Key aspects shaping discourse analysis:

A transdisciplinary study

الجوانب الرّئيسة المؤثّرة في تحليل الخطاب: دراسة عابرة للتّخصّصات

Dr.Kamil A. Mikhael

د. كميل أ. مخايل

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Abstract

This paper examines numerous key aspects that shape discourse analysis across multiple levels of inquiry, namely the micro (textual), meso (interactional), and macro (ideological) levels. Adopting a transdisciplinary approach and drawing on diverse theoretical frameworks, the study argues that discourse analysis cannot be confined to a single social-science discipline. Accordingly, it draws on examples from a range of contexts and resources to demonstrate how these aspects operate within a transdisciplinary framework. The findings suggest that as discursive practices incorporate increasingly complex semiotic resources, they become more creative and effective in meaning-making, particularly through the use of multimodal signs. These analytical lenses highlight the contextual adaptability, pragmatic variability, and semiotic resourcefulness of discourse.

Keywords: discourse, micro-level, meso-level, macro-level, ideology, power, linguistic, multimodal, organizational, institutional.

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدّراسة عددًا من الجوانب الرّئيسة المؤثّرة في تحليل الخطاب عبر مستويات عديدة من البحث، وهي مستوى البنى الصّغرى (النّصّ)، ومستوى البنى الوسيطة (التّفاعليّ)، ومستوى البنى الكبرى (الأيديولوجيّ). تتبنّى هذه الدّراسة مقاربة عابرة للتّخصّصات وتستند إلى أطر نظريّة

متنوّعة، وتناقش الدّراسة أنّ تحليل الخطاب لا يمكن حصره في تخصّص واحد من تخصّصات العلوم الاجتماعيّة. بناء على ذلك، تستند الدّراسة إلى أمثلة من سياقات وموارد عديدة لإظهار كيفية عمل هذه الجوانب ضمن إطار عابر للتّخصّصات. تشير النّتائج إلى أنّه كلما دمجت الممارسات الخطابيّة موارد سيمائيّة أكثر تعقيدًا، أصبحت هذه الممارسات أكثر إبداعًا وفعاليّة في إنتاج المعنى، ولا سيما عبر توظيف العلامات المتعدّدة الوسائط. تبرز هذه المنظورات التّحليليّة مقدرة الخطاب على التّكيف مع السّياق وتنوّعه التّداوليّ وغناه في توظيف الموارد السّيميائيّة.

الكلمات المفاتيح: الخطاب، مستوى البنى الصّغرى، مستوى البنى الوسيطة، مستوى البنى الكبرى، الأيديولوجيا، السّلطة، لسانيّ، متعدّد الوسائط، تنظيميّ، مؤسّساتيّ.

1. Introduction: Conceptual foundations and theoretical frameworks in discourse analysis

Discourse has become a major point of convergence for numerous disciplines over the last three decades. This growing recognition of the significance of discourse can be attributed to several factors, most notably the understanding that macro-level social structures are manifested, constructed and communicated through micro-level processes of language use. In this regard, Teun van Dijk famously observes that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) may be interested in macro notions such as power and domination, but their actual study takes place at the micro-level of discourse and social practices (van Dijk, 2001, p. 115).

Thus, discourse analysis can be understood as spanning at least two interrelated levels: microstructures and macrostructures. These dual-levels orientation of discourse analysis can be traced back to earlier philosophical traditions, particularly post-structuralist theories of discourse. Epistemologically, these theories are concerned with how meaning and texts are interpreted within social contexts, as well as with the processes through which knowledge is produced. Ontological theories of discourse address questions related to the nature of being, social reality, and the methodological assumptions underlying discursive practices.

Discourse analysts are generally not primarily interested in the being but rather in how and why things appear the way they do (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, pp.19–32). Nevertheless, many approaches to discourse analysis are grounded in philosophical distinctions –both ontological and epistemological– such as CDA, in which discourse is interrogated as a form of social practice (ontological) to reveal mechanisms of power, discrimination, and domination (epistemological). In other words, the nature of discourse analysis consists of two dimensions, the discursive dimension and the other dimensions of social practice which constitute our world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 19).

Therefore, this study aims to present a range of discourse-analytic methods, in which the amalgamation of interpretive questions posed by discourse analyst reflects their underlying philosophical roots. Put differently, different ontological positions, give rise to different epistemological questions. This framework may contribute to addressing certain challenges in communication and discourse analysis, as interdisciplinarity is supposed to help communication and collaboration across academic disciplines (Jacobs & Frickel, 2009, p. 44), while transdisciplinarity is supposed to understand the present world, of which one of the imperatives is the unity of knowledge (Nicolescu, 2002, p. 44).

