

THE COGNITIVE-DISCURSIVE PARADIGM OF READING AS A COMPLEX TYPE OF SPEECH ACTIVITY

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Kimsanova Saodatkhon Bokhodirjon kizi

Faculty of Romano-Germanic and Slavic Languages

1st-year Master's Student

Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract

The article examines reading within the framework of the cognitive-discursive paradigm as a complex and integrative type of speech activity. It analyzes the theoretical foundations of the works of Teun A. van Dijk, Nikolai I. Zhinkin, and Elena S. Kubryakova, focusing on the mechanisms of strategic information processing, semantic compression, situational model construction, and the universal subject code. Particular attention is given to the role of cognitive structures, conceptualization, and discursive context in text interpretation. The study argues that meaning is not extracted from the text in a ready-made form but is constructed through the interaction between the text, the reader's cognitive system, and the socio-cultural environment. The pedagogical relevance of the cognitive-discursive approach is emphasized in relation to the development of deep reading strategies, critical thinking, and learners' intellectual growth.

Keywords

reading; cognitive-discursive paradigm; interpretation; macrostructure; situational model; universal subject code; concept; discourse; anticipation; categorization.

Viewing reading through the lens of the cognitive-discursive paradigm allows us to move beyond the traditional understanding of this process as the mere decoding of graphic signs. Within the structural-linguistic approach, reading was long interpreted primarily as a technique for converting written speech into oral form or as a mechanism for recognizing lexico-grammatical units. However, modern humanities—cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse theory—offer a more complex model in which reading is viewed as an integrative activity that unites linguistic, mental, and socio-cultural mechanisms.

In this paradigm, reading appears as an active process of meaning construction, involving the interaction of:

The text as a sign structure;

The reader's consciousness as a system of cognitive mechanisms;

The discursive context as a set of social and cultural factors.

In this view, meaning is not extracted in a finished form but is shaped as a result of the dynamic interaction of these components. Reading becomes an act of interpretation, modeling, and personal transformation.

Below is a detailed analysis of the concepts of three scholars who laid the foundation for the cognitive-discursive approach: Teun van Dijk, Nikolai Ivanovich Zhinkin, and Elena Samoilovna Kubryakova, as well as a formulated author's position synthesizing their theoretical propositions.

The Concept of Teun van Dijk

The research of Teun van Dijk made a significant contribution to the development of the cognitive theory of text and discourse, establishing the foundations for understanding reading as a complex mental process. At the center of his scientific focus was the problem of the relationship between textual structure and the knowledge structures existing in the human mind. The scholar consistently argued that the process of comprehension cannot be explained solely through the analysis of linguistic units – words, sentences, or grammatical constructions. On the contrary, text interpretation involves the active participation of the reader's cognitive system, which organizes and transforms incoming information.

Van Dijk viewed comprehension as a strategic process—that is, an activity aimed at achieving a specific goal: the construction of a coherent meaning. This strategic nature is manifested in the fact that the reader does not process the text mechanically or uniformly; instead, they select significant elements, establish a hierarchy of meanings, and distinguish between primary and secondary information. In other words, text perception is a controlled cognitive activity during which the subject consciously or unconsciously applies certain interpretation strategies.

According to the researcher, reading is impossible without relying on pre-existing knowledge structures—frames, scripts, and mental models. These structures are formed through life experience and represent organized complexes of information about typical situations, events, and social roles. When a person encounters a text, the corresponding frames are automatically activated, ensuring a rapid and holistic understanding of the content.¹

Thus, a new text is not perceived in isolation: it is correlated with previously accumulated knowledge, compared with existing cognitive schemes, and

1. van Dijk T. A. Discourse and Knowledge: A Sociocognitive Approach. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

integrated into the established system of representations of the world. As a result, comprehension takes on the character of an integration of the new and the known.

Of particular importance in van Dijk's concept is the idea that the reader does not simply extract information but constructs a semantic model of what is read. The text serves as a stimulus for building an internal representation of the described situation. This representation includes cause-and-effect relationships, temporal parameters, characteristics of the participants in the events, and their intentions. Consequently, reading is a process of modeling during which consciousness creates its own interpretation of the text.

