Discourse Analysis Reconsidered: A Study of Its Own Discursive Practices

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Abstract

This study reconsiders Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by approaching it not only as a method of analysis but also as a form of discourse shaped by the same institutional and ideological forces it seeks to examine. While CDA is widely used to uncover power relations embedded in language, this paper argues that its analytical practices are themselves embedded within particular academic traditions and shared assumptions. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Fairclough, and Belsey, the study combines theoretical reflection with an examination of recent CDA research (2023–2025) to identify recurring patterns in language use, citation practices, and methodological choices. These patterns suggest that CDA operates within a relatively coherent disciplinary framework that both enables critique and places limits on it. Rather than dismissing CDA, the paper calls for a more self-reflexive understanding of its role within academic discourse. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions about neutrality, ideology, and the conditions under which critique can meaningfully take place.

Keywords: culture, discourse analysis, linguistic signs, Foucault, Fairclough, Belsey

1. Introduction

One of the central aims of discourse analysis has been to examine how language participates in shaping ideology and sustaining relations of power. Within this broad field, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has positioned itself as a particularly powerful approach, one that seeks not only to describe discourse but also to challenge the structures that underpin it (Van Dijk, 1993). However, this critical ambition is not unique to CDA. Earlier intellectual traditions, such as Marxism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction, have similarly sought to expose hidden assumptions and question dominant systems of knowledge. Over time, many of these approaches have themselves become part of established academic practice, raising an important question: can critique remain fully outside the systems it seeks to challenge?

This paper takes that question seriously by turning the analytical lens toward CDA itself. Rather than treating it solely as a neutral or external method, the study approaches CDA as a form of discourse that is shaped by the academic environments in which it is produced. Like other scholarly practices, it relies on shared terminology, familiar theoretical references, and recognizable methodological patterns (Mansour, Mansur, Banat, & Banat, 2024). These features help create a sense of coherence within the field, but they also point to the ways in which CDA is embedded within a particular disciplinary culture (Becher, 1989; Becher & Trowler, 2001).

Seen from this perspective, a tension emerges. On the one hand, CDA seeks to expose ideology and challenge power. On the other hand, it operates through conventions and frameworks that are themselves part of institutional structures. This does not invalidate the work of discourse analysts, but it does suggest that critique is never entirely separate from the conditions in which it is produced. In other words, CDA may both enable critical insight and participate at least in part in the reproduction of the very structures it examines.

The aim of this study is not to reject CDA, but to explore this tension more carefully. By examining a selection of recent studies, it looks at how recurring patterns in language, citation, and methods contribute to shaping the field. In doing so, the paper proposes a way of understanding CDA as both a critical practice and an institutional discourse, one that requires ongoing reflection on its own assumptions and limits.

2. Literature Review

2.1 CDA and the Reproduction of Ideology

Several studies have explored the role of discourse in constructing reality. Michel Foucault's genealogical work (1970, 1977) illustrates the strategies and techniques adopted by institutions to construct, regulate, and maintain definitions of madness, criminality, and sexuality. Foucault epistemologically deconstructs knowledge and reveals how institutions exploit ideas, techniques, and strategies to maintain specific ideas and systems. Crucially, institutions utilize discourse to classify, normalize, govern, and reproduce power. Discourse creates and circulates power and meaning as well as generates subjectivity. Those who control the discourse select, organize, and distribute what is regarded as true and normal. Additionally, they decide how and what to discuss and study. However, this discourse can also be challenged, exposed, or undermined.

Foucault's insights, critical as they may seem, have become doctrinal within academic discourse analysis. Once radical critiques, they now often serve as a legitimating ritual, part of a shared academic code that signals membership within the discourse analysis community or "tribe." In this sense, foundational texts operate as tribal markers—shared references that bind the community together but also limit their horizons.

2.2 Tribalism in Academic Disciplines

The academic tribe metaphor provides a useful lens for understanding CDA development. Becher (1989) and Becher and Trowler (2001) conceptualize academic disciplines as tribes with distinctive values, rhetorical practices, and symbolic boundaries. Becher also demonstrates how academic norms, rituals, and values emanate from prestigious institutions, such as Yale and Harvard, and diffuse downward into less prestigious ones. This diffusion profoundly influences their epistemic and methodological orientations; it helps shape the structure of scientific development across the global academic landscape.

Hyland (2000) extends this view to academic writing, showing how genres such as abstracts and book reviews are deeply conventionalized, serving to communicate knowledge and signal disciplinary allegiance. Following Foucault, Hyland (2000) examines institutional, particularly academic, discourse as a form of disciplinary interaction. He reveals how research abstracts, articles, textbooks, and book reviews display shared characteristics. These traits demonstrate that knowledge production is a highly structured and conventional practice where researchers must display their knowledge of conventions and acknowledge their tribal affiliation. Hyland argues that, in pursuit of individual and professional goals, writers seek the approval of other members of the discipline by projecting a "shared professional context" (1). Simply put, researchers can be regarded as members of a local community who adhere to its values, norms, and practices.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1970/1990) in Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture reveal how education, culture, and social structure are interrelated. In particular, they regard education as a means of academic acculturation, a mechanism of ideological reproduction and a way to legitimize specific linguistic and cultural practices, thus perpetuating social hierarchies.

