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**Feminist Discourse analysis**

Feminist discourse analysis has evolved out of linguists' particular concern with text and talk as gendered interactions, and feminist scholars' particular concern with discourse as an apparatus of patriarchy, to become, today, a wide‐reaching approach for understanding and critiquing the power of language and the language of power in many incarnations and contexts. Feminist discourse analysts understand discourse as establishing categories of inclusion and exclusion that are related to patriarchy as an “omnirelevant” schema but also see these gendered categories intersecting with a wide range of other hierarchical conceptualizations of difference that structure social institutions and interactions. They examine these various manifestations of difference, and the power they accrue or withhold, in media texts, conversations, advertisements, novels, films, political speeches, meeting minutes, interview transcripts, or wherever they may occur, through close attention to structures of representation such as themes, frames, grammatical features, and modes of address.

**Feminist discourse analysis**

Contemporary feminist discourse analysis, is not just about women’s rights or even just about gender. It takes the research tools and analytical approaches that have been learned and refined through several decades of examining manifestations of gender inequality in language and society, and applies them broadly to look at how we constitute a wide range of positions of power and powerlessness in the conceptual categories, practices, language, and imagery we use to relate to each other and to describe (and construct) our shared social world. Contemporary feminist discourse analysis is also not just a single method it is better described as an umbrella approach, under which a diverse range of methods can be deployed. These can range from detailed linguistic methods that use set rules of analysis methods may be etic (overlaying a predetermined analytical framework on the data to locate the presence or absence of specific features) or emic (approaching the data with an openness to discovering new and unexpected features, such as occurs in grounded theory research), or a combination. Feminist discourse analysis studies have evolved out of a linguistics focus on written text and transcribed talk, but today may be focused on any genre of text or practice (visual, oral, written, creative, performed, etc.)

Feminist discourse analyses have used semiotics, deconstruction, action research, ethnography, dramatic analysis, and more, as appropriate to whatever genre of text or practice is being examined, and doubtless further methods will continue to be added to the repertoire as the body of knowledge and scope of the approach grow.

Foucauldian “big picture” explorations that simply ask pertinent questions such as “who says so?” “whose interests are served?” “when did we first start seeing it this way?” and “whose voices are missing?” of a particular episteme’s taken-for-granted metanarratives of social and global organization and distribution also sit comfortably on the wide continuum of feminist discourse analysis methods (Hartsock, 1990).

There is also diversity of disciplinary context: Methods used for feminist discourse analysis have come from, and been applied within, many different disciplines sociology, psychology, linguistics, media studies, communication studies, political science, cultural studies, gender studies, feminist studies, literary studies, organization studies, postcolonial and critical race studies, and rhetorical studies there are also some named subgroupings, such as critical feminist discourse analysis, feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis, material feminist discourse analysis, and feminist conversation analysis.

Lazar draws a distinction between critical feminist discourse analysis, which is inherently “politically invested,” and “feminist approaches that apply descriptive discourse analytic methods” (2007: 144), which she implies are not motivated by social emancipatory goals (although arguably approaches applying a feminist lens are always already critical by definition). The feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis subgroup distinguishes itself from feminist critical discourse analysis by emphasizing subject positions as performative and constantly shifting in discourse, rather than fixed

* Feminist conversation analysis uses specific methods of talk analysis that developed within linguistics to highlight particular conversational structures that oppress and marginalize women (Kitzinger, 2013) – and we can in turn understand feminist conversation analysis as a subset of a slightly broader group of critical approaches to empirically studying gender in language that calls itself “feminist linguistics” (Bucholtz, 2014).
* Naples (2002: 244) outlines a Marxism informed and Foucauldian-influenced “materialist feminist analysis of discourse that focuses on historical and structural patterns of domination and resistance to render visible unspoken or unrepresented features of everyday life in discursive frames.” Her own and others’ materialist feminist discourse analyses are “broader brush” than some linguistics approaches, encompassing attention to mapping the transhistorical, political, and social settings of the analyzed discourse and seeing discourse as “not necessarily tied to particular organizations”
* There are also other similarly methodologically flexible studies, such as those using interpretive thematic analyses or discursive psychology, that do not apply strict empirical linguistics approaches but do explore discourse and its effects from a feminist standpoint, within disciplines such as psychology (e.g., Weatherall and Priestley, 2001) and media studies (Van Zoonen, 1994).

There are several features that unite studies across all of these approaches and disciplinary orientations as a single unified category we can recognize as “feminist discourse analysis.”

* The first is their feminist theory and praxis genealogy: They inherit a tradition of critical attention to make visible, and by making visible helping to change or overthrow, the assumptions in our discourse that allocate and withhold access to power on the basis of existing systems of hierarchy such as patriarchy

Understanding the range of values typically associated with patriarchy (might equals right, competition, heteronormativity, gender dichotomization, individualism, chain of command, and the universalizing and privileging of, for example, rational, literate, individualistic, mechanistic, and reductionist ways of seeing over knowledges that are collective, oral, autochthonous, pluralist, contextual, or embodied) requires investigation that cuts across a range of social categories including culture, race, class, and sexuality, as well as gender.

* The second characteristic of contemporary feminist discourse analysis, then, is that it is intersectional. As well as layering the categories of subjectivity, feminist discourse analyses of patriarchy have also increasingly overlapped with examinations of capitalism, globalization, marketization, nationalism, neoliberalism, and other metanarratives characteristic of our current episteme for example, Fraser’s critical feminist analyses of our global discourses of democracy, justice, and equity.
* Third, contemporary feminist discourse analyses are united by an understanding of discourse as both pervasive and intensely material. This understanding not only means the field has expanded beyond early linguistic approaches to discourse as only text or talk to encompass discourse as any organized pattern of meaning-making in society, whatever its mode, but moreover discourse is now recognized not just as a reflection or description of existing social relations but as actively delimiting subjects and the permissible relationships between them. Discourses are thus considered to be any of the social and cultural meaning making apparatuses that authorize and repress cultural memories, dictate “commonsense” (but actually social and cultural) arrangements of time and space, shape cultural and social institutions and practices, and influence material policies of governance that distribute resources and grant or limit power. Discourse has real-world impact, and feminist discourse analyses are attuned not only to exposing discourse but also to challenging its tangible social and institutional effects, assisting subjects who are palpably oppressed or marginalized within and by these structures to develop active forms of resistance.
* Fourth, feminist discourse analysis reflects contemporary feminism’s shift away from a moralizing frame of reference to an empathetic understanding of the ways in which people are caught within and pressured by social, cultural, professional, and political discursive logics. indicative of the limits of the conceptual vocabulary available to them, rather than as an individual bigotry or failing.

Feminist discourse analysis helps illuminate connections between individuals’ life situations and the broader institutional, economic, and political structures containing those lives. A feminist discourse perspective recognizes that “agency is in the relations between actors, rather than in people and things, thereby enabling some possibilities and constraining others” The increasing breadth of publication locales, disciplinary applications, and topics scrutinized suggests that feminist discourse analysis will continue to increase in recognition as a malleable, pragmatic, general critical approach to both understanding the role of discourse in structuring our lived reality, and establishing responses that help people to resist or challenge discourse’s more injurious effects.

**References**

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