

Discussion Questions for Norman Fairclough's *Analysing Discourse*

Chapter 4: Genres and generic structure

1. Introduction

Q1. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines **genre** as '*a particular type or style of literature, art, film or music that you can recognize because of its special features*'. On the other hand, in 65A, NF defines **genre** as '*the specifically discursive aspect of ways of acting and interacting in the course of social events*'. The OALD's definition is the traditional, standard one. It emphasizes *texts*, and implies that genres are a feature of 'high' art and culture. Fairclough's definition emphasizes *action*, and implies that genre is a part of ordinary people's everyday lives. Which definition do you think is more useful for thinking about genre in relation to the media and media texts? Or do we need both?

2. Genres and texts

Q2. NF's approach to the analysis of texts is a *relational* one, or, as I prefer to call it, a *realizational* one. This means that there are various *levels* of text organization, and the *choices* made by text producers at *higher* levels (about the *meanings* they want to express) get *realized* through the choices they make at *lower* levels (which genres, discourses and styles they use, and then which grammar and vocabulary to use). For text producers, this is a top-down process. But for discourse analysts like us, we must work in the opposite direction: we must start at the bottom level, the level of words on the page or sounds in the air, and work our way back upwards towards the meanings that (we think) the text producers wanted to express. Try to illustrate this point by reference to one or more media texts.

3. Pre-genres, disembedded genres and situated genres

Q3. NF gives two examples of disembedded genres (interviews and self-publicising 'infomercials'). Can you think of any other examples of disembedded genres, especially ones which are related to the media?

Q4. Can you think of any modern media texts which seem to be a *hybrid mixture* of other (older, and perhaps purer) genres?

4. Analysing individual genres

Q5. In 72B, NF concludes that genres vary in their degree of *purpose-driven-ness*! Some genres are strongly driven by one (or more) purpose, but some are not. Consider a range of different media genres and try to rank them in order from most- to least- purpose-driven-ness. Why are some genres more purpose-driven than others?

Q6. Try to identify the hierarchy of purposes in a certain media genre. How can you decide which purpose is higher than another one? What do we mean by ‘higher’ purpose and ‘lower’ purpose?

4.1 Generic Structure

Q7. For any particular media text genre, try to identify its generic structure. Which elements are *obligatory* to the structure, and which are *optional*? Why?

Q8. Deborah Cameron’s study of the language used in ‘call centres’ is very interesting (in my humble opinion!!). NF concludes, in 73A, that the way in which call center workers’ language is controlled by their managers is an example of the wider tendency in the modern world for communication to become *commodified* and *industrialized*. In the world of the media, can you think of any examples of this commodification and/or industrialization of language. Can you think of any opposite cases which suggest that some media people are trying to *fight against* these tendencies?

4.2 Social Relations

Q9. How do TV announcers address (= talk to) viewers? What sort of *power* relations and *solidarity* relations does their use of *address forms* seem to construe (or create)? Are they ‘simulating’ friendly relations? (Or are they *really* being friendly?) Are these relations the *same* for all TV programmes, or do they *vary* depending on the type of programme? Do the ways they address viewers seem designed to legitimize their powerful position, or avoid the alienation of viewers?

4.3 Communication Technologies

Q10. Can you give some examples of how the development of new technologies has produced new media genres?

5. Dialogue and the Public Sphere

Q11. Can you think of any examples of dialogue in the media which are *represented* as being fair and equal but which are, *in fact*, not so?

Q12. Can you explain what ‘*public sphere*’ (79B) means, and how it relates to one or more types of media? For the media you have chosen, can you say whether it contributes to creating an effective public sphere or not?

6. Arguments, Assumptions and Ideologies

Q13. Can you find a newspaper story which contains an argument. An Editorial (社説) or an Opinion article might be a good place to look for such a story. Can you identify what *grounds*, *warrants*, *backings* and *claims* it contains? Are any of the grounds, warrants or backings only implied, or assumed, or taken for granted? Is there an ideological reason for this? Is it due to the

particular discourse (or ideology) of the writer?

7. Narrative

Q14. Collect a range (at least, two!) of media reports about one particular event (major international event or small, local event – either is OK!). Then try to identify the ‘*Fabula*’ structure of the original event and the ‘*Story*’ structure of the various reports. Can you make some comments about what similarities and differences you found?

Q15. For two media reports used in Q14, can you say how they are *focalized*? What *point of view* are they written from? Can you think of any *other* possible ways of focalizing the same story?

Q16. Do you agree with the idea that news is a form of *social regulation*, or ‘*apparatus of government*’ which controls events and the way that people think about them?

Q17. Do you think I have given you too many questions this week???

END