The ethnography of communication is another approach to discourse that is not purely linguistic. This approach is based on both anthropology and linguistics.
This approach focuses on a wide range of communicative behaviours. It seeks to:

1) Discover the variety of forms and functions which are available for communication.

2) Establish the way such forms and functions are part of different ways of life.

3) Analyze patterns of communication as part of cultural knowledge and behaviour.
The key figure responsible for the development of the ethnography of communication is the well-known scholar Dell-Hymes.

Before we proceed to discuss the views of Dell-Hymes, it is essential to see how this approach is related to both linguistics and anthropology. In other words, how do these two fields share an interest in 'communication'?
To begin with, the main function of human language is *communication*, and since linguistics is the scientific study of language, it goes without saying that the study of communication is one of the major goals of linguistics. On the other hand, the "understanding of communication is ... important for anthropologists: the way we communicate is part of our cultural repertoire for making sense of - and interacting with - the world." (schiffrin, 1994:138)
Before we proceed any further, it is essential to define some of the basic concepts associated with Humes' work, particularly those associated with the ethnography of communication. Two important concepts are central to this approach, namely:

i) Speech community.

ii) Communicative competence.
• The notion of speech community has always been a central one in linguistic investigation, but a satisfactory definition has never been agreed. However, it is convenient to consider some of the definitions proposed by some well-known linguists and sociolinguists, notably:

Lyons (1970)
All the people who use a given language (or dialect).

Crystal (1992)
A regionally or socially definable human group, identified by the use of a shared spoken language or language variety.

Bloomfield (1935)
A group of people who interact by means of speech.

Labov (1972)
A speech community cannot be conceived as a group of speakers who use all the same forms; it is best defined as a group of speakers who share the same norms in regard to language.

Gumperz (1972)
To the extent that speakers share knowledge of the communicative constraints and options governing a significant number of social situations, they can be said to be members of the same speech community ... since such shared knowledge depends on intensity of contact and on communicative networks, speech boundaries tend to coincide with wider social units, such as countries, tribes, religions or ethnic groups.
Below are some points of criticism of the above definitions (adapted from Graddol, et.al, 1994:23-24)

**Lyons’ Definition:**

Lyons’ definition is inadequate as it stands: it makes no allowance for bilingual – or bidialectal – communities. Nor does ‘community’ here suggest geographical or cultural proximity: English speakers in Delhi, in New York and in Devon, England could, according to this definition, be in the same speech community by virtue of speaking English.

**Crystal’s Definition**

Crystal corrects the deficiency in Lyons’ definition but rather in a vague way.
Bloomfield’s Definition:

Bloomfield’s definition emphasizes communication between speakers, but allows that his need does not involve use of the same language.

Labov’s Definition and Gumperz’s Definition

Labov allows for linguistic variation but stresses shared linguistic norms (for instance, that speakers would agree on which variety of the language was most prestigious). This would be inadequate for Gumperz, who argues that speakers would also need to agree on a variety of communicative ‘rules’ (including when to speak and when to be silent, for instance) or to share communicative competence.
Speech Events and Speech Acts

Definitions

Hymes distinguishes between speech events and speech acts. He further argues that speech events occur in a non-verbal context. He refers to this non-verbal context as the speech situation. Below are the definitions of these three notions.

Speech Situation:
Context of language use such as ceremonies, fights, hunts, classrooms, conferences, parties.
Speech Events:

A speech event can be defined by a unified set of components throughout:

- Same purpose of communication.
- Same topic.
- Same participants.
- Same language Variety.

According to Khader (2000), speech event is a basic unit of conversation which can be bound by change of scene, or by the exits or entrances of characters, or by the shift in topic, change of concern or focus.

The speech episode is a unit consisting of several speech events bound together by a common thematic matrix, i.e. speech events constituting a speech episode are informed by a common thematic significance.
Dell Hymes further discusses speech events and suggests that various components must be included in a comprehensive ethnographic description of the act of speaking. The classificatory grid that he proposes is known as the **SPEAKING** grid, where each letter in the acronym **SPEAKING** is an abbreviation for a different possible component of communication. The table below shows these components with a brief definition of each.
Situation
1. Setting or locale
2. Scene or situation

The setting or locale and concrete; the place and time. The scene or situation is abstract, a recurring institution, a type of social occasion like ‘a committee meeting’.

Participants
1. Speaker
2. Addressor
3. Hearer or audience
4. Addressee

Whom the act is addressed to, and who it is uttered by, is significant. In various situations, participants are allocated communication roles by the culture, for example, ‘a chairman’, ‘a therapist’, ‘a patient’, ‘a client’, ‘a teacher’, ‘a pupil’, ‘an interviewee’.

Ends
1. Purposes – Outcomes
2. Purposes- Goals

Some speech events have conventional outcomes, for example, ‘a diagnosis’, ‘a sale’, or ‘a verdict’. These, as well as individual goals, are significant.

Act Sequences
1. Message form
2. Message Content

Topics of conversation and particular ‘ways of speaking’. In a culture, certain linguistic forms are conventional for certain types of talk. Certain adjacency pairs typical for certain speech events, e.g. political interview. Tone, manner or spirit of the act, mock or serious.

Key
3. Key

Instrumentalities
1. Channel or mode of discourse
2. Forms of speech

Spoken, written, written but read aloud, recited etc. The dialect, accent or other variety of language in which the act is uttered.

Norms
1. Norms of interpretation
2. Norms of interaction

Interpretation that would be normally expected for the speech event in question. Interpretation in relation to the conventions of conventions of conversation itself turn-taking etc.

Genres
1. Genres

Categories such as poem, myth, tale, riddle, lecture, commercial, editorial etc.