

# **Discourse Studies – Analysing Spoken Discourse**

ENGL 312a  
*2019 (Sept. – Dec.)*

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## **Discourse Studies: *Analyzing Spoken Discourse***

Engl. 312a

Professor: Jessica de Villiers

Buchanan D316

M/W/F: 11:00-11:50

The activity of conversation is central to our lives and to the construction of our social identities. Yet in formal linguistic studies, casual conversation is often overlooked in favour of written texts or instances of spoken text involving a single speaker. This course introduces discourse analysis techniques for the analysis of language events involving interaction between two or more speakers. Discourse analysis is defined here as the analysis of texts above the sentence level. Drawing on a range of linguistic and semiotic approaches, we will study dialogue as a semantic activity. We will explore and practice techniques for analyzing language at a variety of linguistic levels, from micro-patterns in the grammar of conversation, to turn-taking, to text type (genre).

The general goals of the course will be:

- Developing skills in using analytic techniques to describe and interpret dialogue in context.
- Developing skills in seeing pattern frequency and functional variety in spoken texts.
- Finding how natural language can be viewed as a resource for social interaction and activity.
- Designing and producing a research project involving the collection and analysis of conversational data.

There will be a number of in-class and take-home assignments and students will be encouraged to collect and analyze their own data.

### **Required Reading:**

Eggins and Slade (2005). *Analyzing Casual Conversation*, Cassell.

Additional readings may be assigned.

### **Course Evaluation:**

There will be a written assignment, a group presentation, a short quiz, and a final paper representing 40% of the course grade. Students will also present their proposed work for the final paper to the class. There will also be 6 learning and applying activities to be prepared at home and then worked on in class. Each is worth 2% (1% for doing the assignment at home and bringing it to class, 1% for working on it in class in a group). More detail on each of these will be provided throughout the semester.

- Midterm assignment, 15%
- Class Participation, 8%
- Learning activities, 12% (6 activities worth 2% each)
- Presentations, 10%
- Quiz, 15%
- Final Paper/Project, 40%

**Please note the following course expectations:**

1. Students are expected to attend all classes. Announcements will be made at the beginning and end of classes regarding the assigned readings and the expectations for activities and assignments.
2. You should read assigned readings before class.
3. Learning activities cannot be made up or handed in late.

**Policies:**

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website \(https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success\)](https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success). Students must contact me via email as soon as you are aware you may need an in-term concession. I will adjudicate the request. Please include a Student Self-Declaration form, found on the Arts Advising website (<https://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising/academic-performance/help-academic-concession/>). If you require a second concession, you must make your request to your Faculty Advising Office.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

*Week 1: Sept. 4-6*

Introduction – what is discourse?, what is discourse analysis? Transcribing spoken discourse.

**Learning Activities: Activity 1 assigned.**

**(Reading: Ch. 1, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 2: Sept. 9-13*

Data collection, transcribing spoken discourse (cont.); Approaches to spoken discourse and theoretical sources.

**Learning Activities: Activity 1 group work and hand in Sept. 13.**

**Activity 2 assigned Sept. 13.**

**(Reading: Ch. 2, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 3: Sept. 16-20*

Approaches and theoretical background (cont.)

**Learning Activities: Activity 2 group work and hand in Sept. 20.**

**(Reading: Ch. 2, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Tuesday, Sept. 17: Last day for change in registration and for withdrawal from most Winter Session Term 1 courses without withdrawal standing of W recorded on a student's academic record.*

*Week 4: Sept. 23-27*

The grammar of conversation

**Learning Activities: Activity 3 assigned.**

**(Reading: Ch. 3, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 5: Sept. 30-Oct. 4*

The grammar of conversation, cont.