Schiffrin et al. (2004) point to the theoretical breadth and ambivalence, as well as to the epistemological tensions within the field of discourse studies, noting that "the terms 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' have different meanings for scholars in different fields." They also indicate the abundance of the definitions of discourse (1). Such a reflection underscores the difficulty of settling on a singular and stable meaning. Furthermore, Wodak confirms this, stating that the term "discourse" has multiple definitions that seem to contradict or exclude one another (12). This ambiguity has enabled scholars to adapt the concept to diverse contexts and methodologies. This array of definitions also reflects the centrality of discourse in understanding how power, ideology, and knowledge are produced, circulated, and contested—a theme foundational to the works of Foucault, Bourdieu, Becher, Hyland, Fairclough, Gee, and others reviewed in this section.

Similarly, Danielle E. Burns (2020), in Thinking and Acting, highlights the role of social media platforms and institutions such as universities in shaping behavior through implicit norms rather than explicit commands. These norms mold members, especially graduates, into carriers of societal expectations and cultural capital with institutional influence often masquerading as neutrality (Alsharif et al., 2025), while actually carrying formative ideological weight.

Norman Fairclough's Language and Power (1989; 2001), along with his subsequent contributions to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), demonstrates the role language plays in serving institutional interests, shaping ideology, and reinforcing identity. His three-dimensional model of analysis—text, discursive practice, and social practice—has become a canonical framework, widely adopted across a broad spectrum of CDA studies. Fairclough's analysis, particularly within educational contexts, has foregrounded how institutional language sustains structures of domination and legitimizes power asymmetries. His views on CDA continue to be employed in contemporary analyses of political rhetoric, classroom interactions, and digital educational platforms. However, this paper critiques CDA for its insufficient reflection on its own epistemological and ideological foundations. The practice often presumes that its methodological stance is inherently oppositional to the systems of power it scrutinizes. Such a position, as this paper contends, reproduces a self-legitimizing disciplinary identity instead of critically interrogating it and functions as a form of academic gatekeeping.

For James Paul Gee (1999), "Discourses" (with a capital D) are socially situated ways of being that integrate language, belief systems, and practices. Although Gee's model extends the analytical toolkit of discourse studies, it also reinforces a disciplinary ethos that positions discourse analysts as uniquely qualified to interpret semiotic structures. Again, this epistemological positioning risks functioning

as a form of academic gatekeeping and consolidating authority within a narrow band of accepted critical methodologies.

2.3 CDA Has Been Mobilized to Interrogate Academic Discourse Itself

Adopting the CDA perspective, Benesch (2001) challenges the supposed neutrality of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), suggesting that it reinforces disciplinary boundaries and ideological assumptions. Similarly, Lillis and Scott (2015) show how academic writing functions as a gatekeeping mechanism that reproduces global hierarchies tied to access, identity, and linguistic imperialism, marginalizing those who do not conform to dominant linguistic or epistemological norms. Academic writing reinforces institutional norms and power structures, rather than challenging them. In their view, writing is not a neutral skill but a socially situated practice that reflects and perpetuates specific ideologies and power relations within academic institutions. Their work drives home the importance of a more critical approach to understanding academic writing that considers the broader social and ideological contexts in which it operates.

More recent contributions demonstrate the field's adaptability and expansion into new domains and technologies such as digital and geopolitical contexts: Kirasur and Jhaver (2024) use CDA to uncover caste-based discrimination on social media platforms, while Dezhboro et al. (2024) employ a temporal fusion framework to trace discourse fragmentation online. Political applications remain robust, evidenced by Jesudas and Mohammed's (2025) analysis of the 2024 U.S. presidential debates, which employs Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach, and Al-minawi's (2024) integrated CDA and Conceptual Metaphor Theory to analyze Hamas' wartime ideological narratives in discourse.

At the methodological level, refinements such as A Signaled Graph Theory of Discourse Relations and Organization (Zeldes et al., 2024), which offers tools for annotation, search, visualization, and parsing, are aimed at computational discourse analysis. The study examines algorithmically mediated discourse, a discursive practice through which the field itself sustains a cohesive scholarly identity (Al-Suhaimi, 2022).

These studies reveal how the field continuously produces and circulates discursive codes. Consequently, they illuminate a central paradox: while discourse analysis seeks to uncover the ideological operations of language, it simultaneously constructs and maintains ideological boundaries. The tribalism of academic disciplines (Becher & Trowler), the moral and formative functions of institutions (Burns), and the reproduction of symbolic power (Bourdieu) converge in the field's practices. Discourse analysts reflect not only the power structures they study but also the epistemic and institutional structures they inhabit. However, such reflexivity, essential as it may seem, has become a mechanical process incapable of resisting what it critiques as a "control structure" that legitimizes certain ways of knowing and expressing knowledge while marginalizing others.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, meta-discursive approach that turns the analytical lens toward Critical Discourse Analysis itself. Rather than applying CDA to external texts, the study examines how CDA operates as a scholarly practice within contemporary research. The aim is to explore how the field constructs its own language, assumptions, and analytical conventions.

To ground the discussion in actual scholarly practice, the study draws on a corpus of 15 peer-reviewed articles published between 2023 and 2025 in journals related to discourse studies, applied linguistics, and critical language research. The selection was purposive rather than random. It was guided by the intention to capture recent and representative work that explicitly identifies itself as using Critical Discourse Analysis.

