Text and Discourse:
Units of Speech and
Communicative Activity

L ots of definitions exist today for both text and discourse. It is absolutely impossible to introduce them all at once. Moreover, there is no need for such a presentation, as a certain number of definitions may be dominant for some researches, another number may become mostly strategic for others. Having recently become the most disputable phenomena in modern linguistics they are very often contradicted as different units of speech and more often characterized within similar terms, by similar parameters.

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The topical task of the present article is to generalize the results of different approaches targeting at a definite aim to bring discourse and text as close as possible viewed exactly within the frames of an act of communication.

Though the term "discourse" appeared in linguistic researches in the early 60-s of the XX century, no final determination has been yet achieved by all those who try to distinguish between these two units of speech. First, "discourse" came to replace the term "text" and was defined similarly to "text" as an act of speech possessing coherence, informative intention, communicative strategy and purposive nature. As seen, all the devices had always been the indicators of the text.

A great number of linguists define both text and discourse as a coherent piece of utterance, existing and functioning within a certain situation. In traditional stylistics these situations are termed as functional styles, though this term has also been surpassed by a more convenient and modern one "a discourse". Thus, a discourse being determined as a linguistic unit with its semantic, syntactic and structural characteristics, acquires a broader sense than a piece of utterance.

Yet, today the term "discourse" is applied to so many phenomena in the actual reality that it comes to possess non-linguistic properties circulating in a larger context than the situation where utterance is functioning as a result of speech activity.

"Political discourse", "social discourse", "psychological discourse", "media discourse", "communist discourse", "feminist discourse", "intercultural discourse" – all these terms refer more to activities, way of thinking, behavior, mentality, evaluation, than to language media used in a certain context of each of the mentioned situations.

Discourse here becomes a specific kind of activity very much depending upon the communicants' knowledge and experience, their ability to perceive, reconstruct and reproduce the actual picture of the world. Both sides participate actively in a certain

process of communication which may be both written and oral, verbal and non-verbal. The latter occurs in the situations where language is substituted by other means of transforming and representing mental, emotional, spiritual and other notions (a piece of art, music, architecture, etc.). Thus, any kind of communication, that is a message circulating between a producent and a recipient, may be termed as a discourse, which surveys a broader panorama of human activity exposing the interaction of thought, culture, society, behavior and language (or other system of signs). Anyhow, it may be determined as a specific form of creative environment, where a motivational process of "forming and formulating the thought in communication" is taking place (see Zimnaya, 2001).

The extra-linguistic power that discourse acquires due to such an approach towards its nature is constituted in the definition suggested by N.Arutunova, where discourse is determined as a coherent text together with a number of extra-linguistic parameters such as pragmatic, socio-cultural, psychological and others, or speech considered as a social activity, as a component of a cognitive process of interaction of people and the mechanisms of their consciousness. Discourse is "speech immersed in life" (Arutunova, 1990: 136-137).

Though discourse has recently become the subject-matter (a very controversial one) of a large number of scientific branches - psychology, philosophy, literature, political and social sciences, etc., linguistics is dominating among all of them. This is maybe due to the fact that in all the mentioned sciences discourse is considered to be an institutionalized way of thinking and, accordingly, a way of speaking about a specific topic. It occurs in speech-creation process, reflecting reality itself and correspondingly becomes a productive way, manner, or even style of reproducing this reality. And the strongest means of reproducing the picture of the world is the language, as it "has a magical property: when we speak or write we craft what we have to say to fit the situation or context in which we are communicating" (Gee, 2002:11).

One of the Internet sources suggests a definition of discourse as "a back and forth communication of thought by words... discourse presumes that an intellectual component is involved in the interaction. One does not speak of discourse between gravity and the apple on the tree unless it is a fable". (http: // tracesofhistory. com/term. html?term id=287)

Maybe some day the term "discourse" will be used to indicate non-intellectual notions and interrelations. Nonetheless, today whenever a result of creative activities in a certain communicative situation is named a "discourse", it presupposes the intellectual and linguistic parameters.

