Theorising Discourse Analysis in International Politics

6 November 2019 (9:00 – 13:00)  
7 November 2019 (9:00 – 13:00)  
8 November 2019 (10:00 – 12:00)  

Given by Dr Katharine M Millar, LSE  
Seminar Room 4, Badia Fiesolana  
Register online

Workshop Description:

The workshop provides a graduate-level introduction to the theory, epistemology, and methodology of discourse analysis in the political and social sciences, underscored by a substantive emphasis on international affairs, gender studies, and security studies. The workshop differentiates between the major strands of discourse analysis in the social sciences and the forms of questions, and types of claims, supported by each. Working systematically across the levels of epistemology, methodology, and method, the workshop provides students with the robust theoretical and conceptual grounding necessary to construct rigorous, valid, and, most importantly, consistent qualitative research designs.

The workshop structure moves from the more metatheoretical and conceptual to the concrete. Participants will become familiar with the basic theory of knowledge underscoring each approach to discourse analysis, but also engage with practical issues of discourse/text selection, casing, linguistic and cultural competence, accessibility, and, of course, the actual practice of textual interpretation. The workshop will also include a brief discussion of the pros and cons of computer-assisted analysis, illustrated with reference to the software package NVivo – the majority of the methods considerations introduced, however, will pertain more generally.

Significantly, the workshop will also engage with the more challenging aspects of interpretive analysis and ethics: the perils and unavoidability of reification, reflexivity and the positionality of the researcher; learning to “see” intersectional identities and power relations; and “hearing” meaningful silences. The workshop will conclude with a reflection upon the politics of methodology and epistemology within the academy, and a Q and A session trouble-shooting student research issues.
Learning Objectives:

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:
- Distinguish between major approaches to discourse analysis, evaluate their pros and cons, and select the appropriate method for their individual research project
- Execute the core elements of discourse analysis research design: casing, text selection, practical textual interpretation, and data presentation
- Make informed decisions about the utility of computer-assisted analysis for their own research
- Engage open-mindedly with the critical politics and ethics of discourse analysis
- Fairly evaluate – and defend – discourse analysis research design and specific interpretive claims

Requirements:

It is expected that students will have a basic familiarity with the logic and components of social scientific research design (i.e. neopositivist epistemology, discrete causality, case selection, literature review, etc.)

Students will write a response paper of no more than 1000 words in response to one of the asked questions for each seminar (see balance of syllabus), to be presented to the group. The student facilitator will be responsible for coordinating participants to ensure duplication is avoided and each session is covered. Students are also expected to a) read the materials for each session and b) be prepared to apply said materials to their own research in discussion. For the final session, students are requested to bring specific, prepared questions for trouble-shooting their own research.

Session One: Epistemology: Discourse and Claim-Making

Essential Readings:


Questions for Discussion (and paper responses):

What types of questions can be answered using discourse analysis?
What is the relationship between language/meaning and the world within discourse analysis?
What is the theory of agency at work within discourse analysis?
Why might discourse analysis superficially appear inconsistent, vague, or overly-assertive?

Examples:


**Session Two: Methodology: Practicalities of Discourse Analysis**

Essential:


Questions for Discussion (and paper responses):

How do we bound/identify a discourse?
How do we identify cases within discourse analysis?
Is comparison meaningful and/or possible within discourse analysis?
What “counts” as a text within discourse analysis? How do we identify them?
How do we know when a discourse analysis is “finished?”
How do we connect interpretive discursive analysis to social and political phenomena?
What is the fair/appropriate means of evaluating discourse analysis?

Examples:


**Session Three: Method: Computer-Assisted Analysis (SPSS) and Representation of Data**

**Essential:**

Robins, C.S. and Eisen, K., 2017. Strategies for the effective use of NVivo in a large-scale study: Qualitative analysis and the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(10), pp.768-778.


**Questions for Discussion (and paper responses):**

What are the benefits and drawbacks of computer-assisted discourse analysis?

Are all projects suited for computer-assisted analysis?

What times of information can computer-assisted discourse analysis produce?

**Background:**


**Session Four: Critical Extensions: Intersectionality and Reading Silences**

**Essential:**


**Questions for Discussion (and paper responses):**
How are we to read absences and silences through discourse analysis? Can we? What are the ethics of discourse analysis? Does it have a politics? How do we read implicit power relations within discourse analysis? (e.g. gender, sexuality, race, coloniality) Is there a risk of essentialism?

**Background:**


Session Five: The Best Defense is a Good Offense (Wrap-Up Session, Q and A, and Trouble-shooting)

Essential:


Questions for Discussion:

Do certain methods and/or epistemologies imply a particular politics?
How do we respond to positivist challenges to, and misunderstandings of, interpretive discourse analysis?
How much should we care about positivist challenges to, and misunderstandings of, interpretive discourse analysis?
(Bring your own specific research questions for trouble-shooting)
**Background:**