Fairclough (2009) explicitly link transdisciplinary to interdisciplinarity, arguing that transdisciplinary research is a particular form of interdisciplinary research. What distinguishes it is that in bringing disciplines and theories together to address research issues, it sees 'dialogue' between them as a source for the theoretical and methodological development of each of them (p. 163). Furthermore, discourse analysis is inherently interdisciplinary, particularly within CDA. For example, Fairclough (2006) characterizes discourse as a difficult concept, largely because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary standpoints (p. 3). From this standpoint, one can observe that both interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are embedded in the very definition of discourse advanced in his work.

However, Ruth Wodak is unequivocal regarding the relationship between discourse and interdisciplinarity. She emphasizes that discourse-historical approach is interdisciplinary, which itself is located on several levels: in theory, in the work itself, in teams, and in practice (Wodak, 2001, p. 69). In addition, Reisigl and Wodak (2009) argue that discourse as an analytical construct always depends on the discourse analyst's perspective. As an object of investigation, a discourse is not a closed unit, but a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation (p. 89, emphasis added). In other words, meanings in discourse are not fixed; instead, they shape –and are shaped by– the analytical strategies that discourse analysts employ to reinterpret discursive meanings, whether explicit or implicit.

The significant contributions that interdisciplinarity has advanced in the social sciences, particularly in discourse studies, lie in the recognition that discourse is not an autonomous entity but a dynamic one. The implication of this perspective is that both the definition and analysis of discourse have evolved as discourse has come to be understood either as a constitutive power or shaped by a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it (Fairclough & Wodak, 2000, p. 258).

2. The historical evolution of discourse analysis: From Structuralism to transdisciplinarity

Saussurean Linguistics has played a pivotal role in the development of modern linguistic theory since the publication of the cours de linguistique Générale in the early twentieth century. Consequently, structuralism, as a theoretical and intellectual approach, has been profoundly shaped by Saussurean principles and has long influenced how analytical methods are applied to the study of discourse. Nevertheless, poststructuralism, Foucauldian, Marxist and post-Marxist perspectives have become more influential in shaping contemporary discourse analysis, as they move beyond formal structures to address power, ideology, and social practice. These approaches have paved the way for

the emergence of multiple interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary frameworks within discourse analysis.

Therefore, methods of discourse analysis began to integrate insights from other disciplines in the early 1980s, alongside Saussurean foundations. For instance, Michael Stubbs (1983) defines discourse as language above the sentence or above the clause (p. 10). In a similar vein, Robert De Beaugrande and Wolfgang Dressler (1981) define the text as a communicative occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality (p. 3), and they further clarify that discourse inherits all the standards of textuality (p. 29, notes 4–5). Although this definition was relatively marginalized during the 1980s, it later re-emerged in van Dijk's formulation of discourse, as will be discussed below.

Although these definitions highlight the semantic dimension of linguistic analysis and other important features, they largely adhere to a micro-level analysis of discourse. By the mid-1980s, however, developments in the social sciences had introduced new conceptual frameworks that promoted scholars to explore alternative theoretical impulses grounded in a range of disciplines. For instance, in their seminal book Hegemony and socialist strategy, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985/2001) define discourse as the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice (p. 105). This definition reflects the theoretical foundations of their approach and underpins their attempt to formulate a 'post-Marxist' theory of

hegemonic formation by drawing on post-structuralist insights (Kølvraa, 2018, p. 96).

These two scholars construct their theory by combining and modifying two major theoretical traditions, namely Marxism and structuralism (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 25). Moreover, in Laclau and Mouffe's framework, discourse is coextensive with the social and is not opposed to a non-discursive realm (Frow, 1990, p. 52). A second generation in the development of discourse analysis emerges with Norman Fairclough's conceptualization of discourse,

which he elaborates across several works, most notably Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. In this formulation, CDA is developed most consistently… and discourse is reduced to a subset of a broader range of social practices (Torfing, 2005, pp. 6–7). The shift reflects a change in the philosophical underpinnings of discourse studies, which becomes particularly evident in both theoretical and empirical approaches that draw on accumulated insights from multiple disciplines as well as the influence of key of foundational studies.

Accordingly, Teun A. van Dijk (2001) defines discourse as a 'communicative event', including conversational interaction, written text, as well as associated gestures, facework, typographical layout, images and any other 'semiotic' or multimedia dimension of signification (p. 98). This formulation recalls De Beaugrande and Dressler's definition of discourse discussed above, particularly the conceptual parallel between 'communicative occurrence' and 'communicative event'. However, when this definition is considered in relation to its broader theoretical context –namely the section in which it appears (the discourse–cognition–society triangle), the article title (Multidisciplinary CDA: a plea for diversity), and the book title (Methods of critical discourse analysis)– it becomes evident that the underlying philosophical assumptions differ substantially.

This distinction is linked to the inherit micro- and macro-structural dimensions of discourse. Accordingly, language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication belong to the micro-level analysis of the social order. Power, dominance, and inequality between social groups are typically terms that belong to a macro-level of analysis (van Dijk, 2015, p. 468). Another analytical framework further differentiates levels of discourse by assigning syntax and grammar to the micro-level; intertextuality, genre, interactional sequence, sociolinguistic variation to the meso-level; and ("big D") Discourse, habitus, and sign systems to the macro-level (Richland, 2012, 163). Such a formulation suggests that material uses of language are primarily examined at the micro-level, while the macro level is concerned

with more abstract, structural, and ideological dimensions of discourse.