The strategic nature of understanding is also manifested in the fact that the reader constantly adjusts their perception as they progress through the text. New information may either confirm previously formed expectations or come into conflict with them. In the latter case, a restructuring of the mental model occurs, which testifies to the dynamism and flexibility of cognitive processes.

Thus, within the framework of Teun van Dijk's concept, reading appears as an active, purposeful, and multi-layered activity based on the interaction of textual structures and the cognitive mechanisms of the individual. Understanding is viewed not as a passive reflection of content, but as the result of strategic information processing relying on frames, scripts, and mental models accumulated in a person's individual and social experience.

One of the central concepts of Teun van Dijk's theory is the category of the text macrostructure. The scholar emphasized that in the process of understanding, the reader does not store the text in memory in its linear, verbally formulated form. On the contrary, a transformation of the expanded sequence of sentences into a more compact and generalized semantic scheme occurs.

As van Dijk noted, "the understanding of discourse involves the construction of its global semantic structure,"²[2] that is, the formation of a hierarchically organized semantic core of the text. In other words, the reader does not memorize individual formulations but extracts generalized content, which then becomes the basis for further comprehension.

In the process of reading, the operation of semantic reduction is carried out: numerous micropropositions (local semantic elements represented in individual sentences) are collapsed into more general semantic units – macropropositions. Van Dijk pointed out that "macrorules allow for the derivation of their more

2. van Dijk T. A. Discourse and Knowledge: A Sociocognitive Approach. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

3. van Dijk, Teun A. T. A., Kintsch, Walter W. Strategies of Discourse Comprehension. — New York: Academic Press, 1983.

general theme from a sequence of propositions," thereby ensuring cognitive economy and the integrity of understanding.

This process has received the name semantic compression, since the meaning of the text undergoes a peculiar "squeezing" without the loss of its conceptual core. Thanks to this mechanism, the reader:

- identifies the main theme of the text;
- discards secondary and redundant details;
- establishes a hierarchy of semantic connections;
- forms a generalized representation of the content.

Thus, reading includes a strategic selection of information based on the application of so-called macrorules – rules of deletion, generalization, and construction. These operations allow for the transition from the surface textual structure to the deep level of global meaning.

It is important to emphasize that this selection is not exclusively text-centric. As van Dijk stressed, "the interpretation of discourse is always correlated with the knowledge and attitudes of the subject." Consequently, the formation of the macrostructure depends not only on the composition of the text but also on the cognitive sets of the reader, their goals, professional experience, and discursive position.

The same text will be interpreted differently by a student, a researcher, or a journalist, since each forms their own system of macrostructures. A student may focus on the basic facts, a researcher on conceptual propositions and argumentation, and a journalist on socially significant aspects and the interpretative possibilities of the material.

Thus, the macrostructure is not a fixed characteristic of the text; it represents the result of the reader's cognitive activity. This manifests the strategic nature of understanding: meaning is not reproduced mechanically but is constructed through semantic compression and the individual selection of significant information.

One of the key elements of Teun van Dijk's cognitive theory of text is the concept of the situational model. Van Dijk emphasized that the understanding of a text cannot be reduced to a mechanical parsing of words or sentences. On the contrary, every reader constructs in their mind a mental representation of the events described in the text, creating an internal simulation of what is happening. As the scholar notes, "the situational model reflects not only textual information but also the knowledge, experience, and expectations of the subject" [3].

If a text describes a journey, various types of knowledge are activated in the reader's memory: about transport, spatial and temporal parameters, as well as possible emotional states of the participants in the event. This knowledge serves to

fill in the semantic "gaps" that are not presented in the text itself but are necessary for full understanding. Van Dijk emphasizes that "the reader always adds missing elements to build a coherent picture of the described situation"³ [4].

