Competing political party discourses on sovereignty and constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Narratives and Practices in Sovereignty in Area Studies: Merging Multi-Disciplinary Findings under a Unified Approach
Preparatory Workshop

Nelly Gérard, Friday 18 November

Competing political party discourses on sovereignty and constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Context, objectives, data

- The UK's peculiar constitutional tradition: flexibility, ambiguity and multiple interpretations

- How Brexit reignited the debate around sovereignty in the UK: Have discourses on sovereignty constitutional change evolved and how? + power relations

- Data:

    - Political parties as mediating the political « supply »

    - Labour, Conservatives, SNP, LibDem, Greens

    - Manifestos 2021 and policy documents

Assessing the evolution of competing discourses on constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Theory and methods (I)

- Sovereignty as a 'normative and essentially challengeable concept' (Besson 2003) — Sovereignty as the **product of meaning-making processes**

- The importance of language in the *doing* of politics and the **interpretive turn** (>< positivism)

- **Critical Discourse Studies**:

  - Transdisciplinary and eclectic approach to discourse (in context)

  - 'Analysing hidden, opaque and visible structures of dominance, discrimination, power and control **as manifested in language**' (Wodak R. and Meyer M. 2016)

  - 'Make visible through analysis, and to criticize, connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (**ideologies, power relations**) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts, and whose effectiveness depends upon this opacity' (Fairclough, N., 2010)

Assessing the evolution of competing discourses on constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Theory and methods (II)

- **Critical** Discourse **Studies**:

  - Critical dimension de-emphasized

  - Politics = power and resistance

  - Discourses = acts of social power

  → **Analysis of a concept as central for politics as that of sovereignty must include discursive considerations**
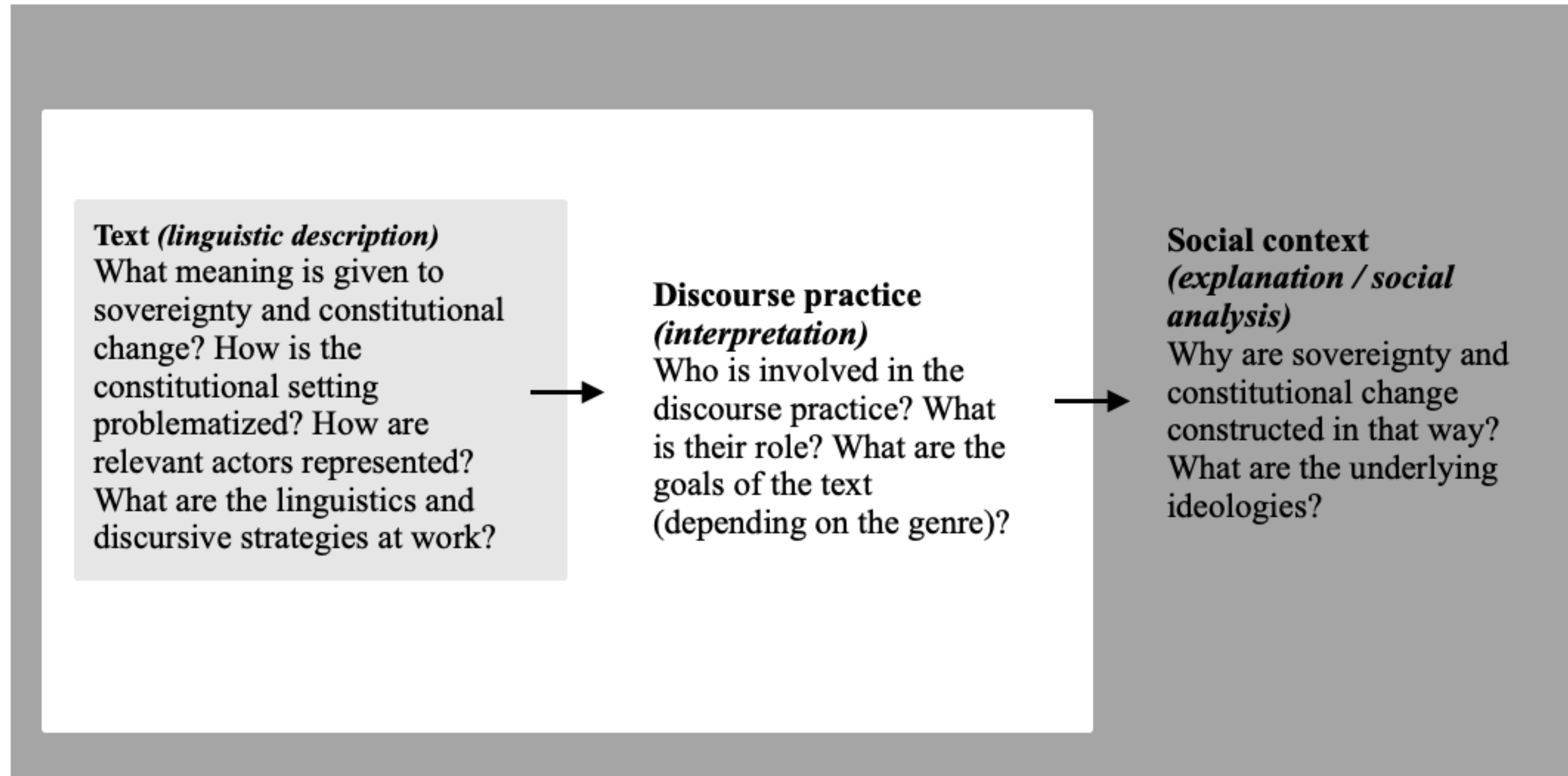
Assessing the evolution of competing discourses on constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Theory and methods (III)

