Why Study Discourse?

There is more than one reason for the study of discourse and discourse analysis. These reasons may be roughly categorized into two groups:

1) Academic Consideration.
2) Pedagogic Consideration.
1) Academic Consideration:

Discourse analysis is a branch of academic research that has relationships with linguistics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, communication and education.

As we have seen, the major objective of discourse analysis is the study of language use or the study of language units above the sentence.
As a student of English language and literature, you should by now have covered a variety of linguistic courses whose domain does not extend beyond the sentence. The study of the formal linguistic system is just one side of the coin. The other side is ‘language use’. Thus, you have to look at the two sides of the coin, namely, **FORM** and **FUNCTION**.

Discourse analysis deals with the functions of language in real communicative situations, whether in speech or writing. This is briefly the academic justification for the study of discourse.
2) Pedagogic Consideration:

DA is relevant to the entire process of language education, whether it is the teaching of \( L_1 \) or the teaching of \( L_2 \).

Indeed, the insights gained from discourse analysis have direct bearings on curricula, syllabuses and language teaching methodology.

The relationship between discourse analysis and foreign language education is very simple: DA is concerned with the use of language in real communicative situations and so is foreign language education.
Speech Acts and Discourse

As pointed before, there is no one single approach to DA.

Today, the main focus will be on one of the numerous approaches to discourse analysis, namely SPEECH ACTS or what has come to known as SPEECH ACT THEORY (SAT).

It should be pointed out that SAT did not start as a linguistic enterprise; it rather began as a philosophical investigation of the power words. The two philosophers whose names are associated with SAT are John Austin and John Searle.
• The first comprehensive work on SAT was published in 1962, namely Austin’s.  

*How to do things with words* (1962)

Illocutionary Acts  
Locutionary Act

• As pointed out above, Speech Act Theory begins with the monumental work of John Austin *How to Do Things With Words*, first published in 1962. This work, which is often referred to in the literature, is widely acknowledged as the first presentation of Speech Act Theory. Austin’s ideas were subsequently expanded and incorporated into linguistic theory by John Searle in his 1969 book titled *Speech Acts*. In this book, Searle introduces several ideas particularly with regard to the application of Speech Act Theory to DA.
As its name suggests, Speech Act Theory treats an utterance as an act performed by a speaker in a context with respect to an addressee.

- Performing speech act involves performing:
  
  i) **A locutionary act:** The act of producing a recognizable grammatical utterance in the language.

  ii) **An illocutionary act:** The attempt to accomplish some communicative purpose. Promising, warning, greeting, reminding, informing, and commanding are all distinct illocutionary acts. While phonology, syntax, and semantics focus on the locutionary act, pragmatics focuses on the illocutionary act, the aspect of the speech act which specifies what the language is being used for on a given situation.