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CRITIQUE AND REFLEXIVITY: EXPLORING THE "C" IN C/RITICAL DISCOURSE STUDIES (CDS) INTRODUCTION: THE EDITORS' VIEW

ABSTRACT

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) stands apart from "non-critical" approaches by not only analyzing the role of language in society, but by examining how and why it is entangled with power relations and ideology. Yet, what constitutes the "critical" in CDS often remains conceptually ambiguous. This Special Issue addresses these ambiguities, focusing on ideology, power, critique, and reflexivity. Bringing together contributions primarily from Greek scholars, it aims to foster reflexive, intertextual dialogue and to advance the academic recognition and institutional presence of CDS in Greece, while also engaging broader questions about its evolving meaning and role in critical scholarship.

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ΚΡΙΤΙΚΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΑΣΤΟΧΑΣΤΙΚΟΤΗΤΑ: ΔΙΕΡΕΥΝΩΝΤΑΣ ΤΟ «Κ» ΣΤΙΣ ΚΡΙΤΙΚΕΣ ΣΠΟΥΔΕΣ ΛΟΓΟΥ (ΚΣΛ) ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ: Η ΟΠΤΙΚΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΗΤΡΙΩΝ

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Οι Κριτικές Σπουδές Λόγου (ΚΣΛ) διακρίνονται από τις «μη-κριτικές» προσεγγίσεις, καθώς δεν περιορίζονται στην περιγραφή του ρόλου της γλώσσας στην κοινωνία, αλλά επιδιώκουν να εξηγήσουν πώς και γιατί η γλώσσα συνδέεται με την ιδεολογία και με σχέσεις εξουσίας. Ωστόσο, η έννοια της «κριτικής» παραμένει συχνά ασαφής. Το παρόν Ειδικό Τεύχος εξετάζει αυτές τις ασάφειες, εστιάζοντας στην ιδεολογία, την εξουσία, την κριτική και την αναστοχαστικότητα. Με άρθρα κυρίως από Έλληνες ερευνητές και Ελληνίδες ερευνήτριες, επιδιώκει την ενίσχυση ενός αναστοχαστικού διακειμενικού διαλόγου και την προώθηση της ακαδημαϊκής αναγνώρισης και θεσμικής παρουσίας των ΚΣΛ στην Ελλάδα, ενώ παράλληλα θέτει ευρύτερα ερωτήματα σχετικά με τη μεταβαλλόμενη σημασία και τον ρόλο τους στην κριτική επιστημονική σκέψη.

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1. MAPPING CDS WITHIN THE DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL PARADIGMS

In 1991, during what since has become a historic symposium in Amsterdam, Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Gunther Kress, and Theo van Leeuwen, introduced Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a theory and methodological approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). CDA sought to differentiate itself from other types of discourse analysis within and beyond linguistics, by integrating both linguistic/semiotic and social dimensions, through a combination of close textual analysis with a social orientation of discourse. Consequently, CDA is par excellence an interdisciplinary analysis, aiming to reveal the relationships between the discursive and the social practice. In fact, some strands of CDA scholars advocate for "transdisciplinarity," which is a distinct form of interdisciplinary scientific inquiry (Fairclough, 2005). What sets it apart is that, while combining different scientific disciplines to address research questions, like linguistics with social theories, it fosters a "dialogue" between them, serving as a source for the theoretical and methodological development of each discipline.

Nevertheless, what has truly distinguished CDA from other "non-critical" discourse analytical approaches is the fact that analysis moves beyond description and interpretation of the role of language in the social world, toward explaining why and how language does the work that it does (Fairclough, 1992). In other words, it is its commitment to three main and constitutive concepts: *power, ideology*, and *critique* that shapes a problem-oriented, interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary approach.

CDA has changed significantly since 1991, insofar as many different approaches have emerged emphasizing the interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary dimension of the field through the synergy between humanities and social sciences. In this vein, more and more scholars have been opting recently for the term "Critical Discourse Studies" (CDS) to denote the expansion of the field as well as to decenter the exclusivity of language-based analyses (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Many new and innovative approaches to CDS have been developed on the basis of different theoretical frameworks or methodological tools, and all of them remain problem-oriented and aim to demystify ideologies and power relations. The varying degree of emphasis on power relations, social consequences, and the construction of truth underscores the polyphonic nature of the field

in forming a theoretical nexus that incorporates various approaches and analytical frameworks (Boukala & Stamou, 2020).

Along these lines, James Gee (2004) draws a distinction between "Critical Discourse Analysis" (abbreviated as CDA) in initial caps and "critical discourse analysis" in lowercase. He explains that CDA refers to a specific type of analysis articulated by scholars like Norman Fairclough, Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, Theo van Leeuwen, and those aligning with them. In contrast, "critical discourse analysis" in lowercase encompasses a broader range of approaches, including Gee's own work, as well as that of John Gumperz (1982), Dell Hymes (1972), and Ron and Suzanne Scollon (1981). These scholars engage in critically oriented discourse analysis without explicitly labeling their work as CDA. On the other hand, there are cases where a CDA study claims to be critical, when, in fact, is not. After all, the mere adoption of a "critical" framework does not guarantee that the knowledge generated will be emancipatory (Latour, 2004).

All that said, the "C" (capitalized or not) in CDA/CDS often remains vague, both in terms of its relation to power and ideology, as well as regarding the researcher's position itself. Expanding on the latter, "critical" here can be understood as engaging the world through a critical lens, by attempting to foster social change, but also as clarifying the political positioning of the researcher and engaging in continuous self-reflection while undertaking research. Research in CDS is socially embedded and dependent on social structures, while at the same time researchers are situated within the same social structures and power hierarchies they are researching/exploring. The "critical impetus" is central in CDS (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

In what follows, we aim to explore the core concepts that stand for the "C" in CDS, namely, ideology, power, and critique, drawing from Marxist and post-structuralist theory, while highlighting the importance of reflexivity and researcher positionality. We, then, outline the aims of the special issue and the reflexive questions posed to contributors. The final section presents the seven contributions of the special issue —three by the editors and four by CDS scholars— which deepen the volume's critical dialogue.

2. CORE CONCEPTS IN A PROBLEM-ORIENTED, TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH: IDEOLOGY, POWER, AND CRITIQUE

2.1. Ideology/Ideologies

In Marxist and post-Marxist theory, there is an important distinction between "ideologies" (in plural) and "ideology" (in singular). *Ideologies* refer to specific and distinct belief systems or worldviews, such as political, religious, cultural, and social ideologies, such as Christian, democratic, feminist, and Marxist ideology. These reflect the interests and positions of particular social classes or groups. They are historically situated and contested. By contrast, *ideology* refers to a structural and enduring mechanism that functions across all societies—its content can vary, but its form remains consistent.

Following Althusser (1971), ideology is not simply a set of ideas but a material structure that reproduces social relations. It does so by shaping how individuals come to understand themselves and their place in the world—not through force, but through consent and internalization. In this sense, ideology "has no history," because it is a constant condition for subject formation and social cohesion. Althusser redefines ideology not as illusion or mere discourse, but as lived practice. Ideology has a material existence in the institutions, rituals, and routines of everyday life—from education and media to the family, the church, and the workplace. These practices interpellate individuals as subjects, aligning them—often unconsciously—with the dominant social order. It is through these normalized behaviors that ideology becomes effective–that is, shaping what feels natural, expected, or inevitable.

Drawing on the obscuring function of ideology, and on the idea of the unconscious, from Freud and Lacan, Althusser argues that "ideology is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (p. 241b). He explores this by questioning why people need this imaginary relation instead of directly understanding the real conditions. The concept of material alienation suggests that the harsh realities of these conditions compel people to create representations that distance them from reality. In other words, the alienating nature of capitalist production leads people to construct narratives that downplay the severity of these conditions, thus further alienating them from the real situation. This "double distancing," or alienation of alienation, acts like a

painkiller, helping people avoid the discomfort of facing the reality of their conditions. Without these narratives, people would be acutely aware of their alienation and might be driven to revolt or experience severe distress. Althusser's ideas hinge on the notion that what is reflected in ideological representations is the "real world," or the real conditions of existence.