Three criteria shaped the selection. First, each article clearly adopts CDA as its main analytical framework. Second, the studies engage with widely recognized theorists in the field, such as Foucault, Fairclough, Gee, Wodak, or Hyland. Third, the articles are published in established international journals, thereby ensuring academic credibility and visibility within the discipline.

Although the number of articles is limited, the sample is not intended to be statistically representative. Instead, it is designed to reflect recurring tendencies within contemporary CDA research. The focus is therefore on identifying shared patterns rather than measuring frequency in a quantitative sense. This approach is consistent with the exploratory and interpretive nature of the study.

4. Results

4.1 Recurring Lexical and Conceptual Patterns

An examination of the selected studies reveals a noticeable convergence in the conceptual vocabulary employed across contemporary CDA research. Terms such as ideology, power, hegemony, positioning, and discursive construction appear consistently across different topics and contexts.

This pattern becomes clearer when we look at how authors formulate their claims. For example, Rubing and Sandaran (2023, p. 970) describe media discourse as "a site where ideology is reproduced and normalized through linguistic choices." In a similar vein, Wu and Zhang (2023, p. 130) argue that language is "constitutive of social reality rather than reflective of it." These formulations are not isolated observations. They reflect a shared understanding of discourse as an active force in shaping social meaning.

A comparable tendency appears in studies that examine identity and institutional practice. Jiang and Akbaş (2024), for instance, discuss meta-discourse as a means through which writers construct disciplinary identity and align themselves with their academic communities. In doing so, they rely on a familiar set of concepts that connect language use with social positioning and authority.

What emerges from these examples is not simply repetition, but a recognizable pattern of conceptual framing. Different researchers,

working on different materials, tend to describe discourse in similar terms and rely on a relatively stable set of assumptions about the relationship between language, power, and social reality. This convergence suggests that CDA operates within a shared conceptual horizon that shapes how research questions are framed and how findings are interpreted.

4.2 Citation Patterns and Canonical Anchoring

The analysis also demonstrates a strong reliance on foundational figures within discourse studies. Across the selected corpus, authors frequently reference Michel Foucault, Norman Fairclough, and Ken Hyland as theoretical anchors. For instance, Jiang and Akbaş (2024) explicitly position their work within Hyland's framework of metadiscourse, while Wu and Zhang (2023) apply Fairclough's three-dimensional model to structure their analysis.

Such citation practices do more than acknowledge intellectual influence; they situate contemporary studies within a recognized theoretical lineage. This recurring engagement with canonical figures contributes to the consolidation of a shared intellectual tradition and reinforces the coherence of the field.

4.3 Methodological Convergence

A further pattern emerges at the methodological level. The majority of the reviewed articles adopt qualitative interpretive approaches, often employing variations of Fairclough's three-dimensional model or related frameworks. Authors frequently describe discourse as embedded within "text, discursive practice, and social practice," and emphasize the analysis of linguistic features alongside broader socio-political contexts.

For example, Waymouth and Weary (2025) analyze teachers' discourse by linking textual choices to institutional ideologies, while Jesudas and Mohammed (2025) use Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach to examine political rhetoric. Although the topics vary, from education to digital discourse to political debate, the analytical structure remains strikingly similar. This methodological alignment reflects a shared understanding of what constitutes legitimate critical inquiry within the field.

4.4 Genre Conventions and Institutional Alignment

The reviewed articles also exhibit common structural and rhetorical features. All conform to established academic genre conventions: structured abstracts, literature reviews grounded in canonical scholarship, qualitative methodology sections, and conclusions emphasizing ideological implications. The language is characterized by nominalization, abstract nouns, hedging devices, and references to "social construction," "discursive positioning," and "power relations."

Institutionally, most authors are affiliated with departments of applied linguistics, education, or communication studies, fields in which discourse analysis has become a central methodological orientation. This institutional clustering further reinforces the shared academic identity reflected in the lexical, methodological, and citation patterns described above.

The patterns discussed above are summarized in Table 1, which brings together the main dimensions observed across the selected studies. The table does not aim to quantify these features, but rather to present them in a structured way that highlights their recurrence across different contexts. As shown, similarities can be traced at the level of vocabulary, citation practices, methodological choices, and institutional positioning, suggesting a degree of coherence in how CDA research is conducted and presented.

Table 1. Summary of Observed Patterns in Contemporary CDA Scholarship

Dimension	**Observed Pattern**	**Illustrative Sources**
Lexical Patterns	Recurrent use of "ideology," "power," "discursive construction"	Rubing & Sandaran (2023); Wu & Zhang (2023)
Citation Practices	Frequent reliance on Foucault, Fairclough, Hyland	Jiang & Akbaş (2024); Wu & Zhang (2023)
Methodology	Qualitative approaches; Fairclough's 3D model	Waymouth & Weary (2025); Jesudas & Mohammed (2025)
Genre Structure	Standardized academic structure and rhetorical style	Sample corpus (2023–2025)
Institutional Context	Predominantly applied linguistics / education departments	Sample corpus

As Table 1 indicates, these dimensions do not appear in isolation. Instead, they tend to reinforce one another. The recurrence of shared terminology is often accompanied by reliance on similar theoretical references and methodological frameworks, which together contribute to shaping a recognizable disciplinary identity.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that contemporary CDA research operates within a recognizable intellectual and institutional framework. The convergence in vocabulary, citation networks, methodological choices, and genre conventions reflects not merely individual scholarly preferences but a broader disciplinary coherence. Recognizing this coherence does not invalidate the critical contributions of CDA; rather, it highlights the extent to which critical inquiry itself is shaped by shared academic traditions and institutional contexts.

