

**Discourse Studies:
Issues and trends in contemporary German society and politics**

GERM 409 (HALW), Fall 2015
TTh 10:00 – 11:15, ML 219
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Description

In this upper-level writing intensive course conducted in German, students will examine in-depth the language used by politicians, journalists, pundits, and other leading public figures to express beliefs and attitudes regarding current socio-political issues in German society. Specifically, the majority of the course will examine the discourse surrounding three contemporary topics: energy policy; immigration policy; and foreign policy. To allow for a more focused and detailed analysis, students will investigate a recent event that highlights the predominant issues for each topic:

- *Die Flüchtlingskrise*: The response within Germany to the massive increase in refugees seeking asylum in Germany in the past year;
- *Die Finanzkrise in Griechenland*: Germany's response to the economic crisis in Greece;
- *Die Energiewende*: The move in Germany toward greater dependence on renewable energy sources following the decision by the federal government in June 2011 to end its reliance on nuclear power by 2022.

Approach

Students will focus their attention on conducting functionally oriented discourse analysis in order to understand the political, social, and cultural context of contemporary Germany. Based on the expectation that students have had no experience conducting discourse analysis, the first four weeks of the semester will be spent introducing the basics of discourse analysis. No linguistics background is required to participate in the course, but students will be expected to have a solid grasp of German grammar and its terminology as well as an interest in understanding how language is used to express ideas. Additionally during this introductory phase, students will inform themselves about fundamental aspects of political and media landscape in contemporary Germany. Such foundational knowledge of Germany will be vital to understand the issues examined later in the semester.

After this introduction, the course's focus shifts to the three featured events. Students will begin by gathering and examining background information on the selected topic and then perform fine-grained discourse analyses of primary texts that explore the topic. Because there is no expectation that students have prior experience with discourse analysis, students will often work in pairs or groups in order to pool their knowledge and work together to practice discourse analysis. Some of this collaboration will be done in and out of class using the collaborative

function of Google Docs. One central and recurring task that will require collaboration is the creation of semantic fields that feature relevant lexicogrammar for a specific topic. Much of the readings about discourse analysis will be in English, but the all class discussions and assignments as well as the primary texts will be in German.

Initially, much of this work will be guided and supervised, but one of the objectives over the course of the semester is to develop students' ability to conduct such informational and analytical work independently. One substantive measure of students' autonomy as discourse analysts will be their completion of the final project that requires them to research and analyze the discourse of another contemporary issue in the German-speaking world.

Because this course fulfills one of the Continuing Writing Requirements for the GERs, students will complete a range of writing assignments that include short responses to the assigned readings, written analyses of primary texts, short written exercises that explore a particular aspect of discourse, and the aforementioned longer independent research paper. A central discursive characteristic of most writing assignments will be formulating an argument, thereby reflecting the shift from the focus on *explanation* at Level 3 to *argumentation* at Level 4. Students will work extensively on how to summarize others' opinions, formulate their own well-substantiated opinions, and respond to criticisms of those opinions. Discourse analysis is seen as a particularly helpful approach at this advanced stage of language learning because it allows students to examine in detail how language functions at the word, sentence, and discourse level to make meaning.

Goals:

By the end of the semester students in this course will be able to

- apply basic tenets of discourse analysis to understand how language is used in the political sphere to make meaning;
- draw on their discourse analyses to summarize in writing and speaking the views on a topic, formulate a well-substantiated argument on the topic, and respond to counterarguments about the topic;
- identify the cultural significance of public commentaries;
- discuss contemporary German politics;
- conduct independent research on German-related issues;
- contextualize contemporary socio-political issues in relation to their history and origins;
- reflect about their own language use in different contexts and to demonstrate familiarity with the next steps in their language learning.

Prerequisites:

Two German courses numbered 300 or higher or the equivalent, or permission of instructor

Course materials:

- Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis. Theory and method*. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0415725569.
- Texts, including theoretical and practical information on discourse analysis, articles from

leading German periodicals, such as *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, and excerpts from political debates, speeches, and discussions will be made available on the course Google Doc site.