Such an idea is not a novel discovery, or an analytical tool newly uncovered by CDA; rather it represents a reformulation of earlier theoretical impulses that contemporary scholars continue to develop within discourse studies. What Michel Foucault, for instance, adds to discourse analysts' traditional concern with language use at micro-level sites of interaction is a broader concern with the macro-level forms of knowledge that appear in society during any given historical period (Hodges, 2015, p. 54).

Additionally, Intertextuality –originally developed through the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and later theorized by Julia Kristeva– had already been employed as an analytical concept in numerous discourse studies prior to the methodological consolidation of macro-level analysis. As such, it is a key to unraveling the way micro feeds into the macro (Hodges, 2015, p. 54). In sum, macro-level analysis was not entirely absent from earlier linguistic traditions; rather, contemporary discourse scholars have further developed and rearticulated it as a central analytical tool. Therefore, the present study adopts a micro-meso-macro analytical framework, while recognizing that this classification serves primarily as a heuristic device for analytical purposes rather than a direct reflection of the dynamics of everyday interaction.

3. Micro-level analysis of discourse

In discourse studies, the term micro refers to the use of small units of language that do not exceed the limits of working-memory capacity during a specific communication event. Micro-level analysis focuses on how meaning is shaped and how discourse is structured, managed and interpreted at the textual and interpersonal level. In other words, micro-level refers to everyday language used in interpersonal encounters or to (agency and interactional), whereas macro refers to the (structural, institutional, organizational) approaches (van Dijk, 2015, p. 468).

Gee (2010) conceptualizes this distinction differently. He defines discourse with a little 'd' as any instance of language-in-use or any stretch of spoken

or written language (often called a “text” in the expanded sense where texts can be oral or written). Discourse, with a capital ‘D’ is used for ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity (pp. 201–205). Although Gee does not explicitly frame this distinction in terms of micro- and macro-levels of discourse analysis, his conceptualization implicitly aligns with these analytical levels. However, his formulation differs due to the philosophical underpinnings of his work, which are rooted in sociolinguistics rather in structurally oriented discourse traditions.

Nevertheless, treating these levels of analysis as an independent dichotomy entails a methodological risk. By contrast, recognizing a dialectical relationship between these levels is more consistent with an ontological view of social reality that raises epistemological questions about discourse as social practice –namely, whether social reality is constructed, mediated, constituted, and constraining. Such a perspective is essential for advancing the discourse-analytic process towards meaningful and theoretically grounded findings. Discourse analysts have long emphasized the importance of beginning with the investigation of discourse events; without such an analytical orientation, it becomes difficult to address what Michel Foucault (1972) famously articulated: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another? (p. 27).

In what follows, I examine the key aspects of these statements across the three analytical levels –micro, meso, and macro. Micro-level analysis in discourse studies focuses on **linguistic features**, including pragmatic and interactional aspects, discursive strategies, genre and register, and situational context. Linguistic analysis at this level examines features such as lexical choice, cohesion, syntax and grammatical structures, and metaphor. Due to space limitations, this study cannot address all categories associated with the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis. Instead, it focuses on one sub-feature for closer examination.

Within this category –namely linguistic features– I elaborate on **syntax and grammatical structures**. Syntax is defined as the study of the interrelationships between elements of sentence structure, and of the rules governing the arrangement of sentences in sequences (Crystal, 2008, p. 279). Although these rules are often conceived as abstract mental representations, they generate infinite sentences that collectively form discourse. Accordingly, De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) establish a link between cohesion (or continuity) and syntax, arguing that cohesion functions as a property of syntactic organization (p. 48).

Teun van Dijk (2008) similarly addressed this question, demonstrating that ideology of newspapers showed in the ways the participants of varying power were represented in sentential syntax (p. 59). For example, describing an event as 'X caused Y' rather than 'Y happened after X' constitutes a syntactic choice that affects perceived causality. Moreover, nominalization and passivation –both produced through syntactic and grammatical processes– usually play a role in encoding ideological stance (Fairclough, 2006, p. 181), linguistic craftmanship, or other layers of meaning. consequently, such syntactic nuances warrant close attention in discourse analysis.

I now turn to the second category at the micro-level: **pragmatic and interactional context**. This category encompasses sub-features such as speech acts, turn-taking, politeness, and implicature. In this section, I focus on **implicature**. In Grice's view one can mean something either by saying it or by saying (or "making as if to say") something else. What one implicates by saying something is generally not implied by what one says (Bach, 2012, p. 55).

