



## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS MODELS: STRUCTURAL, FUNCTIONAL, AND CRITICAL APPROACHES

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**Annotation:** *This article presents a comparative study of three major discourse analysis models: structural, functional, and critical approaches. The research aims to identify their key features, similarities, and differences in analyzing language beyond the sentence level. Using a qualitative methodology, the study examines various types of discourse, including academic, classroom, and media texts. The findings indicate that the structural approach focuses on textual cohesion and formal organization, the functional approach emphasizes communicative purposes and context, while the critical approach explores power relations and ideological meanings embedded in discourse. The study concludes that these approaches are complementary and should be integrated for a more comprehensive understanding of discourse in modern linguistics.*

**Аннотация:** *В данной статье представлен сравнительный анализ трех основных моделей дискурса-анализа: структурного, функционального и критического подходов. Цель исследования — выявить их ключевые особенности, сходства и различия при анализе языка за пределами уровня предложения. В работе используется качественная методология, основанная на анализе различных типов дискурса, включая академический, учебный и медийный тексты. Результаты показывают, что структурный подход сосредоточен на когезии и формальной организации текста, функциональный подход акцентирует внимание на коммуникативных целях и контексте, а критический подход исследует власть и идеологию, отраженные в языке. Делается вывод о том, что данные подходы являются взаимодополняющими и должны использоваться комплексно для более полного понимания дискурса.*

**Annotatsiya:** *Mazkur maqolada diskurs tahlilining uch asosiy modeli — strukturaviy, funksional va kritik yondashuvlar qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi ushbu yondashuvlarning gap darajasidan yuqori til birliklarini tahlil qilishdagi asosiy xususiyatlari, o'xshashliklari va farqlarini aniqlashdan iborat. Tadqiqot sifat metodologiyasi asosida olib borilib, akademik, o'quv va ommaviy axborot vositalari diskurslari tahlil qilindi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, strukturaviy yondashuv matnning bog'liqligi va formal tuzilishiga e'tibor qaratadi, funksional yondashuv kommunikativ*



*maqsad va kontekstni asosiy omil sifatida ko'radi, kritik yondashuv esa diskursdagi hokimiyat va ideologiyani tahlil qiladi. Xulosa qilib aytganda, ushbu yondashuvlar bir-birini to'ldiradi va zamonaviy lingvistikada diskursni to'liq tushunish uchun integratsiyalashgan holda qo'llanilishi lozim.*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, discourse analysis has become an important and rapidly developing field within linguistics. Unlike earlier approaches that mainly focused on grammar and sentence structure, discourse analysis looks at how language is actually used in real-life communication. It tries to understand not only what is said, but also how and why it is said, taking into account context, intention, and interaction between people. As interest in discourse has grown, different approaches have been developed to study it from various perspectives. Among them, structural, functional, and critical approaches are considered the most widely used. Each of these approaches focuses on different aspects of language, which makes them both distinct and, at the same time, complementary.

The structural approach is mainly concerned with how texts are organized. It pays attention to elements such as cohesion and coherence, showing how sentences are linked together to form meaningful texts. This approach is useful for understanding the formal structure of language, although it does not always fully explain how meaning is shaped by context. The functional approach, on the other hand, views language as a tool for communication. It focuses on how people

use language to express ideas, interact with others, and achieve specific purposes. Influenced by Halliday's work, this approach highlights the importance of context and the relationship between language and its function in real situations.

The critical approach, often known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), goes a step further by exploring the connection between language and society. It examines how language can reflect power, ideology, and social inequality. This approach is especially useful when analyzing media, political speeches, and institutional communication, where language is often used strategically. Although these approaches have been widely studied, they are often discussed separately. As a result, it can be difficult to see how they relate to each other or how they can be used together. This study aims to compare structural, functional, and critical discourse analysis models in order to better understand their similarities and differences.

The main idea behind this research is that no single approach can fully explain the complexity of discourse. By looking at them together, it becomes possible to gain a more complete and balanced understanding of how language works in different contexts. This is particularly relevant today, as



communication continues to evolve in digital, educational, and social environments.

## Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research approach, as the main goal is to understand how different discourse analysis models interpret language in context rather than to measure numerical data. A qualitative method was chosen because it allows for a deeper and more flexible analysis of language use across different situations. The data for this research were selected from three types of discourse: academic texts, classroom interactions, and media materials. These sources were chosen intentionally in order to represent different communicative environments and to observe how discourse functions in each of them. Academic texts provide structured and formal language, classroom discourse reflects interactive communication, and media discourse often contains elements of persuasion and ideology.

The analysis was carried out in several stages. First, the selected texts were examined from a structural perspective, focusing on cohesion, coherence, and the organization of linguistic elements. At this stage, attention was given to how sentences and ideas are connected within the text. Next, a functional analysis was conducted. This stage focused on the communicative purpose of the discourse, the role of context, and the interaction between participants. The aim here was to

understand how meaning is shaped by the situation in which language is used. Finally, the same data were analyzed using a critical approach. In this stage, the focus shifted to identifying underlying meanings, such as expressions of power, ideology, or social relations. Particular attention was paid to how language might influence or reflect broader social structures. By applying these three approaches to the same set of data, it became possible to compare their strengths and limitations more clearly. This comparative method helped to reveal how each model contributes to the overall understanding of discourse and how they can complement one another in linguistic analysis.

## Results

The analysis of the selected discourse samples—academic texts, classroom interactions, and media materials—demonstrates that each discourse analysis model offers a distinct perspective on how language functions. When the same data are examined through structural, functional, and critical approaches, it becomes clear that each model highlights different layers of meaning. This confirms that discourse is a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully explained by a single analytical framework.

## Structural Findings

From a structural point of view, the main focus is on how texts are organized and how linguistic elements are connected. In the academic texts analyzed, a high level of cohesion was



observed. Authors frequently used linking devices such as conjunctions (“however,” “therefore,” “in addition”), as well as reference words (“this,” “it,” “these findings”) to maintain continuity. These elements helped guide the reader through the text and ensured logical progression of ideas.

In classroom discourse, structural features appeared in a simpler and more repetitive form. Teachers often repeated key terms or reformulated questions to support students’ understanding. For example, when a teacher asked, “What is discourse?” and the student responded, “Discourse is language in use,” the repetition of the term “discourse” reinforced coherence and clarity. Such patterns show how even basic structural elements play an important role in maintaining communication. However, while the structural approach successfully explains how texts are built and organized, it does not fully account for the influence of context or the intentions behind language use. It describes the “form” of discourse well, but not always its deeper meaning.

### **Functional Findings**

The functional analysis provided a more dynamic understanding of the data by focusing on how language is used in context. In academic discourse, language was primarily used to explain concepts, present arguments, and support claims. This resulted in more formal and carefully structured sentences, reflecting the communicative goal of clarity and precision. In classroom interaction, the

purpose of communication was different. The language used was more interactive and often depended on the relationship between teacher and students. The teacher typically guided the conversation by asking questions, giving feedback, or prompting further responses. Students, in turn, responded based on their level of understanding. This exchange illustrates how meaning is not fixed but is constructed through interaction. Media discourse showed yet another variation. Here, language was often used not only to inform but also to influence. For example, statements such as “Experts warn that new measures are necessary” carry both informational and persuasive elements. The use of the word “experts” adds authority, while “necessary” suggests urgency. From a functional perspective, this demonstrates how language choices are shaped by communicative goals and audience expectations.

Overall, the functional approach reveals how meaning is closely connected to context, intention, and interaction, making it particularly useful for analyzing real-life communication.

### **Critical Findings (CDA)**

The critical discourse analysis uncovered deeper and less visible aspects of meaning, especially in media and institutional discourse. One of the key observations was the frequent use of vague or generalized expressions, such as “authorities have decided” or “it is believed that.” These constructions often hide the actual source of power or



responsibility, making it difficult to identify who is behind certain decisions.

From a critical perspective, such language is not neutral. Instead, it reflects underlying power structures and can influence how information is perceived. For instance, by using the term “authorities,” the speaker invokes legitimacy and control without specifying accountability. In academic discourse, ideological elements were less explicit but still present. Certain terms and frameworks reflected particular theoretical positions, which subtly shaped how information was presented. In classroom discourse, power relations were also evident, though in a different way. The teacher controlled the flow of interaction by selecting who speaks, asking questions, and evaluating responses. This demonstrates how power operates even in everyday communication.

