2014

320-07 Topics in Linguistics: Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis

Carol Winkelmann
winkelmannc@xavier.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/english_syllabi_fall_2014

Recommended Citation
http://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/english_syllabi_fall_2014/61

This Restricted-Access Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the English Syllabi 2014 at Exhibit. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Syllabi Fall 2014 by an authorized administrator of Exhibit. For more information, please contact exhibit@xavier.edu.
This course introduces students to contemporary issues, theories, and methodologies in feminist linguistics, an interdisciplinary field that seeks to make transparent the ways language is used to support and naturalize gender inequities.

In particular, the course investigates the intersection of feminist linguistics and post-structuralism. Feminist linguistics (via critical discourse analysis) tries to promote critical consumerism of messages or information; meanwhile, post-structural linguistic analysis seeks to uncover how different subject positions occur within and across texts. Together these approaches deconstruct how language becomes a site for contested meanings and the negotiation of power. The emphases are on the ways gender identities are constructed through discourse practices, the ways gender stereotypes are confirmed and/or resisted, and the ways power shifts and changes as relations are negotiated in interactions.

As a linguistic methodology and a feminist process, Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) begins by identifying various discourses and shifting subjectivities at textual play. It then attempts to discern discursive relationships between those discourses and/or subjectivities. It theorizes power relations, evaluates and ascertains likely or actual consequences and, finally, offers suggestions for localized emancipatory or more equity-oriented practices.

FPDA is an approach suited for students interested in literature, classrooms, clinics, corporations, and other sites of institutional discourse. It offers ways to systematically consider language and gender at meta-level and local levels; that is, the levels of theory, policy, and practice. For example, classrooms are shaped by educational theories, mandated policies, literary works and other texts, non-verbal messages, and the actual language practices of particular persons. FPDA investigates these and other discursive sites, discerns how gender influences the construction of identities at these sites, and then suggests opportunities for localized social change. Depending on the scope of the study, the linguist would focus on particular texts within these multiply embedded discourses.

We’ll begin the semester by considering the origins of feminist linguistics and how scholars refined their theoretical perspectives over a half century. Pre-feminist linguists didn’t consider gender except in simplistic, often sexist ways; subsequently, early feminist linguists theorized (essential or learned) differences in male and female language and sought to revalorize women’s language practices. Later, feminist scholars became invigorated by the study of the construction of women’s identity and personal agency—often within the conversations of individuals and/or with respect to media influence. They focused on issues of power and dominance. More recently, feminist linguists have begun to consider the positioning of gender in discourse. Gender is viewed as fluid instead of essential, as dynamic and co-constructed, instead of static or stabilized. Gender accrues its meanings from discursive relations instead of simply physical bodies. Feminist linguists, then, are interested in the ways gender impacts shifting power relations that unfold as people negotiate their way through conversations and other textual practices.

Critically, however, feminist linguistics is an action-oriented discipline that recognizes both its own political biases and its civic and social responsibilities. It doesn’t hide its interest in social change; on the contrary, feminist linguistics seeks involvement in collective political action. It is careful to articulate gender discrimination and oppression in local contexts rather universal pronouncements; yet, it clearly recognizes how, in the global arena, women, girl children, and sexual/gender minorities face obstacles and oppressions that have historical persistence, create real suffering, and demand immediate redress.

As such, our course situates itself firmly within the mission of Xavier University as a liberal arts institution that prioritizes social issues and social action.
**Student Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the semester, students who successfully engage our course readings, assignments, and discussions will be able:

- To discuss current issues in language, gender, and feminism;
- To identify feminist linguistic theories and use one (FPDA) to elucidate text;
- To recognize and apply research methodologies appropriate for the study of gender;
- To compose clear and well-organized research about language and gender; and
- To articulate ways we can respond actively to situations of gender injustice.

**Readings**

This semester, we will study:


There will also be readings on Canvas.

**Pedagogy**

Our course is shaped by critical feminist pedagogy. This is not a lecture course. It's not teacher-centered or student-centered. It's conversation-centered. All participants will be expected to teach material and all participants are expected to learn from both the professor and other students. Everyone contributes to the intellectual caliber of the discussion. Whole class discussion is foundational and heavily emphasized. Your participation grade will be determined nearly entirely on how you contribute to whole class discussion.

**Student Responsibilities**

1. Informed & Integrated Participation in Large Group Conversations

   The basic criteria for our discourse will be:

   a. Preparation for class, demonstrated by bringing readings to class and by engaging in an informed and integrated way in our large group conversations—that is, with reference to current and prior readings, documentaries, and discussions;

   b. Regularity of participation with average and above average grades awarded to those students who contribute evenly to every (or most) large group discussions in a STEP UP/STEP BACK way, a conversation sharing strategy to build community. This strategy requires students who speak with ease to invite peers who are more reticent into the conversation. Students who dominate or generally remain silent during our large group conversations will earn below average grades for participation;

   c. Respect for the contributions of others, including the professor, visitors, and peers—though their opinions may be different from yours; and
d. Compliance with the policy for electronic devices and other non-class related material. Cell phones are to be turned off and put away.

