Reconnecting these two objects linguists may receive effective results not only in a linguistic domain, but also in understanding and interpretation of our world, culture, and social environment. Linguists can achieve such results after they accept three main postulates:

1. the **coverage** of a language should keep getting wider;

2. the various descriptions should **converge**;

3. and linguists or linguistic schools should reach a firm **consensus** about how to proceed.

Nevertheless, every researcher has his or her own right to choose the way of analysis and interpretation of the data, because "a truly creative dialogue is not at all common, even in science… The essential thing being that each participant is suspending his or her point of view, while also holding other points of view in a suspended form and giving full attention to what they mean, and it would be desirable for the language guardians to quit with their invented data and to pay their attentio to the actual use of languageand its communicative values.

As **conclusion**, it should be only honest to mention the fact, that there already are evident tendencies to change the traditional point of view and attitudes towards grammar in both linguistic 'teams': English and Lithuanian. The Lithuanian scholars have problems with the terminology; suitable terms for some important syntactical objects have not been formed yet. Sometimes the so-called 'translated' terms are used though there are no suitable definitions for

them suggested. As an example a term 'discourse' could be named. Apart from the traditional Lithuanian linguistic school has still not agreed upon its understanding of the relationship among speech, language and discourse. Most probably this could be one of the reasons why Lithuanian linguists V. Labutis, J. Balkevičius still stick to the traditional ways of treating grammar. There must be some other reasons why modern innovative ideas come slowly to the language as a science. Finally it is necessary to remind of one more thing: "meaning in language is not natural but conversational. Linguists say that the coding of meanings is arbitrary, by which they mean that any sounds or letters could be used to represent any concept. But what concepts come to be represented is not arbitrary or accidentally matter… Language thus becomes a part of social practice, a tool for preserving the prevailing order" (Fowler, 1986:31).

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Jurgita Kerevičienė, Jūratė Patašiūtė

Kalbos mokslo ir diskurso vientisumo problematika

Santrauka

Modernioje lingvistikoje iškyla aktuali kalbos mokslo ir diskurso sujungimo ir vientisumo problema. Tradiciniu požiūriu šie du lingvistiniai dalykai būdavo analizuojami atsieti vienas nuo kito. Šių dienų moderniosios lingvistikos teorijos parodė, kad kalbos mokslas turėtų būti aiškinamas ir studijuojamas kasdieninio gyvenimo, kultūros fone. Tai, ką žmogus įgyja vaikystėje, kokią susiformuoja pasaulėžiūrą, kokioje kultūrinėje aplinkoje užauga, tai jis parodo savo kalboje (tiek rašytinėje, tiek ir šnekamojoje), formuluodamas sakinius ir kurdamas ilgesnius ar trumpesnius tekstus.
Kiek plačiau straipsnyje pateikta konkretaus sintaksinio vieneto – vientisinio sakinio - apibrėžimas, samprata ir aspektų aiškinimas anglų ir lietuvių lingvistų požiūriu. Iš pateikto trumpo pristatymo, aišku, kad sakinį sunku apibrėžti, jeigu jis traktuojamas kaip diskurso, t. y. platesnio sintaksinio vieneto dalis. Iškyla neaiškumų ir dėl paties diskurso apibrėžimo ir analizės lietuvių lingvistikoje, nes Lietuvių gramatikos autoriai, kaip antai, V. Labutis, Č. Grenda, B. Kalinauskas dar tik diskutuoja ne vien tik dėl paties diskurso termino, bet ir dėl jo analizės. Todėl ir aktualu toliau dirbti šioje mokslo srityje.

The Authors

Jurgita Kerevičienė, PhD student, assistant at Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania.
Academic interests: linguistics and sociolinguistics.
Address: Kaunas University of Technology, Faculty of Humanities, Centre of Foreign Languages, Gedimino 43-313, Lithuania.
E-mail: jurgita.kereviciene@ktu.lt

Jūratė Patašiūtė, PhD, assist. prof. at Vilnius University Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, Lithuania.
Academic interests: linguistics, translation studies.
Address: Vilnius University Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, Mutinės 8, Lithuania.
E-mail: jurate.patasiute@khf.vu.lt