To summarize, Althusser argues that ideology does not reflect the real world itself but rather the way individuals perceive their relationship to it. It is about how power is embedded in practice. It functions to make the existing order appear natural or unchangeable or even desirable. This emphasis on consent, normalization, and the lived experience of ideology resonates with Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony (1971), which expands our understanding of ideological control by focusing on how dominant groups manufacture common sense—the everyday, taken-for-granted assumptions through which consent to power is continuously renewed.

According to Gramsci, the ruling class maintains control, not just through coercion, but also through ideological means, by establishing a cultural hegemony. This means that the dominant ideology becomes so pervasive and accepted that it becomes the "common sense" view of the world: historically constructed notions of the world that include taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs that people hold. This cultural domination makes it difficult for alternative ideologies to emerge and be recognized. Thus, hegemony works silently, as it controls people's ideas through the consensual acceptance of the dominant ideology.

The ruling class achieves this by influencing cultural and social institutions, which disseminate its worldview and norms, making them appear as the "common sense" of the time. To return to Althusser (1971), beyond the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), such as the police and the military, which enforce order through coercion and violence, there are also the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). These include institutions like schools, churches, family and the media, which normalize the ideology of the ruling class, ensuring the reproduction of the conditions of production.

Drawing upon Althusser and Gramsci's works, Terry Eagleton (1991) emphasizes how ideology operates through discursive practices and cultural productions. He asserts that ideology has no universal definition as it is related to specific contexts, discursive and material practices; it is a terrain of struggle that is formed on the basis of history, language, and politics.

In a similar vein, the Frankfurt School of Social Research, particularly Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) developed a critical theory that extends Marxist analysis into the realm of mass media, culture, and

everyday life. Their concept of "culture industry" captures how cultural goods are mass produced and consumed as a commodity in capitalist societies. They argue that such commodified entertainment functions to manipulate and pacify the public. Far from being a space for critical thought and reflection, culture becomes a vehicle for reinforcing dominant ideology by promoting conformity and distraction. This ideological process, they argue, produces a passive, uncritical audience more invested in entertainment than in questioning social or political realities—thus reproducing the very conditions of domination that critical theory seeks to expose.

Taken together, these perspectives offer a multifaceted understanding of ideology/ideologies as both structure and practice —deeply embedded in institutions, discourses, and everyday life. Whether through Althusser's interpellation, Gramsci's cultural hegemony, Eagleton's discursive terrain, or the Frankfurt School's critique of mass culture, ideology emerges as a dynamic process that sustains power by shaping perception, experience, subjectivity, and behavior. It is through its normalization as "common sense" that ideology becomes most effective, making social domination appear not only legitimate, but inevitable. Ultimately, dominant ideologies function to preserve the power and interests of the ruling class by securing consent and muting dissent.

2.2. The Concept of "Ideology" in CDS

Marxist theory has been highly influential in the development of CDS, and the concept of "ideology" holds a central role in the field. However, it has not been used uniformly, even among founding scholars. For instance, Fairclough and Wodak refer to "ideologies" (in the plural) but primarily mean "the dominant ideology"–"Ideologies are particular ways of representing and constructing society which reproduce unequal relations of power, relations of domination and exploitation" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 275).

On the other hand, van Dijk has adopted the Marxist conceptualization of "ideologies" (in the plural), as "the 'axiomatic' basis of the shared social representations of a group and its members" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 126), which allow group members to make sense of the world and to serve the interests of their group. Without dismissing the fact that ideologies of the elite tend to become dominant, he argues for more general (and less pejorative) conceptualizations of ideologies, that "are not inherently negative, nor limited to social structures of domination" (p. 11), concluding that "[a] general concept of ideology…allows comparison among different

kinds of ideologies, the changes of ideologies from systems of resistance to systems of domination (or vice versa)" (p. 11).

Although definitions of ideology/ideologies may vary within CDS, it is evident that the focus is on analyzing the dominant ideology primarily through the examination of institutional and public texts from education, politics, advertising, and the media, among others. This aligns with Luke's (1997) assertion that CDS is an approach that examines the language and discourse of social institutions. In Marxist terms, these texts are part of the Ideological State Apparatuses and the "culture industry," commonly referred to as "elite discourse" (van Dijk, 1993). This analytical approach builds on the assumption that the voices of media and political elites have privileged access to the public sphere are widely respected socially, thus controlling discursive and ideological processes. This, among other things, distinguishes CDS from other discourse analytical approaches, such as discursive psychology, that focus, instead, on everyday talk (e.g., Condor, 2000).