Thus, the understanding of a text turns into a process of reconstructing a situational picture of the world, where the word and the sentence act only as triggers for the activation of cognitive structures. The richer the experience, education, and cultural competence of the reader, the more detailed and profound their situational model becomes. In the words of van Dijk, "a rich cognitive baggage allows for the creation of more complex and multi-level models of situations, which contributes to an accurate and multidimensional understanding of the text" [5].

Consequently, the situational model is not a passive copy of the text but represents a dynamic construction formed in the process of the reader's active interaction with information. It demonstrates the strategic nature of cognitive processing, allowing for the interpretation and integration of new data into the already existing system of knowledge.

In his works, Teun van Dijk emphasized that discourse is not simply a collection of textual units, but a full-fledged communicative event involving a whole range of components that determine the process of understanding. Van Dijk identified the following key elements:

Participants of communication – the sender and receiver of information, each with their own knowledge, experience, and expectations;

Social roles – the positions that participants take in the process of interaction, including authority, expertise, or the listener's position;

Goals of communication – the intentions and tasks behind the utterance, whether informing, persuading, or entertaining;

Ideological context – a set of cultural, political, and social representations influencing the perception and interpretation of the text.

Thus, reading is always socially conditioned: the perception of a text directly depends on the cultural and educational background of the reader, their value systems, and personal experience. As van Dijk notes, "discourse cannot be understood in isolation from its participants and context; only through the analysis of social interaction can meaning be correctly interpreted" [6].

This is manifested especially clearly in the analysis of media texts, political speeches, or scientific publications, where the same text can be perceived differently by various audiences. For example, a news article may evoke trust and

4. van Dijk, Teun A. T. A., Kintsch, Walter W. *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension*. — New York: Academic Press, 1983.

acceptance in one social group, while in another, it may cause skepticism and critical assessment.

Consequently, the understanding of discourse requires taking into account not only the linguistic structure but also socio-cultural factors that activate specific cognitive strategies of the reader and guide the interpretation of the text. Van Dijk emphasized that "the social nature of discourse determines the rules of the game in communication and sets the framework for the strategic construction of meaning" [7].

In the works of Nikolai Ivanovich Zhinkin, reading is considered a psychophysiological process during which information is translated from the "language of the text" into the "language of the intellect." Zhinkin emphasized that the understanding of a text is not a passive perception of graphic signs, but an active processing of information, in which the reader constructs internal mental representations and images based on what is read.

Reading, in his opinion, includes several key cognitive operations:

Recoding lexical and syntactic information into mental images;

Activating existing knowledge and representations that allow for the interpretation of new data in the context of personal experience;

Constructing an internal model of meaning that is stored in memory and can be used in subsequent thinking and reasoning.

Zhinkin noted that "the meaning of a text is experienced by the reader as an internal objective structure, and not as a linear chain of words"⁴ [8].

Universal-Object Code

The central concept of his theory is the Universal-Object Code (UOC) (Universal'no-predmetnyy kod – UPK). Zhinkin argued that during reading, words are instantaneously transformed into object-schematic structures: images, schemes, and concepts that represent a non-linear system of meanings.

In other words, the linear sequence of the text's sentences is not stored in memory in literal form but is transformed into a volumetric mental construction that reflects the content and structural connections between concepts.

Proof of the existence of the UOC is the reader's ability to retell a text in their own words while preserving the key ideas and semantic connections. As Zhinkin noted: "If a person is able to reproduce the meaning of a text using different linguistic means, this confirms the presence of an internal code independent of a specific lexico-grammatical form" [9].

Zhinkin, N. I. (1982). Speech as a Conduit of Information [Rech' kak provodnik informatsii]. Moscow: Nauka.

Zhinkin, N. I. (1998). Psycholinguistic Foundations of Speech Activity [Psikholingvisticheskie osnovy rechevoy deyatel'nosti]. In Language and Consciousness [Yazyk i soznanie]. Moscow.

This concept emphasizes that reading is a proactive process in which the reader's consciousness actively constructs meaning rather than simply reacting to verbal signs. The UOC (Universal-Object Code) acts as a mediator between the external language and the subject's cognitive system, ensuring the flexibility and portability of information between different cognitive and communicative contexts.

Zhinkin emphasized that text comprehension is manifested through the ability to perform equivalent substitutions. In other words, the reader can retell what they have read, freely varying the formulations while preserving the semantic core of the utterance. This process testifies to the deep cognitive processing of information that occurs at the level of internal semantic structures rather than at the level of the literal text.

Thus, according to Zhinkin, reading is an act of recoding that includes several key operations:

Identification of the subject of speech, i.e., determining the objects and phenomena discussed in the text;

Establishment of predicative links, allowing one to understand which actions, properties, or relations are attributed to these objects;

Formation of the semantic center of the utterance, through which individual sentences are combined into a holistic understanding of the text.

As Zhinkin himself noted: "The meaning of a text is experienced by the reader as an internal objective structure, rather than as a sequence of words" [10]. This allows the reader to adapt what they have read to different cognitive and communicative situations, making the reading process flexible and effective.

Anticipation and Predicativity

Another important aspect of reading, according to Zhinkin, is anticipation – the mechanism of foreseeing the content of the text. The reader constantly builds hypotheses about how the narrative or argumentation will develop and adjusts their expectations as new information is received.

This process makes understanding proactive, ensuring the integrity of perception. The reader does not simply react to the text but actively participates in its interpretation, modeling the expected meaning.

The concept of predicativity, according to Zhinkin, is closely linked to anticipation. It is expressed in the constant search for the answer to the question: "What is being reported about this subject?". Thanks to this mechanism, the reader builds a hierarchy of semantic links and understands not only individual facts but also the overall picture of events or ideas.

In their totality, the mechanisms of equivalent substitutions, anticipation, and predicativity show that reading is an intellectually saturated process involving the

active construction of meaning and continuous interaction between the text and the subject's cognitive system.

3. The Concept of E.S. Kubryakova: Cognitive-Discursive Synthesis

Elena Samoilovna Kubryakova developed a comprehensive approach that united the cognitive and communicative perspectives of language analysis.

3.1. The Dual Nature of Reading

According to Kubryakova, reading has a dual nature:

Cognitive aspect – the acquisition and processing of knowledge.

Communicative aspect – interaction with the author's position.

Thus, the reader does not simply master information but enters into a dialogue with the author. Reading becomes a form of mediated communication.

Concepts and Categorization

E.S. Kubryakova emphasized that every word in a text corresponds to a concept – a unit of mental memory that organizes and structures human knowledge. In the process of reading, the activation, refinement, and reorganization of concepts occur, allowing the reader to build a holistic representation of the text's content.

The mechanism of categorization consists of correlating new information with already existing mental structures. When data do not coincide, a cognitive conflict arises, which stimulates the processing of knowledge, the formation of new categories, and the development of thinking. Thus, reading is not limited to the passive assimilation of information but acts as a process of active cognitive creativity that facilitates the restructuring of internal models of the world.

As Kubryakova noted: "The reader does not simply decode the text; they reconstruct the meaning using their own system of concepts and categories" ⁵[11].

Text as an Instruction for Meaning

Kubryakova also viewed the text as an instruction for constructing a semantic model. The text does not contain a fully completed meaning; rather, it merely sets the direction for interpretation, providing the reader with space for interpretative activity.

Meaning is formed in the process of the reader's interaction with the text, which emphasizes the interpretative and socio-cognitive nature of reading. The reader becomes an active co-author, constructing meaning in a dialogue with the author and the cultural context.

Thus, the text acts as a framework, and the reader, relying on cognitive experience and knowledge of the world, "unpacks" it, forming an individual understanding.

Kubryakova, E. S. (2004). Language and Knowledge: Towards Obtaining Knowledge about Language: Parts of Speech from a Cognitive Perspective [Yazyk i znanie: Na puti polucheniya znaniy o yazyke: Chasti rechi s kognitivnoy tochki zreniya]. Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskoy kul'tury.