- A good reference grammar book (e.g., Rankin & Wells or Dreyer & Schmitt)
- a reliable source for seeking definitions, translations, gender and plural forms (e.g., http://dict.leo.org/ende/index_de.html; or <http://www.linguee.com>).

Assessment

1. Preparation and participation (25%). Completing homework thoroughly, regularly, and on time is extremely important. Learning a foreign language is long-term process, and cramming simply does not work. Homework will be graded according to the following criteria:

- “√+” (100%): Homework handed in on time and indicating a very thorough effort, including a conscious attempt to use language features emphasized in class;
- “√” (80%): Homework handed in on time and indicating a satisfactory effort;
- “√-” (60%): Homework handed in on time but indicating an unsatisfactory effort.

Note: Homework that receives a check or check minus can be corrected, turned back in, and, assuming the issues have been addressed, receive a mark of 90%. Late homework will not be accepted and will receive no credit. Students are encouraged to use the homework exercises to experiment with the language and become resourceful users of German. At the same time, they are expected to use online resources to check their work for any unnecessary errors. Specifically, in 400-level courses in the German Studies Department it is expected that on take-home assignments students will use resources available to them (e.g., spellcheck in MS Word or Google Doc; websites with verb conjugations; online dictionaries with gender and plural forms) to avoid committing the following errors: gender (G), punctuation (I), case after prepositions (K), plural form of nouns (Pl), spelling and capitalization (R), and subject-verb agreement (SV) = GIKPRS! Random errors in these categories are unavoidable but consistent inattention to these avoidable errors will negatively affect the final grade.

Regular homework assignments could consist any of the following activities: (re)reading an assigned text, creating a semantic field, conducting a preliminary discourse analysis, gathering background information, completing a worksheet or grammar exercise, working with a classmate on an assignment, writing an essay, or preparing for an in-class speaking event.

Attendance, preparation, *and* participation are essential to your progress. You will be allowed a maximum of 2 absences for routine doctor visits and travel for non-emergencies, etc., during the semester without penalty. Beginning with the 3rd absence, a penalty of -1% will be levied on the earned final grade for each class missed. The best policy to adopt is to **keep your instructor informed** if you miss any classes or assignments. Extended illnesses and family emergencies will be treated as exceptions, and absences for these purposes will be excused. Be prepared to show proof of the need for the absences, however, if your instructor asks for it. Varsity athletes can get excused

with coaches' notification of announced absences but must, of course, do the required work.

2. Writing assignments (35%). At the end of each of the three units you will complete a multiple-draft writing assignment on a topic relevant to the unit.
3. Oral performance (15%). At the end of each of the three units you will also participate in a talk show in which you will take on a role of a figure featured in our discussions and argue her/his position with classmates.
4. Final project (25%). Beginning around mid-term, students will select a contemporary issue in the German-speaking world, gather primary texts on the topic, conduct an analysis of the discourse, write a significant report of the analysis, and then present the findings in a formal presentation during the final exam period on Tuesday, December 15, from 3:00 to 5:30pm.

Academic Honor:

The Honor Code of Emory College is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on quizzes and exams, to plagiarize, to deviate from the instructor's instructions about collaboration on work that is submitted for grades, to give false information to a faculty member, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. You agree that the instructor is entitled to move you to another seat during examinations, without explanation. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the honor council.

The central issue is that any work submitted to an instructor for evaluation should be one's own. Within the German Studies Department assistance is possible and even encouraged in two limited situations: online or in person. Online resources can be used for grammatical explanations (e.g., verb conjugations) or the translation of words, expressions, and phrases.

However, use of online resources to translate entire sentences or paragraphs is not permitted. Seeking assistance in person should be limited to receiving suggestions, reviewing certain topics, and addressing revisions, but the ultimate production of the work to be turned in will rest with you.

- The Honor Code, a list of offenses and the Honor Council process may be found; http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor_code.html

SEMESTERÜBERBLICK

1. Einführung (weeks 1- 4)
2. Die Flüchtlingskrise (weeks 5 - 8)
3. Die Finanzkrise in Griechenland (weeks 9 – 11)
4. Die Energiewende (weeks 12 – 14)