More importantly, most theoretical articulations of CDS are grounded in the Marxist concept of "ideology as material practice," particularly as elaborated by Louis Althusser, and extended to the realm of language and discourse, which are understood as key sites where ideology is materialized and enacted. For instance, Wodak describes CDS as "fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control when these are manifested in language" (2006, p. 53). Similarly, van Dijk notes that CDS primarily studies "the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (2001, p. 352).

Taken together, these points suggest that by viewing language/discourse as a material practice of ideology that both reflects and shapes ideology, rather than as a neutral or transparent medium for expressing thought, CDS engages in concrete linguistic analysis. In fact, the "textually-oriented" nature of CDS (e.g., Fairclough, 1992) is a hallmark that often distinguishes them from other more abstract approaches like Foucauldian discourse analysis or Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

2.3. Power

In Marxist theory, power is a central concept intimately linked to class struggle, economic relations, and control over resources and means of

production. The ruling class—the bourgeoisie, who owns the means of production, maintains its dominance through the systematic exploitation of the proletariat, whose labor fuels capital accumulation. Yet, power in Marxist thought is not reducible to economic control alone, but rather appears as a multifaceted formation, involving economic control, political dominance, and ideological influence. The ruling class sustains its power, not only through economic exploitation, but crucially through state apparatuses, and especially, cultural hegemony.

Gramsci's (1971) distinction between "domination" and "hegemony" provides a nuanced understanding of power dynamics within society. Domination refers to the direct exercise of power, often through coercion and force, and typically implemented by state institutions such as the police, military, and legal systems (the Repressive State Apparatuses in Althusser's terms). This form of power is overt and visible, representing the explicit control exerted by the ruling class over the oppressed class. Coercion represents the use of force or threats to ensure compliance from the governed. This can include legal sanctions, physical force, and other forms of direct control, often provoking resistance and opposition.

In contrast, hegemony, as mentioned earlier, involves the subtle and indirect exercise of power through the shaping of ideology and cultural norms. It is the process by which the ruling class secures the active consent and voluntary compliance of the subordinate classes. Consent is achieved by making the ruling class's worldview appear natural, inevitable, and beneficial to all social classes. This involves the manipulation of cultural institutions such as education, religion, media, and family structures (the Ideological State Apparatuses in Althusser's terms) to propagate values and ideologies that support the existing power structures.

In summary, Gramsci's theory highlights that true control by the ruling class involves both physical coercion and ideological/cultural hegemony, balancing direct power with the manipulation of cultural institutions to maintain dominance. This dual approach ensures that the ruling class can sustain its power both visibly through force and invisibly through ideological influence. For example, the governmental management of the COVID pandemic crisis in Greece and elsewhere has involved both coercive measures to ensure compliance (e.g., police patrols and fines) and hegemonic strategies to gain consent (e.g., press releases and social campaigns).

2.4. The Concept of "Power" in CDS

Power understood through Marxism as an oppressive societal force designed to suppress opposition and preserve the status quo, is a foundational concept in CDS. For instance, van Dijk (2008) understands power as the ability to exert control. Groups hold varying degrees of power depending on their capacity to control the actions and influence the thinking of other groups. This power is rooted in their privilege to access specific (and often scarce) social resources, such as wealth, status, fame, and knowledge, or various forms of public discourse and communication. Along these lines, "the real ethical problem we need to focus on in critical discourse research is...the illegitimate exercise of power, that is power abuse or domination" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 24). This perspective is further echoed by Fairclough, for whom the "critical analysis of discourse is nothing if it is not a resource for struggle against domination" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 216). The dominant group is generally framed as an alliance of governments, capitalists, and other stakeholders who together constitute the ruling bloc within capitalist societies and global capitalism (Fairclough, 2001; Wodak, 2001).

Power, however, is not always exercised in overtly abusive acts by dominant groups; it can also be viewed as an invisible network of relations that circulate within and across social practices, and is enacted through the routines and actions of everyday life. This view of power is derived from Foucault (1972, 1980) and has been particularly popular in discourse theory. Specifically, Foucault challenges the traditional notion that power is a form of domination exercised by specific groups over others. Instead, he sees power as multifaceted and pervasive, being deeply embedded in society. Power is not just exercised by centralized authorities, but also through various technologies and practices of governance that shape individuals' lives, thoughts, and actions.