This is maybe why discourse is generally defined as a speech activity in a certain communicative situation, determined by cultural, social, psychological and other conditions, which create specific frames, where speech is functioning as a dynamic process, possessing both the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation.

Text, on the contrary, is defined as a result of speech-creation process shaped in accordance to an abstract model of a definite type of communication, possessing like discourse, the author's intention and the reader's perception. Similarly to discourse it is

very often defined as a sort of message circulating between the author of the utterance and his/her addressee. Like discourse it reflects the actual reality and creates a communicative situation determined by cultural, social, psychological and other conditions.

Thus, both discourse and text create a specific variety of communicative situation, they both possess decoding power, they both design a certain environment, exposing the author's pragmatic efforts and the reader's decoding abilities. Moreover, they are both characterized by the same distinctive parameters like topic, focus and linkage. They both carry a certain portion of information, containing modal meaning, so important for their target goal which consists in the achievement of the desirable effect, the impact upon the recipient.

As seen, there are a lot of similarities and very few differences between discourse and text: discourse is "a process" and text is "a result", discourse is dynamic, and text is static.

No doubt, text becomes a result of a creative process as soon as it is shaped as a written document belonging to a certain functional style. As a document it becomes static, and acquires a property of independent existence. It may and it does really exist independently. But the question is: what for is the aim to express ideas, emotions, and to remain a piece of utterance having no vent to be shared and valued? Of course, not. Its independence is rather relative because it is static and independent only until it starts its functioning and becomes a sort of a dialogue between the author and the reader. Then it acquires the strongest feature of discourse, its mobility which is to be found in the extra-textual world that exists beyond the limits of its corps. This extra-textual context is the large environment in which the text is created in. It accumulates within itself all the cultural, historical, geographical, social, political, psychological and other conditions, which come to determine the development of the communicative act according to the following scheme **producent – text – recipient.** The text located in between the two communicants is a realistic or nonrealistic picture of this environment, which is reproduced by one of them and interpreted by the other. And the large variety of interpretations make it dynamic: the more readers the more interpretations. And, though the producent creates the model of his/her recipient, who becomes the target of his pragmatic efforts, he/she is absolutely unable to determine the range of the interpretations the text undergoes (Gasparyan, 2007:141).

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This is may be why text today is very often defined as "the world". But the question is what "world" is meant here: the "world" surrounding the text and reproduced in it or the "world" created by the author within its frames. The answer will be: both. On the one hand, it is the broad environment perceived and reproduced by the author in the text. It may be defined as the "author's world" existing inside and outside the text. On the other hand, it is the "author's world" perceived and interpreted by the recipient who determines its circulation and functioning in the mentioned environment where the

communicative act between the text-producent and his/her addressee is taking place.

As such, text stands very close to discourse. Like discourse it becomes dynamic whenever it starts the extra-textual circulation and becomes a sort of a message sent by the producent to the recipient to be perceived, understood and interpreted according to the specific communicative situation it is created in.

Thus, text and discourse distinguished as different units of speech may focus on the same aspects and create identical communicative situations reproducing reality itself and constituting both the producent's and the recipient's interpreting potential.

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Տեքստը և խոսույթը որպես խոսքի և հաղորդակցման միավորներ

Այն պահից, երբ տեքստը և խոսույթը դարձան լեզվաբանական ուսումնասիրության առարկա, չեն մարում վեճերը վերջիններիս վերաբերյալ: Լեզվաբաններին հատկապես հետաքրքրում է այն հարցը, թե որն է տեքստի և խոսույթի տարբերությունը այն դեպքում, երբ երկուսն էլ համարվում են հաղորդակցական միավորներ: Շատ հաճախ թե' տեքստը, թե' խոսույթը բնութագրվում են որպես համարժեք հասկացություններ, որպես խոսքային գործունեության ներ- և արտալեզվական համատեքստեր, որոնք պայմանավորված են մշակութային, սոցիալական, հոգեբանական և այլ գործոններով: Հոդվածը նվիրված է սույն խնդրի պարզաբանմանը: