Discourse Community Analysis
Sense Construction Versus Non-Sense Construction

Abstract
This paper examines the nature of the political discourse of international organizations (IMF, World Bank, the UN, European Union, African Union, The Arab League, etc.). The study originates from a fundamental paradox: how can we use the same descriptive linguistic tools which we use in analyzing the production of sense for the production of non-sense characterizing this type of discourse? The corpus analyzed is a collection of texts produced the international community on the Darfur political and humanitarian crisis. The high frequency of words and terms occurring in this type of production contributes in losing their meaning which is contrary to the appreciation of terms occurring in an expert discourse for information retrieval or lexical resources purposes where the high frequency of a term consolidates its belonging to a specific field of knowledge. How can this paradox be explained?

1. Introduction
The term discourse community links the terms ‘discourse’, a concept describing all forms of communication that contribute to a particular, institutionalized way of thinking; and ‘community’, which in this case refers to the people who use, and therefore help to create a particular discourse. “Producing texts within a discourse community,” according to Patricia Bizzell, “cannot take place unless the writer can define his goals in terms of the community’s interpretive conventions.” (Bizzel, 1992). In other words, one cannot simply produce any text. It must fit the standards of the discourse community to which it is appealing. If one wants to become a member of a certain discourse community, it requires more than learning the lingo. It requires understanding concepts and expectations set up within that community.

Discourse community analysis is thus a type of discourse analysis which can be defined as analyzing written, spoken or signed language use. The objects of discourse analysis (discourse, writing, talk, conversation communicative events, etc) are variously defined in terms of coherent sequences of sentences, propositions. Contrary to much of traditional linguistics, discourse analysts not only study language use ‘beyond the sentence boundary’, but also prefer to analyze ‘naturally occurring’ language use, and not invented examples.

Discourse analysis has been taken up in a variety of social science disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, sociology cognitive psychology, international relations and communication studies, each of which is subject to its own assumptions, dimensions of analysis, and methodologies. Topics of interest to discourse analysts consists in the various levels or dimensions of discourse, including significant body language such as sounds, intonations, gestures, the discourse itself (syntax, the lexicon, style, rhetoric, meaning, strategies and other aspects of interaction) and the genres of discourse (various types of discourse in politics, the media, education, science, business, etc.); It also looks at the relations between discourse and the emergence of sentence syntax; the relations between text (discourse) and context; the relations between discourse and power; the relations between discourse and interaction; the relations between discourse, cognition and memory.

This paper originates from a fundamental paradox: how can we use the same descriptive linguistic tools which we use in analyzing the production of sense for the production
of non-sense? My work essentially deals with building linguistic resources for information systems (glossaries, terminologies, ontologies etc.). This process involves collecting, analyzing and describing the linguistic elements from corpora. Discourse analysis although uses the same description tools involves also a ‘beyond the sentence boundary’ analysis. The corpus analyzed is a collection of texts produced by the international community. The terms, understood in a terminological sense, occurring in this type of discourse lose their sense. In other words, one can understand their normal/conventional sense only outside of the context (if they are taken separately). How can this paradox be explained? Their high frequency contributes in losing their sense which is contrary to the appreciation of terms occurring in an expert discourse (scientific and technical discourse.) or in information retrieval where the high frequency of a term consolidates its belonging to a specific field of knowledge. In other words, the terms are used so much that their specific meaning fades away, that is, the terms become empty symbols. Reality description is essential in the case of expert discourse, refereeing to specific concept and their interrelation. This is true of scientific and technical discourse. As for the political discourse of international organizations it seems disconnected from the reality it is referring to unlike the expert discourse mentioned above in which not only terms should adhere to concepts but in addition their standardization is an essential activity.

2. Discourse analysis: sense construction vs non-sense construction

One of the purposes of information and communication sciences is the construction and sharing of meaning. This process involves building reference tools such as thesauri for indexing and retrieving an increasing digital data. Meaning construction through these tools is based on well known conceptual methods. To guarantee communication between the various actors of a field of knowledge, or what we can call a ‘community of experts’ which uses its own discourse these tools should be rigorously and coherently designed. The term holds a univocal relationship with the concept hence normalizing terminologies. Normalization is an activity characterizing many organizations producing and validating such specific terminologies (such as la Délégation de la langue Française in the French context for instance). These coherent approaches are in total contradiction with the implicit meaning construction characterizing the political discourse of international organisations, a rather stilted and ‘politically correct’ form of logorrhoea. A recent study (Rist, 200) shows by a variety of examples how this type of discourse is characterized by its non-sense. Thus the international community could be said to use an approach diametrically opposed to the one I have been using so far. This paradox is particularly interesting and calls for a thorough examination of information production contexts. Meaning should normally be contextualized that is why it would be interesting to study the following aspects: who are the “producers” of the discourse. Who are the recipients/targets? What kind of impact does it have on the recipients/targets? The conceptual network centred on a scientific or technical term should help putting the term into a coherent conceptual environment which will help understanding its scope and meaning. If we look now to the international organizations discourse, also called “international rhetoric”, (Rist, 2002) we find a peculiar conceptual network which strengthens the non-sense in a ‘coherent’ manner.

If we examine the political discourse of international organizations we can notice that it is largely symbolical and that its operating field is in itself symbolical. Reality is manipulated by the discourse in order to conform it to the symbolical contents that have been pre-selected. Distortions are denied because behind this symbolism contains a solid ideology
all the stronger for being implicit. Since the end of communism a logico-semantic setting was born and a number of terms like empowerment, stakeholders, transparency, good governance, level playing field, human rights, free market, gender, should be understood, not in their univocal original meaning but rather as symbols. In a way this harks back to the old Communist discourse in which words such as proletariat, working class, masses progress, popular struggle and so on had a “coded” meaning which had only a distant relation either to the political science vocabulary or even to the original Marxist vocabulary it was supposed to have been borrowed from. In analysing the corpus related to the Darfur crisis, a specific discourse genre, I will refer to the studies undertaken by Maingueneau (2002) and Krieg-Planque (2007) which I consider as particularly relevant.

The impact of international rhetoric on its audience can be compared to the Indian Chief discourse described in Pierre Clastre (1974):

Parler est pour le chef une obligation impérative, la tribu veut l’entendre : un chef silencieux n’est plus un chef [...]. Ce n’est pas de l’esthétique qu’il est question mais de politique. La parole du chef n’est pas dite pour être écoutée. Parce que littéralement, le chef ne dit, fort prolixement, rien. Son discours consiste, pour l’essentiel, en une célébration, maintes fois répétées, des normes de vie traditionnelles. (Calstres, 1974)

We translated this quotation as follows: For the Chief, speaking is an absolute imperative. The tribe wants to hear him and a silent chief is not a chief any more. This has nothing to do with aesthetics, it is essentially political. The speech issuing from the Chief’s lips is not made to be listened to. Because, if we consider his discourse in depth, the Chief, although he speaks a lot, says literally nothing. His discourse is essentially a frequently reiterated celebration of the norms of [the tribe’s] social life.

3. Analyzing texts related to Darfur crisis corpus

The corpus we are analyzing is representative of a discourse community. We chose texts related to the Darfur political and humanitarian crisis as we mentioned above. The reason of our choice is our knowledge of the context which is essential for analyzing the corpus. All the texts are related to a single subject: Conflict Early Warning by various international entities. We are giving hereafter some examples, i.e. texts showing the nonsense followed by our comments.

Example 1. “By presenting a credible military threat a third party force seeks to convince all conflictual parties that violence will not succeed. International force is brought to bear not to defeat but to neutralize the local forces and to reduce the expected gains of continued fighting. The political objective is to become a successful arbiter of disputes and to persuade the contending parties they have no alternative but to negotiate. The point is to deny victory to one side in order to create a military stalemate” [David Carment & Dane Rowland: Explaining multilateral intervention in ethnic conflicts: a Game theoretic Approach. ISA Paper. San Diego. 1996.

Absurd of course since one does not see how one side would be deterred without fighting and even less persuaded that it has no alternative but to negotiate. The author was a game theorist writing on Congo-Zaïre. He did not have ANY ground experience.

Example 2. “The most ambitious and focused early warning system yet established in the UN is the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS) of the Department of Human Affairs (DHA). It involves a number of professional staff and a significant computer
capacity. It incorporates a multitude of sources (statistical and textual) to allow monitoring in over 100 nations. However the system has yet to produce a single “early warning” since it has been in operation since July 1995. (...) The solution to this political problem is to develop a new norm for early warning in which the UN Secretary General draws attention to potential conflict at an early stage in spite of the reluctance of the members.”[pp. 168–169] A Walter Dorn: “Early (and late) warning by the UN Secretary General Synergy in Early Warning. University of York Toronto 15–18 Mar. 1997].

This text is a model of nonsense. The author first explains how a certain system is designed “to allow monitoring of 100 nations”. And he then explains how it does not work at all, since it has “not produced a single early warning” since it has been in operation since July 1995. Today, thirteen years later, it still has not produced anything!

Example 3. “As the 1996 joint donor evaluation of the Rwanda conflict found, what is needed is not so much information but policy-oriented analysis that will suggest logical operational responses. The debate on early warning has not yet moved forward to deal with the issue of the process link between early warning analysis and effective preventive action. This may be because early warning praxis is not effective in producing analysis that clearly present options for effective preventive action and rapid engagement policy.” John G. Cockell (Department of Foreign Affairs. Government of Canada, collected by the University de York): “Towards Response-oriented Early Warning analysis: Policy and Operational Considerations”.

Meaningless because what it says (once you pierce the language barrier) is that if only “early warning” provided guidelines for preventive action this would work. This is in complete neglect of reality. “Preventive action” (which has never occurred) is linked with political choices, not with “analysis of policy options”. In other words this text says that if a “response-oriented” early warning system existed it would be enough to produce adequate response to violent crisis. There is no any reference to the reality.

4. Discussion
A discourse community has several aspects beyond its technical linguistic aspect. One is the reinforcement of the group’s norms, meaning that a minimum median line has to be adhered to. If a speaker strays too far from this norm his first punishment will be not to be taken seriously. If he strays too far, the second and more serious punishment will lead him to be deprived from his job or at least to see his work perspectives reduced.

But an interesting point is that such “discourse communities” cannot at the same time simply fold back into an autistic reality. They have to deal with the real world which forces them to admit (even if only at the margins) forms of discursive heterodoxy in order to refresh the contents of the discourse and to keep it somewhat connected to reality. A good example of the failure to integrate practically such discursive heterodoxy is the failure of the Communist system between 1965 and 1989 to renew its discourse on the surrounding world, leading to an increased disconnection between the accepted discourse and what it was referring to.

5. Types of tools needed for analysing and extracting terms and collocations
In our previous researches we largely dealt with term extraction tools, their description and their evaluation. We don’t think that these tools will be sufficient for analyzing this type of discourse even if they can be partially relevant, i.e. extracting nominal construc-
tions. For discourse analysis we need more holistic tools capable of analyzing the sentences and find collocations. The analysis should involve three essential aspects are i) the relative authorship weight of the text producer since the impact of the nonsense is greater if the text producer is “important”; ii) the reality about which the discourse is produced and; iii) the impact of the discourse on the audience (see also above). These three aspects involve efficient semantic and pragmatic analyzers and we are not really sure that this type of this discourse analysis would be possible to automate. Moreover, there is a pre-established potential for receptivity to different types of discourses depending on the nature of the audience.

6. Conclusion
We assume that the human involvement in analyzing this type of discourse is crucial since existing tools are still very primitive as far as semantic and pragmatic analyses are concerned. Their use can be helpful in identifying terms and collocations and their contexts but they will be insufficient for analyzing the sense or non-sense characterizing this type of discourse.

References