According to Foucault, power is inextricably linked to knowledge, a concept he terms "power-knowledge." This relationship indicates that the ability to define and control what is considered true or real is, itself, a manifestation of power. This process occurs through discourses that are systematic practices shaping knowledge, social identities, and the objects they describe. Central to Foucault's analysis is also the dynamic interplay between power and resistance, that drives social change. Rather than existing in simple opposition, power and resistance are deeply interconnected, with resistance constantly challenging and redefining how power is exercised in society.

Although Foucauldian discourse analysis differs from CDS in many respects, such as the neglect of textual analysis and the resistance to the Marxist view of ideology and critique (Fairclough, 1992), Foucault's conceptualization of power has been influential among CDS scholars. Chouliaraki and Fairclough assert that "the view of modern power as invisible, self-regulating and inevitably subjecting […] needs to be complemented with a view of power as domination […] Otherwise it can collapse into structural determinism and anti-humanism which leaves no space for agency in social practices" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 24).

2.5. Critique

The concepts of "critique" and "critical" encompass a wide range of meanings and interpretations. Talmy (2015, p. 154) explains that part of the difficulty to define them, lies in "the plurality of critical theories, which are grounded in the varied work of scholars like Marx, the Frankfurt School, Volosinov, Gramsci, Freire…among others," and in the fact that they are constantly evolving. Critical theories are typically focused on issues of power and justice, examining how factors such as the economy, race, class, gender, religion, education, and sexual orientation shape, maintain, or change social systems. Ultimately, critical theories seek not just to interpret the world, like traditional theory, but to change it by fostering greater social justice and equity (Gounari, 2021).

Critique may concern a critical external attitude towards the world and/or an internal attitude about ourselves (as researchers) (Gounari, 2020). The critique of reality is usually knitted to ideology, whereas the critique of the (scientific) self involves issues of reflexivity and positionality.

2.5.1. Critique of Reality

2.5.1.1. Ideology Critique: What/Whose Interests Are Served Through Discourse?

This notion of "critique" is commonly discussed with reference to issues of power and ideology. Specifically, the "critique" of ideology is a fundamental aspect of Marxist theory, aimed at uncovering the ways in which ideology perpetuates inequality and hinders the development of class consciousness. By exposing ideology, Marxists believe that the oppressed classes can develop class consciousness and become aware of their true interests and the exploitative nature of capitalist society. This awareness is seen as a crucial step toward revolutionary change.

Echoing the tradition of ideology critique, CDS is "critical" because it seeks to unveil the ideological function of discourses. Specifically, it aims to identify discourses that embody distorted representations of reality, which perpetuate existing dominant power structures, with the goal to advocate social change. Hence, unlike objectivist social science, CDS does not claim political neutrality; it is explicitly committed to political engagement and social change. In the name of emancipation, CDS aligns with oppressed social groups, using critique to highlight the role of discourse in sustaining unequal power relations. The overarching goal is to use the findings of CDS to support the struggle for radical social transformation.

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) suggest that the results of discourse analysis should be subject to critique along three main aspects. First, "text or discourse immanent critique" focuses on the internal structure and logic of the discourse itself, with the aim of identifying inconsistencies, contradictions, and omissions within the text or discourse. Hence, the primary goal of text or discourse immanent critique is to understand the persuasive techniques and strategies used in the text and to uncover any latent biases or assumptions. Second, "socio-diagnostic critique" seeks to uncover the underlying social functions and ideological effects of discourse, by diagnosing the social problems and power relations that discourse might reflect, reinforce, or challenge. Socio-diagnostic critique is, then, concerned with how discourses contribute to the (re)production of social inequalities and how they align with the interests of specific groups or institutions. Third, "future-related prospective critique" involves a forward-looking approach that considers the potential impact of discourse on future social practices and developments. It is concerned with the possibilities for social change and transformation. Consequently, future-related prospective critique is normative and aspirational, as it not only challenges existing discourses but also envisions and advocates for a more equitable and just social future.