The critical approach, therefore, provides valuable insights into how language is connected to broader social, institutional, and ideological contexts—areas that are often overlooked in purely structural or functional analyses.

### Comparative Overview

When comparing the three approaches, it becomes clear that each one contributes to understanding discourse in a unique way:

- The structural approach explains how discourse is constructed and organized at the textual level.

- The functional approach shows how discourse operates in context and serves communicative purposes.

- The critical approach reveals how discourse reflects power, ideology, and social relations.

Rather than contradicting each other, these approaches complement one another. The findings suggest that relying on only one model may lead to a limited interpretation of discourse. In contrast, combining these perspectives allows for a more comprehensive and balanced analysis.

### Discussion

The results of this study highlight that discourse cannot be understood through a single analytical lens. Each of the three approaches—structural, functional, and critical—offers a different way of interpreting language, and together they provide a more complete picture of how discourse operates.

The structural findings confirm that cohesion and organization are essential for building meaningful texts. Without clear connections between ideas, communication becomes fragmented and difficult to follow. However, the analysis also shows that structure alone does not explain why certain linguistic choices are made. For example, while cohesive devices ensure clarity, they do not reveal the speaker’s intention or the social context in which the discourse occurs. This limitation suggests that structural analysis, although necessary, is not sufficient on its own. The functional approach addresses this gap by focusing



on language as a tool for communication. The findings demonstrate that meaning is strongly influenced by context, purpose, and interaction. In classroom discourse, for instance, meaning is shaped through dialogue, where both teacher and student contribute to the construction of knowledge. Similarly, in media discourse, language is often carefully selected to achieve specific communicative goals, such as informing, persuading, or influencing public opinion. This supports the idea that language is not static but dynamic, constantly adapting to different situations.

The critical analysis adds another important dimension by uncovering hidden meanings related to power and ideology. The use of vague expressions such as “authorities” or “experts” in media discourse illustrates how language can obscure responsibility and shape perception. This finding aligns with previous research in Critical Discourse Analysis, which argues that language is closely connected to social structures and power relations. Even in classroom settings, the teacher’s role in controlling interaction reflects subtle forms of institutional authority. These observations show that discourse is not neutral but is often shaped by underlying social forces.

One important insight from this study is that the three approaches are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they can be seen as different layers of analysis. The structural approach focuses on form, the functional approach on use, and the critical approach on meaning within a

broader social context. When combined, they allow for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of discourse. This integrated perspective is particularly relevant in modern contexts, where communication is increasingly complex. In digital environments, for example, language is influenced not only by structure and function but also by social dynamics, identity, and power relations. Therefore, relying on a single analytical model may lead to incomplete conclusions.

Overall, the analysis suggests that a comprehensive study of discourse should involve multiple approaches. By combining structural, functional, and critical perspectives, researchers can better capture the complexity of language in use and provide more meaningful interpretations of discourse in various contexts.

## Conclusion

This study set out to compare three major approaches to discourse analysis—structural, functional, and critical—in order to better understand how each of them interprets language beyond the sentence level. The findings show that each approach offers valuable insights, but at the same time, each has its own limitations when used independently. The structural approach proved useful in explaining how texts are organized and how coherence is achieved through linguistic devices. However, it mainly focuses on form and does not fully address the role of context or intention. The functional approach, in contrast,



provided a clearer understanding of how language operates in real communication, emphasizing purpose, interaction, and situational context. Meanwhile, the critical approach revealed deeper layers of meaning by highlighting the influence of power, ideology, and social structures within discourse.

One of the key conclusions of this research is that discourse is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon. No single model is capable of capturing all its dimensions. For this reason, the study supports the idea of an integrated approach, where structural, functional, and critical perspectives are used together. Such a combination allows researchers to move from surface-level analysis to a more comprehensive

interpretation of meaning. In addition, the study shows that these approaches are particularly relevant in contemporary contexts, including education, media, and digital communication. As language continues to evolve in these environments, the need for flexible and multi-dimensional analytical tools becomes even more important.

Finally, this research suggests that future studies could benefit from applying integrated discourse analysis to specific real-world data, such as online learning platforms or social media communication. This would not only strengthen theoretical understanding but also contribute to practical applications in linguistics, education, and communication studies.

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