The patterns identified above are not entirely exclusive to Critical Discourse Analysis. Similar tendencies can be observed across other areas in the humanities and social sciences, where scholars often rely on shared theoretical frameworks, specialized terminology, and established methodological conventions. In this sense, the convergence noted in the present analysis should not be understood as unique to CDA alone.

However, what distinguishes CDA is the particular way in which these patterns are tied to its critical orientation. The field explicitly positions itself as a form of ideological critique, concerned with uncovering relations of power and challenging dominant discourses. As a result, the recurrence of specific concepts such as ideology, power, and discursive construction is not merely a feature of academic writing in general but part of a more defined analytical agenda.

In other words, while similar forms of coherence may exist in other disciplines, in CDA they are closely linked to a shared understanding of what it means to conduct critical analysis. This gives the field a relatively stable conceptual and methodological identity, even as it continues to expand into new contexts and areas of study. Recognizing this point allows for a more balanced interpretation of the findings, one that acknowledges both the common features of academic practice and the particular characteristics of CDA as a critical tradition.

Taken together, these observations suggest that contemporary CDA research tends to operate within a set of shared conceptual and methodological conventions. The repetition of certain terms, the reliance on similar theoretical references, and the use of comparable analytical frameworks point to a degree of coherence within the field. At the same time, these findings should be understood cautiously. They do not imply uniformity across all CDA research, nor do they reduce the diversity of topics and approaches found in the field. Rather, they indicate that, despite this diversity, many studies draw on a common set of assumptions about the relationship between language, power, and social reality.

From this perspective, the results do not seek to challenge the value of CDA as an analytical approach. Instead, they highlight how its critical orientation is expressed through recurring patterns that shape how research is conducted and presented. Recognizing these patterns provides a basis for a more reflective engagement with the field, one that considers not only what CDA reveals about discourse, but also how it constructs its own analytical framework.

5. Discussion

5.1 Critical Analysis of Discourse Analysis

A closer examination of discourse analysis as a scholarly practice suggests that it shares several features with earlier critical traditions such as Marxism, poststructuralism, and postcolonial theory (Jaradat, 2022). These traditions, despite their differences, have often relied on similar forms of argumentation, recurring conceptual vocabularies, and established modes of critique in order to examine relations of power and ideology. In this respect, discourse analysis does not stand entirely apart from these approaches but can be seen as part of a broader intellectual movement that seeks to interpret and question systems of meaning.

At the same time, the findings of this study indicate that discourse analysis operates through a recognizable set of conventions. These include shared terminology, recurring citation patterns, and widely adopted methodological frameworks. Such features contribute to the formation of a coherent academic practice, one that allows scholars to communicate effectively within the field. However, they also suggest that discourse analysis is shaped by the institutional and intellectual environments in which it develops.

This does not mean that discourse analysis should be dismissed or reduced to a closed system. Rather, it points to a tension that lies at the heart of critical inquiry. On the one hand, discourse analysis seeks to reveal how language constructs social reality and sustains power relations. On the other hand, it relies on its own conceptual tools and conventions, which are themselves part of academic discourse. Recognizing this tension does not weaken the field but instead opens the possibility for a more reflective and self-aware form of critique.

5.2 Academic Discourse, as a Form of Disciplinary Interaction

Discourse analysts display methodological similarities in their studies. They overwhelmingly employ qualitative methodologies in their interpretations, including critical discourse, textual, and genre analyses. They often focus on the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse within institutional settings. For example, Waymouth and Weary (2024) regard teachers' discourse as a reflection of institutional ideologies in literacy education, while Swear regards language as constitutive; she critically examines identity formation through institutional texts (2024, pp. 301-305). These authors share the convictions that language does not reflect reality, that discourse is constitutive, that power is discursive, and that exposing these mechanisms is a fundamental, and legitimate, scholarly objective. This methodological uniformity among diverse authors reflects a shared academic understanding and binds the authors to a common scholarly culture.

Institutional affiliation, material infrastructure, and research context greatly influence scholarly identity and practice. The scholars under review are predominantly present within departments of applied linguistics, education, or communication. These departments have traditionally housed discourse analysis, indicating these scholars constitute an academic community. For instance, Jiang, Akbaş, and Hyland have all held academic positions within applied linguistics departments, while others like Wang and Waymouth are associated with education faculties where critical literacy and discourse studies are central. Universities, classrooms, and academic texts all align scholars with the institutional concerns of their field. Affiliations, furthermore, play a key role in determining the research questions scholars are encouraged to ask, the methodologies they are trained to employ, and the theoretical frameworks they are expected to cite. Research centers, doctoral programs, and funded projects are all material infrastructures that sustain the field of discourse analysis.

Scholarly mechanisms, such as elite journals, conferences, and collaborative networks, are utilized for reproducing academic capital and tribal belonging.