This distinction indicates that the process of meaning production differs from the immediate pragmatic purpose of an utterance. In this view, meaning is not generated solely through linguistic form but emerges through the cooperative interaction between speaker, hearer and language. It is in this context that Paul Grice proposed the cooperative principle and its four

maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Grice, 1975, p. 45). Each maxim comprises a set of more specific guidelines that may be flouted in interaction. When speakers deliberately flout a maxim, they exploit the situation and say what they believe to be false; then the implicature is not carried by what is said, but only by the saying of what is said, or by 'putting it that way' (Grice, 1975, pp. 45–58).

For instance, if a person A asks, 'can you lend me some money?' and person B answers, 'I need to pay off a big loan this month'; person B did not explicitly say 'no', but one can infer the relevant maxim, which is in this case a polite refusal. Having identified the role of implicature, discourse analysts should then consider the role such implicit meaning meanings play in shaping discourse and interaction, particularly in regard to power relations, politeness strategies, and the dynamics of linguistic exchange.

The third category of micro-level aspects concerns **discursive strategies**, which examine sub-features such as nomination, predication, framing, argumentation, intensification and mitigation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 95). Reisigl and Wodak (2009) further define discursive strategy a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal. Discursive strategies are located at different levels of linguistic organization and complexity broadly as a more or less intentional plan of practices (p. 94).

The paragraph that follows examines mitigation as a discursive sub-feature. Mitigation addresses phenomena such as modification the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 95; Holmes, 1984, p. 345). According to Bruce Fraser (1980), to mitigate is to soften the effects of an order, ease the blow of bad news, make a criticism more palatable, and the like. For instance, to utter 'I must forbid you from …' or 'I must criticize you from' may count as an act of forbidding or criticizing, respectively, though the literal interpretation of each sentence is only a report of obligation (p. 342). By focusing on illocutionary

acts performed through individual utterances rather than larger discursive structures, this sub-feature highlights how mitigation produces discursive effects. It underscores the role of mitigation strategies in shaping the discourse-analytic process, illuminating processes of power negotiation at the interpersonal level and revealing the subtle mechanisms through which language users pursue their communicative objectives.

I now turn to **genre and register**, which constitute the fourth category in this section. A Genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute a rationale for the genre (Swales, 1990, p. 58). Acknowledging that genres are recognizable and recurrent patterns implies that they belong to an interdiscursive construct. Therefore, from a micro-level analytical perspective, genre analysis focuses on linguistic features, including lexico-grammatical features, textualization, and structural interpretation of the text-genre (Bhatia, 1993, pp. 13–26).

As for register, it refers to the relationship between the situational use of language and its functions. A register is defined as a variety associated with a particular situation of use (including particular communicative purposes) (Biber & Conrad, 2019, p. 6). Register encompasses the analysis of three interrelated variable: the type of social action (what is happening or field), role relationships (who is involved, or tenor), and symbolic organization (how language is being used or

mode) (Halliday, 1978, p. 35).

Given that these three variables operate within a specific context –namely, the context of situation– and that genre is associated with a broader level of meaning, namely the context of culture, these two levels of communication work together to interpret the social context or discourse (Martin, 1992, p. 495). There is therefore an interplay among genre, register and language: modification in one dimension often entails corresponding changes in the

others. Language use is not independent of the function it serves; rather it is intrinsically tied to situationality, a concept that will be addressed in the following section.

The final category addressed in this section is **situationality**, which has received comparatively less attention in linguistic proper than in sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology. Situationality is a general designation which render a text relevant to a current or recoverable situation of occurrence (De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981, pp. 9–13). From this perspective, situationality, as a factor influencing discourse, concerns how to find a balance between efficiency and effectiveness that will be appropriate to the situation and to the participants' roles (De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981, pp. 9–13). Such a balance is attained through speakers' and writers' awareness of the linguistic choices mobilized within specific discursive practices.

Another perspective on this aspect is Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication, which he introduced in his earlier work. The foundations of this approach are ethnographic and sociolinguistic; that is, they primarily address external contextual dimensions rather than exclusively internal linguistic features. Hymes' framework is articulated through the SPEAKING model, which elaborates the context of situation into eight components: **S**etting and Scene, **P**articipants, **E**nds, **A**ct sequence, **K**ey, **I**nstrumentalities, **N**orms, **G**enre (Hymes, 1972, pp. 59–65). A third perspective is the sociocognitive model developed by Teun van Dijk across several studies. Van Dijk (2006) conceptualizes the relationships among discourse, context, and cognition as follows:

> Contexts defined as participant definitions, that is, as mental constructs, are able to function as the interface between situational and societal structures and discourse structures, because they subjectively 'represent' relevant aspects of situations and society and directly interfere in the mental processes of discourse production and comprehension (p. 163).

