



21 Great Examples Of Discourse Analysis

By Chris Drew (PhD) / January 8, 2023



Discourse analysis is an approach to the study of language that demonstrates how language shapes reality.

Discourse is understood as a way of perceiving, framing, and viewing the world.

For example:

- A dominant discourse of gender often positions women as gentle and men as active heroes.
- A dominant discourse of race often positions whiteness as the norm and colored bodies as 'others'.

Through discourse analysis, scholars look at texts and examine how those texts shape discourse.

In other words, it involves the examination of how the 'ways of speaking about things' normalizes and privileges some frames of thinking about things while marginalizing others.

As a simple example, if movies consistently frame the ideal female as [passive](#), silent, and submissive, then society comes to think that this is how women *should behave* and makes us think that this is *normal*, so women who don't fit this mold are *abnormal*.

Instead of seeing this as just the way things are, discourse analysts know that norms are produced in language and are not necessarily as natural as we may have assumed.



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Examples Of Discourse Analysis

1. Language Choice In Policy Texts

A study of policy texts can reveal ideological frameworks and viewpoints of the writers of the policy. These sorts of studies often demonstrate how policy texts often categorize people in ways that construct social hierarchies and restrict people's agency.

Examples include:

Study	What it Examines
The Chronic Responsibility: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Danish Chronic Care Policies(Ravn, Frederiksen & Beedholm, 2015)	The authors examined Danish chronic care policy documents with a focus on how they categorize and pathologize vulnerable patients.
The construction of teacher identities in educational policy documents: a Critical Discourse Analysis (Thomas, 2005)	The author examines how an education policy in one state of Australia positions teacher professionalism and teacher identities. While there are competing discourses about professional identity, the policy framework privileges a narrative that frames the 'good' teacher as one that accepts ever-tightening control and regulation over their professional practice.

2. Newspaper Bias

Conducting a critical discourse analysis of newspapers involves gathering together a quorum of newspaper articles based on a pre-defined range and scope (e.g. newspapers from a particular set of publishers within a set date range).

Then, the researcher conducts a close examination of the texts to examine how they frame subjects (i.e. people, groups of people, etc.) from a particular ideological, political, or cultural perspective.



Study

What it Examines

Rohingya in media: Critical discourse analysis of Myanmar and Bangladesh newspaper headlines (Isti'anah, 2018)

The author explores the framing of the military attacks on Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar in the 2010s. They compare Bangladesh and Myanmar newspapers, showing that the Bangladesh newspapers construct the Rohingya people as protagonists while the Myanmar papers construct the military as the protagonists.

House price inflation in the news: a critical discourse analysis of newspaper coverage in the UK (Munro, 2018)

The study looks at how newspapers report on housing price rises in the UK. It shows how language like "natural" and "healthy" normalizes ever-rising housing prices and aims to dispel alternative discourses around ensuring access to the housing market for the working class.

Immigrants and the Western media: a critical discourse analysis of newspaper framings of African immigrant parenting in Canada (Alaazi et al, 2021)

This study looked at 37 Canadian newspaper articles about African immigrant parenting. It finds that African immigrants are framed as inferior in their parenting methods to other Canadian parents.

3. Language In Interviews

Discourse analysis can also be utilized to analyze interview transcripts. While coding methods to identify themes are the most common methods for analyzing interviews, discourse analysis is a valuable approach when looking at power relations and the framing of subjects through speech.

Study

What it Examines

What is the practice of spiritual care? A critical discourse analysis of registered nurses' understanding of spirituality (Cooper et al, 2020)

This study looks at transcripts of interviews with nurses and identified four ways of framing their own approach to spirituality and how it intersects with their work: these are the personal, holistic, and empathetic care [discourse communities](#).

An Ideological Unveiling: Using Critical Narrative and Discourse Analysis to Examine Discursive White Teacher Identity (Coleman, 2018)

This case study looks only at one teacher's discursive construction of (i.e. the way they talk about and frame) their own whiteness. It shows how teacher education needs to work harder at challenging white students to examine their own white privilege.