- Analytical framework: 3D concept of discourse (Fairclough 2010)

  - Language text, spoken or written (micro-level) *description;*

  - Discourse practice (meso-level) *interpretation*;

  - Sociocultural practice (larger social context at the macro-level) *explanation.*

Assessing the evolution of competing discourses on constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Theory and methods (IV): 3D approach (adapted from Fairclough 2010: 133)

Text *(linguistic description)*
What meaning is given to sovereignty and constitutional change? How is the constitutional setting problematized? How are relevant actors represented? What are the linguistics and discursive strategies at work?

Discourse practice *(interpretation)*
Who is involved in the discourse practice? What is their role? What are the goals of the text (depending on the genre)?

Social context *(explanation / social analysis)*
Why are sovereignty and constitutional change constructed in that way? What are the underlying ideologies?

Assessing the evolution of competing discourses on constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Theory and methods (V)

- Textual analysis based on the tools of Discourse Historical Analysis (Reisigl and Wodak 2016)

Discursive strategies	Objectives of the discursive strategies		
Nomination - Verbs or nouns to describe processes, actions, etc.; - Metaphors, metonymies, synecdoches; - Categorization, proper nouns, membership attribution, etc.	Discursive construction of sovereignty, statehood, constitutional status, constitutional change and related processes, actors, objects, events and actions	Perspectivization - Reported or direct speech; - Quotation marks; - Metaphors.	Giving the speaker's or another actor's point of view on sovereignty and constitutional change and expressing distance or proximity (e.g. to criticize or praise said point of view)
Predication - Adjectives; - Collocations; - Predicates (what is affirmed or denied); - Comparisons, metaphors, etc.; - Allusions, stereotypes, etc.;	Evaluation (negative or positive) of items construed and identified through the nomination strategies	Intensification/mitigation - Diminutives or augmentatives; - Hyperboles or litotes; - Indirect speech acts (using a ? instead of an assertion to mitigate the utterance), etc.;	Change the intensity of one or more utterances of their discourse on sovereignty and constitutional change, thereby changing the deictic position of the speaker (perspectivization)
Argumentation - topoi (themes)	Justification, by the author of the text, of the truth or 'normative rightness' of their discourse on sovereignty and constitutional change	Ideological discourse structures - Polarization between the in-group (positive description of norms, values, activities, interests) and the out-group (negative description of norms, values, activities, interests); - Use of WE versus THEM;	Local (textual) expression of underlying ideologies

Competing political party discourses on sovereignty and constitutional change in post-Brexit Scotland

Thanks!

Nelly Gérard, Friday 18 November