5.3 Key Concepts in Discourse Analysis

Furthermore, discourse analysts employ similar formal structures and linguistic features in their texts. All the reviewed articles which can be taken as representatives of almost all the articles in discourse analysis conform to the genre conventions of academic writing in applied linguistics or critical discourse studies; they include abstracts that abide by the field's norms, literature reviews which are grounded in established scholarship and literature, methods sections that describe qualitative approaches, detailed textual analyses, and conclusions that emphasize the ideological implications of findings. In addition, all reviewed articles exhibit common terminology, nominalization, hedging, and abstract noun constructions; these are stylistic features of the language of humanities and social sciences scholarship. These conventions are not neutral or universal; they are human constructs functioning as boundary markers. They demarcate the field's stylistic and rhetorical norms and solidify the shared academic identity which they indicate. Evidently, the authors are insiders who know how to "speak" the language of their community. They engage in dialogic intertextuality through a process that goes beyond simple citation. Such a process entails the uptake, reinterpretation, or contestation of existing theoretical and empirical claims. For instance, Jiang and Zhang (2024) perform a bibliometric analysis of the field of academic discourse studies. They chart how key themes such as disciplinarity, genre, and stance have evolved. Thereby, they situate their study within a meta-theoretical dialogue about the field itself. Similarly, Jiang and Akbaş (2024) discuss how disciplinary identities are constructed through authorial self-mentions, directly engaging with Hyland's earlier work on stance and identity. These kinds of intertextual exchanges demonstrate not only familiarity with the field's core issues but active participation in shaping its current conversations. These intertextual engagements illustrate what Bakhtin (1981) termed dialogism: the idea that all texts are inherently relational and meaning is co-constructed across time and interlocutors; it signifies more than intellectual familiarity; it is a hallmark of membership in a robust and self-sustaining academic community.

These six dimensions, discourse lexicon, citation practices and inter-referentiality, methodology, genre conventions, intertextuality, and their institutional affiliations, illustrate that the reviewed study authors form a cohesive academic "tribe" and knowledge community with shared assumptions, values, language, and practices. Recognizing the reflexivity in discourse analysis requires analysts to be aware of how their scholarly practices may reproduce the very ideological structures they seek to critique. Accordingly, analyzing discourse also involves an analysis of the analysts, a meta-discursive endeavor that implicates the observer as the object of observation.

As illustrated above, discourse analysis, once scrutinized through its own theoretical tools, can function like other former and current academic movements. Disguised as objectivity, analytical neutrality and scholarly detachment, it constructs narratives about other descriptions and interprets them through alternative signs. Foucault's (1970, 1977) genealogical critique reveals how institutions produce truth through discursive regimes that normalize particular versions of reality while marginalizing others. Similarly, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) reveal how educational institutions utilize discursive mechanisms to legitimize dominant cultural and linguistic practices and reproduce social hierarchies. Discourse analysis, therefore, evolves into a method and a form of institutional storytelling, revealing how language mediates our understanding of the world. Even when scholars such as Fowler (1991) and McCarthy (1991/1994) expose the artificiality of ideological categories and interrogate the linguistic constitution of society and social relations, they unwittingly establish new ones.

Despite the ambitious critical endeavors, this study contends that discourse analysis itself constitutes a modern myth, another narrative that, like its theoretical predecessors, derives its power and legitimacy from its institutional entrenchment. As in all academic disciplines, discourse scholars operate as tribes and reproduce their unique value systems, lexicons, and rhetorical rituals. Discourse analysis functions as a self-referential paradigm, legitimized through the proliferation of books, peer-reviewed journals, conferences, and postgraduate training. Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, and Bakhtin, whose insights were once individual interventions, have been elevated to the status of intellectual archetypes, their works embedded in curricular canons and cited as foundational within a wide array of disciplines. This transformation from a critical standpoint to institutional orthodoxy reflects what Hyland (2000) identified as professional performance: scholars perform their membership within disciplinary communities by mastering and reproducing their rhetorical codes. Likewise, Fairclough's (1989, 2001) widely adopted framework for CDA reveals how critique itself can become canonized, consequently risking the reproduction of its own ideological closure. Even Gee's (1999) notion of "Discourses," meant to interrogate the overlap of language and identity, has arguably become a form of academic gatekeeping that positions discourse analysts as uniquely authorized interpreters of social meaning.

Accordingly, discourse analysis can be framed not merely as a method of ideological critique but also as a discursively constructed regime, an epistemological narrative that has been mythologized and institutionalized through academic practices. It has become, in effect, an accepted "truth" within many academic cultures, gaining legitimacy not solely through empirical validation or conceptual rigor, but through the politics of circulation. Through conference panels, editorial policies, funding structures, and pedagogical reproduction, discourse analysis has transitioned from a theoretical tool to a paradigmatic system of thought. Within this context, discourse analysis must itself be critically interrogated, not only for the discourses it seeks to deconstruct but also for the discursive logic it unconsciously sustains.