4. Television Analysis



Discourse analysis is commonly used to explore ideologies and framing devices in television shows and advertisements.

Due to the fact advertising is not just textual but rather multimodal, scholars often mix a discourse analytic methodology (i.e. exploring how television *constructs* dominant ways of thinking) with semiotic methods (i.e. exploration of how color, movement, font choice, and so on create meaning).

I did this, for example, in my PhD (listed below).

Study	What it Examines
Ideologies of Arab media and politics: a critical discourse analysis of Al Jazeera debates on the Yemeni revolution (Al Kharusi, 2016)	This study transcribed debates on Al Jazeera in relation to the Yemeni revolution and found overall bias against the Yemeni government.
Soak up the goodness: Discourses of Australian childhoods on television advertisements (Drew, 2013)	This study explores how Australian childhood identities are constructed through television advertising. It finds that national identity is normalized as something children have from the earliest times in their lives, which may act to socialize them into problematic nationalist attitudes in their formative years.

5. Film Critique

Scholars can explore discourse in film in a very similar way to how they study discourse in television shows. This can include the framing of sexuality gender, race, nationalism, and social class in films.

A common example is the study of Disney films and how they construct idealized feminine and masculine identities that children should aspire toward.

Study	What it Examines
Child Rearing and Gender Socialisation: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Kids' Popular Fictional Movies (Baig, Khan & Aslam, 2021)	The study shows how the films <i>Cinderella</i> and <i>Tarzan</i> construct gendered identities where women are kinder and depicted as attractive to other characters, while men are more active and seek roles as heroes.
Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Representation of Male and Female Characters in the Animation Movie,	This study acknowledges the changes in how Disney films construct gender . It shows how women are active protagonists in the film <i>Frozen</i> but also shows how the protagonists continue



Study

What it Examines

FROZEN (Alsarairah, Sarjit & Hajimia, 2020)

to embody traditional feminine identities including their embrace of softness, selflessness, and self-sacrifice.

6. Analysis Of Political Speech

Political speeches have also been subject to a significant amount of discourse analysis. These studies generally explore how influential politicians indicate a shift in policy and frame those policy shifts in the context of underlying ideological assumptions.

Study

What it Examines

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Anti-Muslim Rhetoric in Donald Trump's Historic 2016 AIPAC Policy Speech (Khan et al, 2020)

This study looked at Donald Trump's use of language to construct a hero-villain and protagonist-other approach to American and Islam.

Critical discourse analysis in political communication research: a case study of rightwing populist discourse in Australia (Sengul, 2019)

This author highlights the role of political speech in constructing a singular national identity that attempts to delineate in-groups and out-groups that marginalize people within a multicultural nation.

9. Examining Marketing Texts

Advertising is more present than ever in the context of neoliberal capitalism. As a result, it has an outsized role in shaping public discourse. Critical discourse analyses of advertising texts tend to explore how advertisements, and the capitalist context that underpins their proliferation, normalize gendered, racialized, and class-based discourses.

Study

What it Examines

A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Soft Drink Advertisements (Suphaborwornrat & Piyaporn Punkasirikul, 2022)

This study of online soft drink advertisements contributes to a body of literature that shows how advertising often embraces masculine tropes to appeal to their target audience. However, by repeatedly depicting masculinity, a discourse analysis approach also highlights how the depiction of normative masculinity also reinforces it as an idealized norm in dominant discourse.

Representation of Iranian family lifestyle in TV advertising (Labafi, Momeni & Mohammadi, 2021);

Another common theme in discourse analyses of advertising is that of consumerism. By virtue of their economic imperative, the advertisements reinforce consumption as the [normative way of perceiving personal identity](#). While this may seem normal, these studies



Study

What it Examines

do highlight how the economic worth of a person subsumes other conceptualizations of identity and humanity, such as those of religion, volunteerism, or communitarianism.

Education on the rails: a textual [ethnography](#) of university advertising in mobile contexts (Symes & Drew, 2017)

In the context of university advertisements, education is often framed as a product rather than a right for citizens.