2. Eight quizzes

3. A midterm exam

4. Seven assignments

5. A research paper and its presentation

The research process will include a proposal and a preliminary annotated bibliography of 3 items. The paper will include a title page, an abstract, a research question, thesis, literature review, theoretical and methodological discussion, context setting, and a linguistic analysis by way of established methodologies (connotation analysis; denotative analysis; identifying discourses and their intertextual relations, and so forth). Finally, a bibliography and appendices will be provided.

Most importantly, the research will be designed with the intent of suggesting action to bring about social change on the basis of its linguistic analysis. That is, the study should contribute in some pragmatic way to an actual need or problem in gender relations.

Each student will present their analysis to the community towards the end of the course. This paper may be individually or collaboratively written with one co-writer. The formatting requirement for the main body of the paper is a minimum of 5400 words in Times New Roman, 10 point, single-spaced (not including title page, abstract, key words, appendices, and bibliography) text with one-inch margins on all sides. This is 12 pages of single spaced text. The format for your paper is the style sheet for the journal Women and Language.

**Assessment**

The final grade will be determined on these bases: participation (20%); quizzes (20%); assignments (15%); midterm (15%); and a research paper (30%).

In addition to timeliness, the evaluation of all your contributions will be basically based on five criteria: thoughtfulness, thoroughness, clarity, evidence, and originality. The English department grading criteria will be available on Canvas.

Grades are recorded on a twelve point plus/minus scale: 12 (A+), 11 (A), 10 (A-), 9 (B+), 8 (B), 7 (B-), 6 (C+), 5 (C), 4 (C-), and so forth.

This is an example:

1. First, calculate the averages for quizzes. There is no rounding up, but include figures to the 1/100 decimal point, e.g., 9.25 or 10.70

2. Multiple the grades or grade averages by the percentages for the 5 types of contributions to the course (i.e. participation, assignments, quizzes, midterm, and research paper).

3. Then add the totals. You can include figures to the 1/100 decimal point, e.g., 9.25 or 10.70. There is no rounding up.
4. Here’s an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participation:</th>
<th>Assignments average:</th>
<th>Quizzes average</th>
<th>Midterm</th>
<th>Research paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9 points</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 points</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>180</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no rounding up for the final grade.

The 12-point scale is recognized to be a simple, more fair rubric than the traditional 100 point grading scale. If you would like to read about it, see the article at [http://mymassp.com/content/challenging_grading_paradigm_part_3](http://mymassp.com/content/challenging_grading_paradigm_part_3).

You can download a form on which you can record your own scores and then calculate your grade. I will help if you need it.

**Classroom Policies**

Our sessions will be conversation-centered; thus, your presence is important to the community. You will lose a full letter grade for a fourth absence. An absence will be excused only if it is covered by acceptable documentation: e.g., a doctor’s note or other documentation regarding a serious situation. Only activities covered by university policy are excused. Excused absences may require additional work on the part of the student to make up missed class time. If you miss a presentation due to an undocumented absence, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

You are responsible to sign the attendance sheet at the beginning of each class. If you have not signed the attendance sheet, you may be counted as absent. If you register late for the course, you are responsible for the sessions you missed before you arrived in class; that is, they count as absences.

Habitual tardiness will be noted and deducted from your participation grade.

Electronic devices should be turned off and put away. Please do not bring or use non-course related material to class, such as homework assignments or reading for other classes. If you use such items, it will be noted and your participation grade will be penalized.

Late papers are those not submitted during class time or at the specified time on the due date. Do not submit papers at my office door and do not submit papers via email. I will not grade papers sent via email unless we have a prior arrangement.

Consult about your work: Please take advantage of the opportunity to talk about your performance. The appropriate context for this is in my office during office hours or at an arranged time. I am happy to talk to you about your work, but it is my policy not to discuss grades or performance in front of other class members.
CLASS POLICIES
ENG 320

Please check or initial each policy, then sign and submit this agreement sheet. Policies are detailed more completely in the syllabus and were discussed during the first week of the course.

_____ I understand that a fourth absence will result in the drop of an entire letter grade from my final grade—regardless of circumstances, including sports, weather (unless XU is officially closed), or job related absences. Thus, for example, a final course grade of a “B+” will turn into a “C+” if I have 4 absences.

_____ I understand that, if I missed the first session(s) due to late registration (or any other reason), the absence counts against my three “free” absences.

_____ I understand that I am responsible to sign in each session in the attendance book or I may be counted as absent.

_____ I understand that documentation to cover absences must be turned in by the last regular day of the course, that is, a week before the final exam.

_____ I understand that habitually tardiness will affect my participation grade negatively.

_____ I understand that using my cell phone or laptop (for non-class related activity) during class will affect my grade negatively.

_____ I understand that late papers are ones not turned in during class time or the specified time on the due date. They will be penalized.

_____ I understand that my work will not be accepted by email (without prior arrangement) or under my professor’s door.

_____ I understand that my participation grade will be determined by my contributions to LARGE class discussions.

Print Name:

Sign Name:

25 August 2014