In this excerpt, van Dijk refers to mental models as a mediating interface in the process of communication. In other words, van Dijk's model posits communication as an interpersonal process, that is simultaneously individual, cognitively controlled, and mentally mediated. By contrast, De Beaugrande and Dressler conceptualize situationality primarily as a property anchored in textual dimensions. Consequently, the discourse analyst focuses on discourse never in isolation, but always in its relations with other elements, and always in ways which accord with the formulation of the common object of research (Fairclough, 2010, p. 5)

Building on these insights, all such factors influence discourse analysis, whether in observable way or at more implicit levels. By way of illustration, in a thesis viva, the interactional dynamics between panel members and the doctoral candidate are shaped by configurations of field, tenor, and mode, which together define the register of academic evaluation. Within this critical institutional interaction, if tension emerges during the exchange, linguistic choices and discursive strategies may be vary according to situational parameters that governs power relations, disciplinary conventions, and expectations of academic performance.

4. Meso-level analysis of discourse

Norman Fairclough developed the three-dimensional model of CDA in his 2006 book discourse and social change book. Within this framework, analysis proceeds as follows: the text is described at the micro-level; discursive practice (meso-level) is responsible for interpretation; and social practice (macro-level) is responsible for explaining (p. 73). On the same page, Fairclough conceptualizes discursive practices (meso-level) as an analytical lens for examining processes of production, distribution, and consumption, assigning it a mediating role between the micro- and macro-levels of discourse analysis. This mediating function has been corroborated by numerous CDA scholars. For instance, van Dijk (2015) similarly emphasizes that the link between text and society is mediated (p. 467).

Accordingly, Fairclough (2003) explicitly addresses this issue in a paragraph entitled The limits of textual analysis, which serves as an introductory conceptual framing. He argues that one would need to frame textual analysis within, for instance, organizational analysis, and link the micro analysis of texts to the macro analysis of how power relations work across networks of practices and structures (pp. 15-16). In other words, Fairclough contends that a meso-level of discourse analysis is required to function as a mediating layer, bridging micro-level linguistic features and macro-level sociopolitical structures, including power, ideology, systems of representation, and institutions.

These interconnections are the focus of this section. I begin with **institutional context** and then turn immediately to organizational discourse, as the relationship among action, texts, discourses, and institutions is both recursive and iterative: Institutions are constituted in discourse, and to understand the process of institutionalization and how institutions enable and constrain action, we need to understand the discursive dynamics underlying them (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004, p. 646). In this sense, the term institution is sometimes used to refer to entities such as schools, universities, courts, corporations, the military, and the church –settings in which norms, policies, and routines are formally established and come to be taken for granted as stabilized practices within a broader social and often global context.

At first glance, it may appear that institutions are primarily physical sites in which social activities take place; however, this understanding require further clarification. Michael Agar (1985) defines institutions as a socially legitimated expertise together with those persons authorized to implement it (p. 164). This definition foregrounds the human and discursive dimensions of management and governance, while also emphasizing that institutions are not confined to physical settings. Rather, they may refer to any powerful and organized social formation, such as government bodies or the media. Consequently, institutions are seen as inextricably linked to power and

serving the interests of certain powerful groups (Mayr, 2008, p. 4)

Moreover, given that institutions are associated with distinct domains of expertise,

an institutional framework is required to account for their communicative practices as well as other forms of social activity. For example, institutional settings such as the military or courts impose specific discursive constraints that regulate who is entitled to speak, what can be said, which styles or registers are considered appropriate. These norms, policies, and routines are sometimes codified in institutional protocol, which language users gradually internalize through participation and socialization. Michel Foucault (1972) explains the rationale behind adherence to such protocols, arguing that every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it (p. 227). From this perspective, institutionally defined communication rules reflect not only the power exercised by institutions but also the ideologies they reproduce and legitimize.

Closely related to institutional analysis, **organizational discourse** refers to a multidisciplinary domain that looks at the ways in which language and meaning shape organizational phenomena (Robichaud, 2015, p. 1). More specifically, organizational discourse refers to principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are (Mumby & Clair, 2000, p. 181). In this sense, organizational discourse can be understood as a set of discursive practices that structure interpersonal communication and social action, while simultaneously reflecting and mediating broader social and institutional objectives.

Within this framework, institutional discourse can be seen as operating at a more abstract and structured level. As van Dijk (2009) notes, institutional discourse is often partly planned in advance and less spontaneous (p. 250). Similarly, Fairclough (2006) characterizes institutional discourse as strategic or influenced by technologization of discourse (p. 219). Institutional

discourse thus aligns more closely with the macro level of social structures, where power relations and hierarchies are explicit and formally organized. By contrast, organizational discourse operates primarily at the micro-level of social life. It is local, situated, and embedded in day-to-day practices, shaped by –but not reducible– to institutional norms and policies. As such, hierarchical relations tend to be less overt and are often negotiated through routine communicative interaction.