Similar to the fiction readers, discourse analysis experts often suspend critical disbelief regarding the assumptions underpinning the practices they participate in. Instead of revealing the epistemological instabilities and contradictions inherent in practice, this suspension

obscures them. Furthermore, such conceptual instability reflects broader challenges in grasping the complex relationships between language, analytical practice, and the structures of lived experiences. Passive acceptance of methodological conventions as natural or self-evident can impede a deeper critical reflection, blinding researchers to contradictions within their frameworks and preventing them from recognizing the ideological foundations of their tools. For instance, the fluctuating definition of the term 'discourse' and related language concepts reflects the inability to comprehend how language relates to practice and totality of existence. Such passive acceptance of a practice as natural can obscure the broader system and its ideological underpinnings that individuals or groups are part of.

5.4 Discourse Analysts Are Identified by Signs or Titles

Furthermore, the textual toil of critics, thinkers, intellectuals, feminists, Marxists, philosophers, theorists, cultural materialists, historians, and linguists enable them to negotiate, and challenge established norms in the practice of discourse analysis and adopt more metacritical, even iconoclastic, approaches. Discourse analysts are recognized by the signs or titles they carry, provided they employ the conventions of discourse analysis in their narratives. On the contrary, Foucault, Barthes, Williams, and Derrida are viewed as philosophers, critics, university professors, poststructuralists, thinkers, theorists, salaried employees, discourse analysts, storytellers, and mythmakers, indicating these signs may not have obvious bounds outside language or beliefs.

It is important to recognize that many of the concepts used in discourse analysis, including the notion of discourse itself, are not fixed in meaning but remain open to interpretation. Rather than referring to stable and clearly bounded entities, these concepts often function within evolving theoretical frameworks that shape how they are understood and applied. As a result, interpretations in discourse analysis tend to build on earlier interpretations, forming an ongoing chain of scholarly engagement.

From this perspective, discourse analysis can be seen as a practice that produces successive readings of texts rather than arriving at a single and definitive account of reality. Scholars working within this field draw on existing concepts, refining them, and apply them to new contexts. This process does not detach analysis from reality, but it does suggest that what is presented as knowledge is always mediated through particular conceptual and linguistic choices.

A related insight can be found in Foucault's discussion of Don Quixote, where meaning is presented as emerging from relations between texts rather than direct access to an external reality. In this sense, interpretation becomes a process of tracing connections within language itself rather than uncovering a stable truth that exists independently of it (Foucault, 1970, pp. 46 to 47). This perspective helps explain why discourse analysis often involves engaging with existing interpretations and reworking them in new ways.

These observations raise important questions about how discourse analysis positions itself in relation to the reality it seeks to examine. While the field aims to uncover ideological structures and forms of social influence, it also relies on interpretive frameworks that shape how such structures are identified and described. This does not invalidate its findings, but it suggests that analysis is always carried out within particular conceptual boundaries.

Scholars have long noted that key terms such as discourse are defined in multiple and sometimes conflicting ways across disciplines. As Schiffrin and her colleagues observe, definitions of discourse are so numerous that many studies begin by reviewing them. Wodak similarly points out that the term carries a range of meanings that may not always align. This variability is not unique to discourse analysis. Concepts such as postcolonialism, realism, and postmodernism have also been described as difficult to define and open to competing interpretations.

Rather than treating this instability as a weakness specific to discourse analysis, it may be more appropriate to see it as a broader feature of theoretical language in the humanities. These concepts function less as fixed labels and more as flexible tools that are adapted to different analytical purposes. Their meaning emerges through use, rather than existing independently of it.

From this perspective, knowledge can be understood as something constructed through situated academic practices rather than as a direct reflection of an independent reality. As Rorty suggests, what we recognize as knowledge often takes the form of narratives shaped by prevailing intellectual and cultural assumptions. Similarly, scientific and academic discourse does not simply mirror the world but organizes and represents it through particular conceptual frameworks, a point also echoed in Hawking's observation that our understanding of reality is always mediated by theory.

This does not mean that all interpretations are equally valid or that analysis lacks value. Rather, it highlights the role of academic conventions in shaping what counts as acceptable knowledge. Within institutional contexts, researchers are expected to follow established forms of reasoning, use recognized terminology, and engage with existing scholarship. These expectations make scholarly communication possible, but they also influence how knowledge is produced and evaluated.

As Hyland observes, academic writing is not simply a neutral presentation of ideas, but a form of communication shaped by disciplinary norms and expectations. Scholars write with an awareness of their audience and position in their work within ongoing conversations. In this sense, knowledge is not only discovered but also negotiated within specific academic communities.

Within this framework, the instability of key concepts is often acknowledged but rarely treated as a central problem. Instead, academic practice tends to prioritize coherence, methodological clarity, and rhetorical persuasiveness. Questioning the foundations of widely used concepts can therefore be challenging, as it may place the researcher outside accepted modes of inquiry. As a result, the academic system often reproduces its own assumptions while maintaining the appearance of critical engagement.

5.5 Language: A Dynamic Medium

All concepts, terms, words, and notions used in the academy are not objective realities; rather, they are signs created by other signs, formulated by intellectuals, thinkers, critics, philosophers, discourse analysts, New Historicists, Marxists, etc., all building on one another. However, none of these signs have clear and singular definitions. The supplementary signs of analysts, rather than clarifying the problems resulting from the unending proliferation of signs, often add confusion and hinder understanding. Furthermore, this confusion could become a subject of investigation in a process that continues interminably. I contend that analyses conducted under such circumstances should be dispensed because analysts have lost all touch with reality and have begun to navigate a world of ideas and signs.