11. Analyzing Lesson Plans

As written texts, lesson plans can be analyzed for how they construct discourses around education as well as student and teacher identities. These texts tend to examine how teachers and governing bodies in education prioritize certain ideologies around *what* and *how* to learn. These texts can enter into discussions around the 'history wars' (what and whose history should be taught) as well as ideological approaches to religious and language learning.

Study

What it Examines

Uncovering the Ideologies of Internationalization in Lesson Plans through Critical Discourse Analysis (Hahn, 2018)

Japanese lesson plans appear to be implicitly integrating the language of internationalization that has been pushed by government policies over a number of years, despite rare explicit mention. This shows how the discourse of education is systemically changing in Japan.

Exploring Canadian Integration through Critical Discourse Analysis of English Language Lesson Plans for Immigrant Learners (Barker, 2021)

This study explores English language lesson plans for immigrants to Canada, showing how the lesson plans tend to encourage learners to assimilate to Canadian language norms which may, in turn, encourage them to abandon or dilute ways of speaking that more effectively reflect their personal sense of self.

12. Looking At Graffiti

One of my favorite creative uses of discourse analysis is in the study of graffiti. By looking at graffiti, researchers can identify how youth countercultures and counter discourses are spread through subversive means. These counterdiscourses offer ruptures where dominant discourses can be unsettled and displaced.



Study

What it Examines

An exploration of graffiti on university's walls: A corpus-based discourse analysis study (Al-Khawaldeh et al, 2017)	The study shows how graffiti is a site for conversations around important issues to youths, including taboo topics, religion, and national identity.
Graffiti slogans and the construction of collective identity: evidence from the anti-austerity protests in Greece (Serafis, Kitis & Argiris, 2018)	This study from Greece shows how graffiti can be used in protest movements in ways that attempt to destabilize dominant economic narratives promoted in traditional media narratives.

The Origins Of Discourse Analysis

1. Foucault

French philosopher Michel Foucault is a central thinker who shaped discourse analysis. His work in studies like *Madness and Civilization* and *The History of Sexuality* demonstrate how our ideas about insanity and sexuality have been shaped through language.

The ways the church speaks about sex, for example, shapes people's thoughts and feelings about it.

The church didn't simply make sex a silent taboo. Rather, it actively worked to teach people that desire was a thing of evil, forcing them to suppress their desires.

Over time, society at large developed a suppressed normative approach to the concept of sex that is not necessarily normal except for the fact that the church reiterates that this is the only acceptable way of thinking about the topic.

Similarly, in *Madness and Civilization*, a discourse around insanity was examined. Medical discourse pathologized behaviors that were 'abnormal' as signs of insanity. Were the dominant medical discourse to change, it's possible that abnormal people would no longer be seen as insane.

One clear example of this is homosexuality. Up until the 1990s, being gay was seen in medical discourse as an illness. Today, most of Western society sees that this way of looking at homosexuality was extremely damaging and exclusionary, and yet at the time, because it was the dominant discourse, people didn't question it.

2. Norman Fairclough

Fairclough (2013), inspired by Foucault, created some key methodological frameworks for conducting discourse analysis.



Fairclough was one of the first scholars to articulate some frameworks around exploring 'text as discourse' and provided key tools for scholars to conduct analyses of newspaper and policy texts.

Today, most methodology chapters in dissertations that use discourse analysis will have extensive discussions of Fairclough's methods.

Conclusion

Discourse analysis is a popular [primary research method](#) in media studies, cultural studies, education studies, and communication studies. It helps scholars to show how texts and language have the power to shape people's perceptions of reality and, over time, shift dominant ways of framing thought. It also helps us to see how power flows through texts, creating 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' in society.

Key examples of discourse analysis include the study of television, film, newspaper, advertising, political speeches, and interviews.

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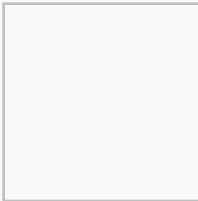
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