

# Discourse Analysis

## **POL 8618 Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods**

Dr. Miguel A. Martínez López

Dept. Public Policy.

City University of Hong Kong

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# Definition

- Qualitative discourse analysis is the process of producing an interpretation out of the different “texts” as the main empirical evidences.
- Before the interpretation: analysis (organise, classify, categorise, compare, identify patterns and differences, explain relations to the significant “contexts”, etc.)
- Interpretation: make sense of the whole textual data (after the analysis) according to the research goals and hypotheses.
- Texts: transcripts of interviews and discussion groups, media contents, documents, observational notes, pictures, etc.

- Discourse: any practice that provides meaning to individuals. Texts are just one of those practices.
- Sociological perspective: texts/discourses are just a means to access a social / political reality, not the end of the analysis (as it is for a linguistic approach).
- It is not quantitative because it does not consist of counting the most repeated words, expressions, arguments, etc. Instead of “fragmenting” the texts, the researcher must establish the social and political significance of each individual and collective discourse.
- It is not descriptive because it does not simply summarise the opinions or experiences told by the interviewees/speakers. Instead of repeating the contents of texts with different words, the researcher must explain how and what for the discourse is produced according to the social context.

# Types

- Quantitative accounts and analysis of words, expressions, etc.
- Reach of the interpretative capacities of the researcher in relation to the contexts.
- Textual nature of the empirical products under analysis.
- Performative features of the discourse.
- Degree of authority of the speakers/interviewees.

	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
<b>Quantitative analysis</b>	Content analysis	Socio-semiotic analysis	(Critical) Discourse analysis
<b>Interpretation</b>	(Critical) Discourse analysis: discourse and society-politics (contradictions)	Semiotic and conversational analysis	Content analysis: referential description of the cultural system (consensus)
<b>Textual nature</b>	Transcripts of in-depth interviews, focus groups, audio visual documents	Mass media news and ads, films, observational notes, written documents	Photographs, buildings, urban forms, maps, rituals
<b>Performative features</b>	Pragmatic (discourse as practice)	Semantic (discourse as conveyor of meanings)	Syntactic (discourse subject to linguistic codes)
<b>Authority</b>	Laws, official documents, speeches by government, scientific reports	Published media with wide distribution (newspapers, books, movies, songs...), reports by NGOs	Private documents, letters, biographical notes, conversations with friends

# Advantages

- Low cost when the discourses are already produced (documents), but higher costs if they are first-hand produced (transcripts of interviews and focus groups).
- Low reactivity once the researcher deals with the texts, although some reactivity might be produced before.
- Texts may be original and exclusive once produced or collected –it depends on their public availability.

# Disadvantages

- Researcher is not always able to control the contexts and process of production of texts (who, how, what, etc.).
- Aims of the texts may differ from the researcher's aims.
- Institutional bias in official documents -hidden data when they are sensible to their interests, public data when they are favourable.



# How to conduct DA

- 1/ Transcribe the group discourse literally and completely (with silences, laughs, incidences...) –once it is typed, you can add it to a computing programme.
- 2/ Create the general codes and categories for all the kinds of data collected –transcription of the discourse, observational notes about body language, notes about the context, etc.
- 3/ Read the texts (as many times as needed) and write down notes and start making hypotheses, associations, questions, etc.
- 4/ Analyse the texts according to your initial objectives and some sociological assumptions as the following:

<b>Attitudes and Behaviours</b>	To what extent people <b>say the truth</b> ? To what extent is people honest (even if they are wrong)? To what extent people tell only what is expected as members of a particular group?
<b>Social Situations</b>	Each situation constrains people's behaviours, beliefs and expressed ideas because of the <b>social pressure</b> (control, sanctions and group approval) and the <b>social visibility</b> .
<b>Secondary Socialisation</b>	Beyond family and early school experiences (primary socialisation) our discourses are also determined by every involvement in different <b>groups of interaction and learning</b> such as peers, new family configurations, working environments, etc. (secondary socialisation).
<b>Social Position</b>	Our place in the social <b>hierarchies, structures, organisations and networks</b> constrain what we say, how, to whom, etc.
<b>Cognitive Dissonance</b>	We tend to adjust our discourses to the conflicts we face and others' expectations by using <b>disclaimers</b> and <b>justifications</b> -usually, only in case we are asked for.

<b>Cultural Strategies</b>	Discourses do not reproduce an integrated “cultural system” (because culture is continuing changing historically and is crossed by social and political conflicts) but borrow some “cultural resources” in pursuing different <b>strategic struggles</b> .
<b>Social Ambivalence</b>	We always face <b>ambivalent tensions</b> between different expectations, between the constraining situations and our ideals, between our past socialisation and present situations, etc. so our discourses are <b>strategies to legitimise</b> our practices/behaviours.
<b>Discourse as Practice</b>	Discourses do not reflect the true motives, beliefs, attitudes, ideals, meanings and cultural systems – they are produced as <b>strategic practices of interaction</b> with the researcher and other participants (in focus groups) in order to legitimise their practices and according to external constraints.

## A- **Referential (content) analysis** (discourse *reflects* systems of meanings):

- Build a list of topics (*what is said*) according to the reading and classify them by readjusting your previous codes and categories in different levels of generalisation.
- Apply all the categories to the text and analyse each textual excerpt (meanings, trends, novelties, etc.) - *how things are said* and *what do they mean*.
- Draw maps, figures, tables and graphs in order to create connections between all the findings -and charts with the participants' locations and points of view.
- For each group discourse, write a report about their main symbolic differences / configurations, the significant contexts, intentions (*why and what for things are said?*), etc.

## B- **Strategic analysis** (discourse as *strategic* practice):

- Describe the underlying rules of the situation in which the discourse is produced -what is and is not expected to be said. And track along the discourse the variations or deviations in respect to the dominant legitimacy. (Goffman's frame analysis)
- Determine the different social discourses available for the speakers/interviewees -those which are more legitimised by experts and authorities, those which are produced by peers in everyday life. Every discourse take a stance in the struggle between different discourses.
- Focus on the patterns and coherence of the discourses as well as on the ambivalences and inconsistencies. In particular, focus on the contradictions between what is said and the practices/behaviours.
- Interpret discourses according to external constraints, legitimised discourses, situational interactions, context, etc. -How convenient is every discourse? What is its benefit?

## C- Multiple approaches:

- Grounded Theory: inductive creation of concepts and theory out of the empirical analysis, by means of continuous comparisons, semantic networks, intensity of meanings, etc.
- Semiotics: to unveil deep structures and codes of language that determine the communication; to re-construct the frames and mechanisms that help create meaning such as metaphors, metonymies, verbal modes, deictics, etc.
- Contexts: situation (effects of the relations between interviewees and with the researcher, time available, venue, roles in conversation, negotiated and conflictive definitions of the situation...), intertextuality by borrowing from other discourses, dialogue with them, reproduction of dominant ideology, etc.

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