Having clarified the relationship between discourse analysis and the quest for truth, this analysis reports how discourse, including discursive inquiry can shape, construct, and sometimes obscure our understanding of the world (knowledge, academy, science, politics, etc.). I emphasize that this endless play is, ironically, crucial in understanding the dynamics of knowledge production. Scrutinizing the interplay between discourse and truth, we can gain insight into how intellectual frameworks influence our perceptions of reality. Importantly, this is not because the ideas reflect an objective truth; instead, the accepted methodologies align with common perceptions of what is considered true.

The passages quoted above offer valuable insights into academic practice. Even though basic concepts lack meaning or at least have an unstable meaning, researchers and academics attribute significance to this instability by including or referring to it in their arguments. Instead of examining the impact, implications, and consequences of this instability, researchers and discourse analysts appear to merely negotiate and engage in persuasive dialogue with their peers, inadvertently reinforcing the existing system instead of radically challenging it. This is partly the result of the impact of the established archive of texts and deep-rooted conventions on discourse analysts, which are rarely properly examined or adequately challenged.

Ironically, the inherently constitutive nature of language, reinforced by the dominant academic archive and conventions, ensnares even those who seek to analyze it critically. Researchers in the present are guided by communal practices and the problems of the disciplinary group to which they belong; they can never be free agents of inquiry, since the system itself prevents this by reducing inquiry to the practice of referring to past literature protected by the gatekeepers of the discipline (Kuhn, 1970; Foucault 1970, 1977). Academic papers, articles, researchers, conferences, books, and reviews are the means by which academics and researchers communicate and engage institutionally with one another. Membership of the academic community is often contingent on one's ability to conform to established conventions and languages.

To become a “discourse analyst” it is not sufficient to produce critical, even insightful, comments on ‘discourse,’ one needs to speak and write in accordance with the accepted norms of the field. In other words, one must walk and talk. However, this adherence raises questions about the extent to which genuine critical inquiries can thrive within such constrictive frameworks. Therefore, the argument presented in this study underscores the need for a more critical examination of academic practices and conventions that shape scholarly discourse.

Another significant shortcoming of discourse analysis is the manner in which it addresses its findings. Instead of attempting to mitigate and restrain the continual confusion of meaning and the explosive proliferation of signs to the point of obfuscation, discourse analysis actively participates in and engenders this process. The expansion of discourse analysis has become so extensive that it bewilders anyone attempting to comprehensively grasp its essence.

Discourse analysis is a rhetorical practice, rather than a logical, grammatical, or mathematical one. Rather than fostering critical thinking and broadening perspectives, it often produces trainee practitioners with academic titles who can think only by relying on the texts authored by other discursively constructed idols, revered as the most prominent critics and scholars in practice, inadvertently turning the practitioners of discourse analysis into guardians of the discipline.

For example, instead of merely reiterating the rhetoric of a discourse analyst on a single sign by quoting someone stressing that discourse is difficult to define, then proceeding to other signs such as "poetry," "postcolonialism," "New Historicism," "Realism," "Feminism," etc. studying each of them separately and concluding that these terms are difficult to define, a more effective approach would be to generalize the common features among all these terms. The inability to define basic terms in any field of study should be expressed as a single proposition that acts as a guiding rule whenever approaching these terms. Therefore, I believe that the observations regarding the preceding terms should be articulated as follows:

Terms like discourse, realism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, New Historicism, and feminism present definitional challenges not due to their inherently complex and multifaceted nature but because of the instability of language itself.

Therefore, when Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition, observes that "scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse" (1984:3), this observation can be carried to apply to discourse analysis, along with all the practices it involves. Discourse analysis, a form of scientific knowledge, is a form of discourse. In other words, discourse analysis can be analyzed as a form of discourse. All attempts to grasp the truth of discourse analysis will ultimately fail, becoming another form of discourse to be analyzed (Al-Ghammaz et al., 2024). The Truth sought by discourse analysts is an illusion that cannot be obtained. Any truth accepted by discourse analysts is merely a myth, destined to be replaced by another once its contradictions are revealed. Commenting on the prestigious practice of trying to understand Hamlet, a literary play written by William Shakespeare and classified as a tragedy, Catherine Belsey observes:

Hamlet's irresolution, melancholy, relations with Ophelia, career at Wittenberg, and Oedipal tendencies have all been thoroughly investigated and documented in an attempt to find the truth of Hamlet's subjectivity: the reason he says what he says, acts, or fails to act as he does. The quest is endless because its object is not there (41).

Hamlet's endless quest for the truth, as discussed by Belsey, exemplifies the endless quest for the truth of the human self and identity (Al Ghammaz, Al Khatib, & AbuRas, 2022). The futility of this quest is expressed by Belsey as she remarks:

The quest for the truth of the self, our own, and others, endlessly fascinating, is precisely endless since the subject of liberal humanism is a chimera, an effect of language, not its origin. (54).