Drawing on the analysis of the concepts of T. van Dijk, N.I. Zhinkin, and E.S. Kubryakova, reading can be defined as a synergetic process that unites:

Cognitive modeling, including the construction of an internal model of the text and the activation of concepts and categories;

Discursive adaptation, ensuring that the social role of the text, the communicative goals of the author, and the cultural context are taken into account.

This combination makes reading a dynamically active and intellectually saturated type of speech activity.

The Interactivity of Meaning

The meaning of a text does not exist in a ready-made form. It arises at the point of intersection between:

The reader's cognitive experience, including knowledge, previous experience, and mental models;

The author's intention, reflecting goals and communicative intent.

The discursive context, which defines the social boundaries and the role of the text.

The text can be compared to a map, and the reader to a navigator who builds their own route of interpretation, adapting the representation of meaning to their system of knowledge and reading goals.

As Kubryakova rightly observes: "The meaning of a text is constructed at the moment of the reader's interaction with the linguistic form and cannot be fully extracted from the text without the participation of the cognitive subject"⁶ [12].

Discursive Filtration

Different types of discourse require different reading strategies:

Scientific text activates analytical and logical thinking, information structuring, and the identification of cause-and-effect relationships;

Literary text engages empathy, imagination, and the ability to model the events and feelings of characters;

Publicistic text activates evaluative and critical mechanisms, allowing the content to be correlated with the social and political context.

A change in the discursive frame is capable of radically changing the interpretation of the same content, which confirms the role of social and cultural factors in the reading process.

Dynamic Integration

Every new text enters into interaction with the individual's already existing cognitive system. Two scenarios are possible:

Kubryakova, E. S. (2004). Language and Knowledge: Towards Obtaining Knowledge about Language: Parts of Speech from a Cognitive Perspective [Yazyk i znanie: Na puti polucheniya znaniy o yazyke: Chasti rechi s kognitivnoy tochki zreniya]. Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskoy kul'tury.

Confirmation of former beliefs, when the text resonates with already formed cognitive structures;

Transformation of former beliefs, when the text causes a cognitive conflict that stimulates the restructuring of mental models.

It is precisely the second option that makes reading a tool for personal development, as it activates the processes of comprehension, self-reflection, and cognitive enrichment.

Thus, reading in the cognitive-discursive paradigm represents an integrative process that unites language, thinking, and culture, and becomes a means of intellectual and personal growth.

In conclusion, within the framework of the cognitive-discursive paradigm, reading appears as a highly complex type of speech activity in which a whole spectrum of cognitive and communicative processes is realized. In the course of reading, a person simultaneously:

Carries out strategic information processing, selecting significant textual elements and forming a hierarchy of semantic units;

Performs the recoding of meanings, translating the linear linguistic flow into non-linear mental constructions and universal-object codes;

Constructs situational models, reproducing the events and situations described in the text based on personal experience, knowledge, and imagination;

Enters into communicative interaction with the author and the text, interpreting intentions, goals, and discursive features.

Reading, in this understanding, is not simply a passive perception of written information, but a mechanism for the active construction of reality, where the subject acts simultaneously as an interpreter, co-author, and participant in discourse. Each act of reading is unique, as it depends on individual cognitive strategies, personal experience, and the cultural and social context of the reader.

Consequently, teaching reading must go beyond the traditional development of decoding techniques and include:

The development of cognitive strategies, such as predicting text content and identifying logical connections;

The mastery of categorization skills, allowing for the correlation of new information with already existing knowledge;

The formation of the ability to build mental models, ensuring a deep understanding of the text and the possibility of reconstructing a semantic picture of the world.

It is this that lends pedagogical significance to the cognitive-discursive approach and emphasizes its relevance for modern linguistics and text psychology,

as it allows for viewing reading as a complex process that integrates language, thinking, experience, and socio-cultural context.

Thus, the use of the principles of the cognitive-discursive paradigm in educational practice contributes not only to increasing the efficiency of reading but also to the development of critical thinking, the capacity for interpretation, and the personal growth of students.

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