Not all scholars in CDS engage with the traditional ideology critique view. In particular, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) propose a "modified ideology critique," as described by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002). Building on Bhaskar's "critical realism" (though, see Chouliaraki, 2002, for a distancing from Bhaskar), Chouliaraki and Fairclough reject "judgmental relativism," which asserts that all discourses are equally valid representations of reality, because the social consequences of discourses are continually assessed in everyday practices and within a specific discursive space, in which there is already a set of criteria for what is accepted as

"right" or not. However, they endorse "epistemic relativism," which posits that all discourses arise from specific positions within social life. This contrasts with traditional ideology critique, which might argue that only certain discourses are ideologically influenced. This stance addresses the asymmetry inherent in traditional ideology critique, where researchers often claim to possess the truth, whereas others are viewed as having false consciousness. Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue that determining what is true should not be the exclusive domain of a scientific elite. Instead, they advocate for public, democratic debate where different representations are compared based on both their content and their social consequences. They see the role of science as contributing knowledge to these public debates, providing insights that are not commonly accessible in everyday practices. This perspective treats scientific knowledge as one input among many in public discourse, rather than as the ultimate arbiter of truth.

In summary, the modified ideology critique, while still engaging with Marxist views on ideology, shifts the focus from merely unveiling misrepresentations to a comparative evaluation of discursive representations based on their social consequences and on democratic values. Chouliaraki and Fairclough propose that the ultimate objective of CDS is to contribute to public debate by problematizing the social impact of different discourses. This involves demonstrating the "semiotic aspects" of "social wrongs" (Fairclough, 2009), by distinguishing between those discourses which improve the world and those which do not, thereby using insights from CDS to inform and enhance public discourse.

2.5.1.2. Critique of the Taken-for-Granted: How Else Could It Be?

This perspective on critique is in tune with post-structuralist discourse analytical approaches, such as Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory. It suggests that what we perceive as "reality," "objectivity," and "truth" are actually understandings of the world that have become naturalized, that is, "we view them not as *understandings of* the world but *as* the world" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 178). Consequently, critique, in this sense, involves denaturalizing those fixed meanings by highlighting the contingency of the truths constructed through discourse.

As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) explain, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is a form of ideology critique that aims to expose contingency and deconstruct objectivity by underscoring that it could have been different. Yet, unlike traditional ideology critique, it does not claim to offer an

ideology-free truth, acknowledging that researchers themselves inevitably "distort" reality when identifying objects and discussing them. To avoid confusion with traditional ideology critique, Laclau and Mouffe rarely use the concept of ideology, preferring instead to speak of "objectivity."

Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe propose a positive utopia of "radical democracy" that the critical enterprise can help to realize. As taken-for-granted meanings limit the range of possibilities for thought and action, the goal of denaturalization is to transform these meanings into potential objects for continued discussion, thereby expanding the political landscape and enabling action in the world by considering alternative perspectives on the constitution of reality (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

In summary, this perspective on critique may appear more aligned with post-structuralist discourse analytical approaches and somewhat distant from the Marxist "roots" of CDS. However, the focus on objectivity as taken-for-granted understandings of reality echoes Gramsci's concept of the commonsensical effects of dominant ideology. Besides, while advocating for epistemic relativism, it rejects judgmental relativism by advancing positive alternatives for political action. Consequently, although this perspective departs from a social constructionist ontology, it appears to have some parallels with a modified view of ideology critique.

2.5.2. Critique of the (Academic) Self and Reflexivity: What Is My Positionality Within Knowledge Production?

Broadly speaking, reflexivity refers to the practice of self-awareness and critical reflection on the research process. This concept has become increasingly important in social anthropology, particularly within the context of ethnographic fieldwork. Some of its key aspects include the researcher's influence, acknowledging that they are not neutral observers, but their background, identity, beliefs, and emotions can shape how they ask and frame research questions, and interpret and present their findings. It also involves an awareness of the power dynamics between the researcher and the subjects. For instance, researchers must consider how their social position (such as being an outsider of the community they study or having more resources) affects their interactions and the data they collect. Moreover, reflexivity concerns the ethical implications of research, including its potential impact on the very communities it studies and beyond. This may involve questioning how the research might be used, who benefits from it, and how the findings are presented.