For instance, an email exchanged between two NGOs typically follows established institutional norms and genre conventions, including levels of formality, standardized formats (such as subject lines and dates), and regulated content. By contrast, when the same actors meet in person, communicative practices often shift: interactions become less formal, more dynamic, and highly context dependent. In summary, institutional modes of communication tend to operate within formal and political frameworks in which discourse is planned in advance and structured around predefined objectives. As a result, discursive structures remain relatively stable and change primarily in relation to institutional goals. Organizational practices, by contrast, are more fluid and interactional; they may emerge spontaneously in everyday contexts and, at times, even reshape institutional norms through the adaptation of new discursive strategies.

The third category addressed in this section is **community norms**, which constitute a core component of a discourse community. According to John swales (1990), discourse community is made up of

- individuals who share common goals agreed upon by most members,
- it has mechanism of intercommunication among its members,
- it uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback,
- has and uses one or more genres that help the group achieve its shared goals,

- it has acquired some specific lexis,
- it has a reasonable ratio of novices and experts (pp. 24–27).

Consider a tense moment in a Formula One race, in which cars may experience maximum deceleration (braking) of over five g (G-force) when braking into the first chicane after reaching speeds of up to 350 km/h on the main straight. Under such high-pressure conditions, neither the race engineer nor the driver can rely on extended or elaborated utterances. Instead, communication, must be rapid, economical, and highly conventionalized. As a result, semantically dense lexical items are preferred. For example, Box is a single word that functions during a race as a directive from the pit wall instructing the driver to enter the pit lane for a pit stop. In other words, race-specific norms regulate turn-taking and constrain permissible forms of interaction, giving rise to highly professionalized communication in critical and official moments. Beyond in-race communication, written genres such as emails and formal letters are used to communicate with FIA (Fédération International de l'Automobile) regarding race incidents and administrative matters. In this sense, Swales (1990) notes that discourse communities use and develop genres that outsiders may recognize but are tailored to the group needs (p. 26)

Hence, discourse communities can also be professional… Active community members also carry on informal exchanges: at conferences, through e-mails interest groups, in memos and elsewhere, the results of which may be woven intertextually into public, published texts (Johns, 2011, pp. 502–503). Ultimately, community norms shape discourse practices by providing a shared framework of expectations and interpretative resources that influence what is said, how it is said, and how it is understood.

Finally, I examine the fourth category in this section: **media and technology**. Over recent decades, means of communication have developed such that discourses are communicated not only through political speeches and news items but through different kinds of semiotic resources, different

modes, and realized through different genres (Machin, 2013, p. 347). Consequently, communication is subject to mediation means, or to digital practices, which are assemblages of actions involving tools associated with digital technologies (Jones; Chik; Hafner, 2015, p. 3).

As a result of these developments, multimodal analysis has emerged within the field of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to address at least two major issues: first, the role of media as an institution in shaping discourse and imposing power relations and new agendas; and second, the role of **multimodal communication** itself. The first issue has been discussed previously, and power will be examined further below; the second relates to what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) describe as the shift from monomodality to multimodality (p. 1).

The rationale for this shift lies in the recognition that language alone is not responsible for meaning production; rather, meaning making is fundamentally a multimodal process (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 79). From this perspective, meaning is also produced through semiotic processes beyond language. As Gunther Kress (2010) famously argues, 'meaning is the stuff of semiotics', and is therefore inevitably and centrally implicated in any theory of learning. Semiotically speaking, sign-making is meaning-making and learning is the result of these processes (p. 178, emphasis in original).

Another example drawn from Formula One races is the chequered flag (Fig. 1). This sign forms part of a broader semiotic ensemble, namely the digital image, and carries specific semiotic meanings –particularly when images of the race winner are transmitted to Formula One fans or viewers via their mobile phones, computers, and television screens, or through live streaming. In this context,

Fig. 1: chequered flag

meaning is produced through the articulation of multiple modes, ranging from visual and gestural modes to spatial and temporal ones. The chequered flag thus brings together gesture and technology to signify the end of the race, while simultaneously indexing a real-world event: the race leader crossing the finish line.

Meaning, therefore, is culturally dependent rather than inherent. These meanings align with Kress's view that meaning is designed rather than merely encoded. In this sense, Kress (2010) argues that design is the process of translating the rhetor's oriented assessment of the environment of communication into semiotically shaped material (p. 132, emphasis in original). This process also embodies the institutional power embedded in the FIA's rules. Consequently, these discursive aspects involved in the production of digital knowledge provides a valuable framework for understanding discourse production and analysis, while opening up further theoretical implications.

5. Macro-level analysis of discourse

Macro-levels aspects of discourse are sometimes regarded as long-established concerns. Issues such as power, ideology, and domination date back to the earliest civilizations, and cultural and historical contexts have long been central to social inquiry. This section addresses these macro-level aspects of discourse analysis and

seeks some of their less visible roles.

The first category examined in this section is **power and ideology** and their relationship to social institutions such as the media. Power has been addressed across numerous disciplines and there is a plethora of definitions of the concept. Perhaps the most well-known definition of power [Macht] is provided by Max Weber (1978), who defines it as the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance (p. 53). According to Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (2009), this understanding of power serves as a common denominator

across disciplines (p. 9).