Here, I discuss Belsey's quest for the truth of Hamlet and Human identity as a synecdoche, one part isolated from standing for a whole that cannot be represented. Instead of examining linguistic signs in isolation–arguing, for instance, that the quest for the meaning of Hamlet, woman, American, humanism, liberalism, nationalism etc. is endless– one can express this in a single proposition: "the quest for the meaning of any linguistic sign is endless." This proposition applies to any kind of quest, including the search for meaning by so-called scholars, critics, thinkers, intellectuals, philosophers, New Historicists, historians, discourse analysts, and theorists, who can, without exception, be endlessly defined, as they are, without exception, engaged in endless processes of weaving myths under the guise of knowledge (Tawalbeh, Farghal, & Abu-Elrob, 2026).

It is indubitable that the perpetual process of deferring meaning can be represented differently by thinkers, professors, scholars, Marxists, formalists, structuralists, feminists, critics analysts, or whatever title a person involved in the practice producing a discourse on another discourse carries. Terry Eagleton, in an instance that can be taken as another synecdoche to represent the unstable process of identifying the referent of any sign, refers to the difficulty in identifying the meaning of Shakespeare:

The discourse of Shakespeare is unabashedly perverse, bending constantly away from some 'normative' referent, staggering and deferring the signified, luxuriating in its sumptuous transgression of strict semantic economy. It is this libidinal excess which humanism recuperates, gullibly, as 'human richness' or 'sensuous concretion,' blind to the mastery, violence and manipulation implicit in any such idiom (205).

Where the representations produced by discourse analysts to be compared to any other representations, it would be the representations produced by Elizabethan theatre as described by Greenblatt (1988) as he remarks that "the theater achieves its representations by gesture and language, that is, by signifiers that seem to leave the signifieds completely untouched" (7). Similarly, discourse analysts, philosophers, theorists, scholars, critics, Shakespeare, and Hamlet achieve their representations through language and signifiers that seem to leave the signified completely untouched. The truth of this observation is described in detail by Nietzsche.

Supposing that Truth is a woman-what, then? Is there not ground for suspecting that all philosophers, insofar as they have been dogmatists, have failed to understand women—that the terrible seriousness and clumsy importunity with which they have usually paid their addresses to Truth, have been unskilled and unseemly methods for winning a woman? Certainly, she has never allowed herself to win. (2).

Discourse analysts are new dogmatists who have failed to understand women's discourse. Their methods are "unskilled" and "clumsy." Members of academic tribes adhere to their own norms, conventions, values, dogmas, and strategies. Only those who display sufficient discourse competency are considered discourse analysts. Any discourse produced is constrained by the ideological perspectives of the discipline and the world. The system of hierarchical power relations controlled by the gatekeepers of the discipline guarantees that methodologies and assumptions regarding external reality, knowledge, and the nature of the world are maintained. This critique does not dismiss the analytical utility of discourse analysis but seeks to foreground its epistemological limits and institutional embeddedness.

6. Conclusion

This paper contends that discourse is not an objective decoding of texts, but, conversely, a continuation of infinite semiosis: a discourse produced on other discourses under the guise of analysis. In this practice, discourse analysts become an academic tribe that—like their philosophical, scientific, critical, and theoretical predecessors—claim to possess privileged epistemic tools for accessing truth about signs (e.g., culture, history, literature, race, human experience, and so on). However, the "knowledge" produced within these scholarly communities ultimately functions more as narrative than revelation: a provisional, contingent, and ideologically inflected closure of meaning. These narratives—feminist, modernist, post-colonial, and beyond—are continually reinterpreted, rearticulated, and reinscribed within new frameworks.

The only meaning that discourse analysts possess and will possess is the conventional one, upon which they agree to create a temporary closure that binds members of the community, the mythical tribe. This allows them to proceed exactly as all mythical stories about the world bind cultures and communities together while affecting their perception of the world. Like formalism, structuralism, anthropology, Marxism, and modernism, discourse analysis continues until its contradictions become apparent. Subsequently, other groups of rhetoricians call for better methods for understanding truth, adopt new titles, and the cycle persists incessantly.

Interrogating the structural foundations of discourse analysis, including its economic, cultural, ideological, political, and discursive conditions of possibility, one can foresee that any attempt to unmask or oppose ideology would inevitably become entangled in the frameworks they seek to dismantle. Despite its critical posture, discourse analysis often reproduces the same institutional logic, rhetorical strategies, and epistemological assumptions that it claims to critique. Rather than offering a radically new epistemic vantage point, it recapitulates broader systems of knowledge production and regenerates new discourses, narratives, and methodological trends. These academic products, often embedded within economically profitable structures, contribute to a recursive process in which each new

discourse merely rearticulates or reframes its predecessors. In this case, discourse analysis serves as a type of meta-discursive production, generating commentaries on previous ones and thereby sustaining an ideological cycle that conceals its role in the institutional reproduction of knowledge.

As a theoretical formation, it constructs a new ideological framework that reinterprets both dominant and marginal narratives, thus perpetuating and obscuring rather than disrupting and illuminating the cycle of academic commodification. At its core lies structural ingenuity—a technology of interpretation that repackages existing discourses under the guise of critical innovation. This continual reinterpretation feeds into a lucrative and ideologically saturated intellectual market in which new readings are incentivized and valorized. Within such a system, discourse analysts and their followers often find themselves reproducing, consciously or not, the interpretive patterns of their predecessors, ultimately reinforcing the epistemic structures they aim to challenge.

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