

Working with Key Concepts in Cultural Studies: DISCOURSE**‘Discourse’ and ‘discourse analysis’ have different meanings in linguistics and in literary / cultural studies:**

In linguistics, **discourse** is often understood as “A linguistic unit that comprises more than one sentence”; it is “*linguistic context*”, [as opposed to] “*situational context* [which] is the nonlinguistic environment in which a sentence or discourse happens” (Fromkin, et al., 544 and 200)

Linguistic “**Discourse analysis** is concerned with the broad speech units comprising multiple sentences. It involves questions of style, appropriateness, cohesiveness, rhetorical force, topic/subtopic structure, differences between written and spoken discourse, as well as grammatical properties.” (Fromkin et al., 199-200)

In Literary and Cultural Studies ‘Discourse’ is understood as invariably situated:

To do discourse analysis is to analyze everything that is being said (or written) according to its function in a particular context; i.e. according to when and where it is said, by whom it is spoken (or written), and what effects it has.

To treat something as discourse is to ask:

- How do people speak about a given object or material? What precise terms are they using?
- In which settings do they speak, and what sustains these settings?
- In what roles or with what identities do they speak, and how have they acquired these roles and identities?
- Is there a connection between the different settings in which this discourse is situated? How can we describe the connection?

Examples:

Medical Discourse

Terms / Vocabulary: e.g. illness, health, diagnosis, treatment, examination, operation, therapy, doctor, nurse, ointment, tablets, pharmacy, psychosomatic effects etc.

Settings / Institutions: hospitals, surgeries and practices, medical faculties at universities, health insurance companies, health sections in popular magazines, government ministries of health, national health systems ...

Roles / Subject positions: doctor, patient, nurse, chemist, medical scientist, medical journalist, health system official, friends and relatives ...

The Discourse on Literature

- **Terms/Vocabulary:** literary works, texts, genres, poems, narratology, metaphor, poetics, (cf. handouts from winter term)
- **Settings / Institutions:** publishing houses, book shops, books, magazines, newspapers, author readings, prize committees, authors’ associations, publishers’ associations, book clubs, literary prizes, literary festivals, universities (literary studies)
- **Roles / Subject positions:** author, reader, reviewer, literary critic, literary agent, bookseller, publisher, prize committee member, professors of literature (and culture), students of literature (and culture)

The Discourse on Sodomy

- **Terms / Vocabulary:** sodomy, buggery, debauchery, male venery, sin, depravity, wantonness, wanton humour, Italian vice, heresy, treason
- **Settings / Institutions:** molly houses, privy chamber, church, court
- **Roles / Subject positions:** sodomite, buggerer, catamite, Mollies, Ganymede, minion, bedfellow, gomorrhean, indorser, Bud Sallogh, Madge, Madge Cull, Madge Cove

The Discourse on Homosexuality

- **Terms / Vocabulary:** homosexual(ity), gay(ness), lesbian(ism), queer(ness), sexual identity, same-sex desire, homophobia, heteronormativity, homonormativity, LGBTQ, gay marriage, civil partnership, effeminacy, butch, femme, third sex, intermediate sex, sexual inversion, Uranian
- **Settings / Institutions:** gender theory, queer theory, gay rights movement, gay liberation, (sexual) politics
- **Roles / Subject positions:** gay men and women, lesbians, activists, scholars, sexologists

Appendix:**Discourse Analysis: Methodological principles according to Michel Foucault:**

- **Exteriority (vs. deeper meaning)**
 - don’t look for the ‘inner meaning’ of a term (e.g. what is literature?) but analyse it ‘from the outside’
 - analyse for each term the *material conditions and circumstances* which allow the term to be spoken, and to have an effect
- **Specificity (vs. universality)**
 - take each occurrence of a term or an item individually and separately
 - Do not assume something to be a variation or manifestation of themes (e.g. homosexuality ≠ sodomy)
- **Discontinuity (vs. development)**
 - do not assume that individual occurrences of a term are connected in a way that you already know
 - analyse in each case the connections which it holds to other occurrences of the same term (cf. Foucault 1986 158-160.)

Sources:

- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. 1976. Vol 1: An Introduction. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1978. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Discourse on Language." *Critical Theory since 1965*. 1974. Eds. Hazard Adams and Leeroy Searle. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1986. Print. 148-162.
- Fromkin, Victoria, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams. *An Introduction to Language*. 8th ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007. Print.