**Learning Activities: Activity 3 group work and hand in Oct. 4.**

**(Reading: Ch. 3, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 6: Oct. 7-11*

Semantics, appraisal

**Learning Activities: Activity 4 assigned Oct. 9.**

**(Reading: Ch. 4, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Friday, Oct. 11: Last day for withdrawal using the [Student Service Centre](#) from most Winter Session Term 1 courses with withdrawal standing of W recorded on a student's academic record.*

*Week 7: Oct. 14- 18*

**NOTE: MONDAY OCTOBER 14: THANKSGIVING DAY. UNIVERSITY CLOSED.**

Semantics, appraisal, discourse structure. **Discuss midterm assignment and group presentation.**

**Learning Activities: Activity 4 group work and hand in Oct. 16.**

*Week 8: Oct. 21-25*

Discourse structure, cont.

**Learning Activities: Activity 5 assigned Oct. 21.**

**Activity 5 group work and hand in Oct. 25.**

**(Reading: Ch. 5, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 9: Oct. 28-NOV 1*

Genre, Telling Stories (narrative).

**Learning Activities: Activity 6 assigned Oct. 28**

**Activity 6 group work and hand in Nov. 1.**

**Nov. 1: Midterm assignment due.**

**(Reading: Ch. 6, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 10: Nov. 4- 8*

Genre, Telling Stories (cont.), **Group presentations; Discuss final project.**

**(Reading: Ch. 6, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 11: Nov. 11- 15*

**NOTE: MONDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2019, REMEMBRANCE DAY. UNIVERSITY CLOSED.**

Gossip

**Nov. 13: QUIZ.**

**(Reading: Ch. 7, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

*Week 12: Nov. 18-22*

Presentation of final projects

*Week 13: Nov. 25-29*

Presentation of final projects, wrap up. Nov. 29, Last day of classes. **Final projects due.**

**(Reading: Ch. 8, *Analysing Casual Conversation*)**

**ASSIGNMENTS: [NOTE: KEEP ALL ASSIGNMENTS, AND ALL DATA USED FOR ASSIGNMENTS, FOR POSSIBLE FURTHER REFERENCE AND USE]**

**Mid-term Assignment: (15%)**

Select **one** of the learning and applying activities you have already completed (not including Activity #1). Prepare and develop it as a formal assignment to be handed in by including: a) an introduction in which you include all key contextual information necessary for a reader to understand and appreciate your analysis (see p. 170 for one suggested approach); b) a description of methods; c) some discussion of why the methods selected were suited to the text; d) text analysis; e) a short discussion in which you comment on the linguistic and/or discourse patterns you observe. What can be said on the basis of your analysis? What did you find most interesting about the analysis? What, if any, were the limitations in your analysis (e.g. what would you do next time)? Was there anything that surprised you?

Length: 2 pages, double spaced (not including analysis or tables).

**Note:** you are welcome to do a new activity, following the original instructions of the activity, and use that for your assignment.

**Final Paper: (40%)**

Select a topic and develop a research question that focuses on the analysis of spoken dialogue. Collect a text or small corpus that allows you to investigate your question. Transcribe your data, as appropriate, and use one or more of the approaches studied in class to do an analysis of your corpus. Write a paper which includes the following elements: Introduction, Methods, Discussion, Conclusion. You should also include all data analysed and a key to transcription conventions. Depending on your research question, you may also be expected to include a literature review.

The length of the paper will partly depend on your research question and the data collected. The written (essay) component should be approximately 6 pages double spaced (not including appendices).

You will also be expected to present your paper to the class in a short (3-4 minute) presentation during the last 3 weeks of classes. Your paper will likely be 'in progress' at this time. Depending on how far along you are, you should present your topic, describe your data and methods, and briefly report on 1 or 2 interesting findings or observations you have made.

**LEARNING AND APPLYING ACTIVITIES:** 12% (2% for each).

*Learning and Applying Activity #1. Transcription assignment.*

PART 1: Find an interview or conversation on YouTube or the internet. For this first assignment, you should select a naturalistic conversation or interview (rather than a conversation that is part of a scripted television show). Transcribe **2 minutes** of your text, following the conventions provided in your textbook (pp. 1-5). Make a key of all the transcription conventions you used.