Moreover, given the interdisciplinary nature of the concept of power, Michel Foucault (1978) offers a different definition: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (p. 93). Foucault conceptualize power as relational and productive and reject the view that power is something that can be possessed. Consequently, he examines the relationship between knowledge and power and the ways in which power operates through discourse. As Foucault (1978) maintains, power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (p. 93).

These conceptualizations have been particularly influential for discourse studies, especially for CDA, through which the relationship between power and discourse has given rise to specific theoretical developments, commonly referred to as the macro-level. Accordingly, these conceptualizations offer new explanatory frameworks, particularly because power –while largely invisible– remains central to understanding the dynamics and specifics of control (of action) in modern societies. Therefore, Linguistic manifestations are analyzed in depth in CDS (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10). Moreover, the imposition of power has increasingly ceased to rely on force in many domains of social life; instead, power is exercised and enacted in invisible or covert ways, as suggested above, whether in interpersonal or institutional contexts. Consequently, significant analytical attention has been devoted to uncovering the mechanisms through which power operates.

The analysis of these mechanisms reveals further complexities in the examination of social and political ideology within discourse studies. Ideology necessitates an examination of power, social beliefs, and other related concepts. For van Dijk (1998), whose work is historically and methodologically more closely aligned with a cognitive framework, ideology consists of shared frameworks of social beliefs that organize and coordinate

the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members (p. 8). For Fairclough (2003), who shares with van Dijk

and Wodak an interest in CDA,

> ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation. This critical view of ideology, seeing it as a modality of power, contrast with various descriptive views of ideology as positions, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives of social groups without reference to relations of power and domination between such groups (p. 9).

Regardless of the theoretical perspective adopted to conceptualize ideology and its relationship to discourse and power, ideology has always been intrinsically linked to knowledge and power, all of which are deeply intertwined in discourse. Consequently, uncovering the role of ideology in enacting hegemony, domination, consent, or combinations thereof has been a central concern. This discursive enactment of power ultimately influences aspects of discourse structures, and the main objective of CDA is therefore to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes (Fairclough, 2010, p. 93).

For instance:

BRITAIN INVADED BY AN ARMY OF ILLEGALS

SUN News Special

By John Kay and Alison Bowyer

Britain is being swamped by a tide of alleged immigrants so desperate for a job that they will work for a pittance in our restaurants, cafes and nightclubs.

Immigration officers are being overwhelmed with work. Last year, 2,191 'illegals' were being nabbed and sent back home. But there are tens of thousands more, slaving behind bars, cleaning hotel rooms and working in kitchens (van Dijk, 2008, p. 80).

This article was published in the British newspaper The Sun, which is generally regarded as right-wing and aims to influence public opinion. In van Dijk's (2008) analysis, the headline contains three major negative and racist lexical choices –invaded, army, and illegals. These expressions, together with the details of the article, frame immigration as a form of warfare that threatens Britain. Consequently, immigrants are represented in a very negative way (They), and (We) or our People (officials, business, Britain) in a very positive way (pp. 80–82).

In this context, it is evident that the newspaper, as an institution, has abused its power through this opaque headline by framing the event as objective and self-evident to readers, thereby implying that Britain must act in response to an alleged invasion. In other words, institutions manipulate ideology and power while simultaneously setting the agendas for what can be talked about. As van Dijk's (2015) argues, the power of dominant groups shows not only in their control of the discourse of others but also in their own discourse. That is, social power may also be locally enacted by the very properties of discourse of (members of) powerful groups (p. 474).

The second category examined in this section is **the socioeconomic and political context**. This category includes the analysis of policy, governance, and social class. Policy and governance, in particular, are closely associated with officials and institutions that oversee and, at times, influence discourse structures, thereby determining what may be discussed and, more importantly, how issues are addressed. As van Dijk (2015) notes, among many other resources that define the power base of a group or institution, access to or control over public discourse and communication is an important "symbolic" resource, and this is also the case for knowledge and information (p. 470,

emphasis in original).

Moreover, several characteristics distinguish the social class of elites and their discourse, including socioeconomic status, such as being skilled, wealthy, educated, and empowered by their institutional positions. As Fairclough (1989) explains, discourse often embodies assumptions which legitimize existing power relations, and those assumptions are ideologies (pp. 2–33). For instance, in the article discussed above, The Sun selected specific journalists and granted them access to sensitive information, which they were then allowed to publish in a biased manner. This process serves to legitimize a right-wing perspective as both normative and necessary in Britan, albeit articulated through explicitly racist representations.

The third category examined in this section is **the cultural and historical context**. This category encompasses the study of collective memory, tradition, and national narratives. According to Fairclough and Wodak (2000), discourse is historical, and the distinctive feature of this aspect is its attempt to integrate systematically all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of a written or spoken text (p. 266). In this sense, every discourse is produced within a cultural and historical context that simultaneously provides its significance, structure, and constraints.

For example, discourse structures produced in Britain differ from those produced in the United States. The historical trajectories experienced by the two countries are distinct; consequently, the historical layers that shape discursive practices and cultural narratives also differ. These layers are linked to collective memory, traditions, religious influences, and intercultural discourses. From this perspective, British discourse is often regarded as more conservative, indirect, and formal than its American counterpart. As Stuart Hall (2003) explains, meaning is produced through [what he terms] the cultural circuit, which shapes everyday life. the question of meaning arises in relation to all the different moments or practices in our cultural circuit –in

the construction of identity and the marking of difference, in production and consumption, as well as in the regulation of social conduct (pp. 3–4).

In addition, the cultural and historical dimensions of discourse shape its analysis by providing shared identities, experiences, practices, memories, and interests. Accordingly, discourse analysis examines how the cultural rules which constitute a specific discourse, make for example a certain text a fascist text. The same methodology approach applies to the historical dimension of discourse, as each text relates to other texts, synchronically and diachronically (Fairclough & Wodak, 2000, p. 266). Consequently, genre, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity play a crucial role in linking texts to broader social formations and practices; the report discussed above from The Sun does not merely allude to contemporary sense of danger; rather it is embedded in and draws upon historical narratives of threat, evoking past dangers and hostilities posed to Britain by its neighbours decades earlier.

The final category examined in this research is **media and institutional discourse**.

Historically, the role of media has evolved significantly, and its role become pivotal in everyday human life. Media discourse refers to interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener, or viewer (O'Keeffe, 2012, p. 441). In modern societies, media objectives transcend mere mediation, and engage with ideological processes (Fairclough, 2010, p. 79), as ideology is considered more important than cognition (Mullins, 1972, pp. 506–507).

Often this role takes effect within institutional contexts, which provide a structured frame of interaction for recipients. Fairclough (2010) explains these dynamics as follows:

> A social institution is (among other things) an apparatus of verbal interaction, or an 'order of discourse'… Each institution has its own set of speech events, its own differentiated settings. It is, I suggest,

> necessary to see the institution as simultaneously facilitating and constraining the social action (here, specifically, verbal interaction) of its members: it provides them with a frame for action, without which they could not act, but it thereby constrains them to act within that frame (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 40–41).

Moreover, given that cultural institutions such as universities and media draw on information and communication means to practicing symbolic power (Thompson, 1995, p. 17), institutional discourse becomes a paradigmatic case through which ideas are disseminated across social networks and cultures. This process, in turn, has numerous implications, including the globalization or universalization of certain political and academic ideas, such as Neoliberalism, dominant constructions of power, and the English language.

Another implication of the previously discussed processes concerns **cultural homogenization**. For instance, the structure of news reports that construct the identity of Ahmad al-Ahmad –who disarmed one of the gunmen during a terrorist attack at Bondi Beach, Sydney, in December 2025– is framed in a largely unified manner across languages and cultural contexts. This uniformity reveals the power relations underpinning journalistic practice. At the same time, most of these news reports foreground the nationality and religion of the alleged hero, identified as a Syrian Muslim, a discursive choice that is politically motivated. In contrast, the identity of the individual who shot the alleged hero is not clearly mentioned. This asymmetrical distribution of detail suggests that journalistic discourse is shaped and regulated by institutional policies aligned with specific political agendas.

6. Conclusion: Limitations, implications, and directions for future research

This theoretical study has examined key aspects of discourse analysis that shape analytical processes. Whether a bottom-up approach (micro-, meso-, and macro-levels) or a top-down approach is adopted, the macro-level consistently appears to exert a more tangible influence on discourse than the

reverse. This tendency may be linked to Western ideological traditions, while privilege abstract structures and emphasize their determining role in shaping concrete social practices.

The aspects discussed here are not intended to be exhaustive. This limitation is not primarily due to a reliance on Western philosophical traditions, but rather due to constraints of scope. Future research is therefore encouraged to explore these analytical dimensions within Eastern cultural contexts, such as Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern societies, where alternative epistemological assumptions may foreground different analytical priorities.

Another issue highlighted in this study is the role of creativity in shaping discourse analysis. Multimodal approaches, in particular, offer innovative analytical possibilities by integrating visual and textual semiotic resources. Greater attention to creative semiosis is therefore warranted, as multimodal configurations –such as the photo–text example in Fig. 1– activate multiple cognitive processes rather than

a single interpretive mechanism.

Finally, ideology remains a critical but under–theorized concept. Although often treated as more influential than cognition, the privileging of ideology requires clearer justification and empirical grounding, especially given the diversity of theoretical traditions informing its conceptualization. Therefore, this study recommends that the analysis of ideology within discursive contexts be further developed and examined more systematically.

Notes

1. Kamil A. Mikhael, PhD in Languages and Translation, is a Linguist and Researcher, based in Beirut, Lebanon.

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