In transcribing talk, you will likely notice things about it that usually go unnoticed. What did you find most unexpected? Make 2 or 3 observations and write them down. **Bring completed assignment to class. (1%)**

PART 2: In a group, work on your transcript in class with others. **Hand in assignment and group notes. (1%)**

*Learning and Applying Activity #2. Ethnographic SPEAKING grid.*

PART 1: Apply Hymes' SPEAKING grid (p. 33) to the text you collected for Activity #1. Include the title and link for the text. (If your text does not have a title that explains it, give it your own.) **Bring completed assignment to class. (1%).**

PART 2: in a group, work on your transcript in class with others. **Hand in assignment and group notes. (1%)**

*Learning and Applying Activity #3. Grammatical patterns*

PART 1: Collect an interview or television show from the internet. Notice any differences in the transcription conventions used (compared to those from the textbook), and make a key of any new conventions used. Analyse 7-10 consecutive sentences using the coding sheets from pp. 109-110. (Create your own coding sheet, following the format on p. 109 and 110. Make adjustments to the sheets as you find necessary.) Note grammatical patterns and **bring completed assignment to class. (1%)**

PART 2: In a group, work on your transcript in class with others. **Hand in assignment and group notes. (1%)**

*Learning and Applying Activity #4. Appraisal and interpersonal alignment.*

PART 1: Find or collect a casual conversational (e.g. interview, conversational extract from a television show or movie, or your own recorded interview or conversation). Analyse the text for features of appraisal and alignment discussed in class.

To what extent do the speakers align with their interlocutors? Where do you see this (or not) in the data? **Bring completed assignment to class. (1%)**

PART 2: In a group, work on your transcript in class with others. **Hand in assignment and group notes. (1%)**

*Learning and Applying Activity #5. Speech Functions.*

For Activity #5, each group will work on one transcript.

- Select 1 transcript already used in a previous assignment to be worked on by the group. (Alternatively, you can find a new one to use.) Arrange to have everyone work on the same transcript.

- Select 10-12 consecutive sentences (depending on sentence length) and then every member of the group should do an analysis of those sentences identifying and labelling: a) moves; and b) speech functions (using Figures 5.1-5.5). Try to do the most delicate analysis, but if in doubt, use the more general labels. (The Speech Functions column will be the 12 broad categories (Table 5.3); The Moves column will be the more delicate, descriptive ‘moves’.)
- Make some observations if you can and bring your analysis to class for work in the group.

***Learning and Applying Activity #6. Narrative assignment.***

PART 1: Find a transcript of a narrative (e.g. an episode of a TV show) online. If you select a television show, and you have access to a video recording of the show, you may wish to watch the episode to check the reliability of the transcript and make improvements where necessary. (Note: if you collected a narrative for Activity #3, you may choose to use the same transcript.) Next, do a narrative analysis using Labov and Waletzky’s classic narrative stages (Abstract, Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, Resolution, Coda) from pp. 233-234. **Bring completed assignment to class. (1%)**

PART 2: In a group, work on your transcript in class with others. **Hand in assignment and group notes. (1%)**

*Alternative options for data:* a) look at a naturalistic narrative that is spontaneously produced as part of an interview; b) collect an elicited personal narrative.

If you wish to collect an elicited narrative, you may choose to use the following task:

Record a 5 - 10 minute conversational interview in which the interviewee describes to an interviewer the most interesting thing that ever happened to them. (Begin by securing consent). Alternatively, the interviewee can describe the funniest or scariest thing that happened to them. Other possible questions to elicit a personal narrative might be about: a difficult shopping experience this past holiday; most intense study/exam preparation memory; a time you broke the rules; a time you remember laughing really hard. Transcribe the recording in its entirety, including all necessary information. Once you have a full and faithful representation of the spoken material, complete the assignment as described.