In discourse analytical approaches, reflexivity involves recognizing that researchers are embedded in the very language practices they are studying. The purpose of adopting a reflexive approach is shaped by the researcher's own claims about knowledge and reality. As Billig eloquently puts it,

> all discourse analysts face a paradoxical situation. We investigate language, yet at the same time we must use language in order to make our investigations. We have no separate tools to pursue our tasks. Discourse analysis does not, and cannot, exist outside of language: it comprises articles, books, talks etc. We cannot, therefore, rigidly separate the objects of our analyses from the means by which we conduct our analyses (Billig, 2008, p. 783).

By embracing epistemic relativism as mentioned above, it is acknowledged that the researcher cannot be simply an objective observer who sees things as they "truly" are. Instead, the knowledge scholars produce, like all discourse, is constitutive, as it simultaneously shapes and represents reality. But then, a challenge arises when attempting to defend or prioritize one viewpoint over others. For example, how can one provide academic justification for a specific political stance, such as an antiracist, or feminist position? As mentioned earlier, this judgmental relativism may be rejected by adopting a modified ideology critique perspective, where, while accepting that scientific knowledge, as all other forms of knowledge, is historically and culturally specific, and therefore open to ongoing democratic debate, at the same time, it is anchored within a specific discursive space, which determines and sets boundaries for what it is considered "good" or "bad", "true" or "false" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

CDS has been criticized for a lack of reflexivity (e.g. Bucholtz, 2001; Rogers et al., 2005). One point of criticism concerns the adoption of an explicit political stance that privileges the analyst's perspective, positioning the researcher as a sort of political vanguard and as if they were detached from the texts they analyze. This approach echoes the traditional ideology critique perspective. Furthermore, it has been argued that by limiting critical analysis mostly to the textual level, the processes of both text production and reception remain obscure. As a result, CDS scholars may often position themselves primarily as text analysts, despite also serving as the instruments of data collection. Additionally, the audience for these analyses is frequently idealized rather than reflecting actual readers, whose practices of text consumption are largely speculative.

There have been some strategies proposed to enhance reflexivity in discourse analysis. For instance, discursive psychologists have proposed "dialogical research" as an attempt to dismantle the hierarchical relation between researcher and informant (e.g. Condor, 1997). Specifically, by involving informants as co-researchers, this approach attempts to democratize the research process, giving more voice to informants in both the analysis and presentation of findings. This can include presenting the empirical material as a dialogue between the researcher and the researched, using longer interview excerpts, and even involving informants as co-authors.

"Experimental writing" is another reflexive strategy proposed, which challenges the traditional hierarchy between writer and reader by focusing on how research is presented. It criticizes the conventional scientific approach for portraying knowledge as neutral and objective, which can unjustly give it authority. To counter this, some researchers aim to make the construction of the text visible, reminding readers that what they are reading is a contingent representation of reality, not an absolute truth. For instance, Edwards & Potter (1992) incorporate "reflexive" boxes in their work on discursive psychology, where they openly discuss the status of their knowledge and the decisions behind it. These interruptions in the conventional flow of the text highlight that knowledge is not pre-existing but is shaped by the choices of individuals in specific contexts.

Additionally, conducting a reflexive discourse analysis of the scientific texts produced by discourse analysts themselves has been proposed as a strategy. This approach aims to evaluate and reshape the analyst's socio-discursive interactions with the world, ensuring they align with their intentional socio-political goals and minimizing their unconscious role in perpetuating the existing socio-political order (Alejandro 2021). On the same page, Billig (2008) has emphasized that the way CDS is written is more than just a matter of style, so that analysts should carefully examine their own use of language. He highlights the frequent use of nominalizations and passive constructions by many CDS scholars in their scientific texts —even in those where they argue that these linguistic choices have significant ideological functions, such as obscuring agency and reifying processes. Although these linguistic constructions are typical of scientific writing, Billig argues that by unreflexively using the same linguistic forms they critically analyze, analysts inadvertently reinforce the very language patterns whose ideological potential they are warning against (see, though, Fairclough, 2008, for a reply to Billig).

3. THE SCOPE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This Special Issue features three reflective pieces by the co-editors and four articles that all wrestle with the questions we posed. Considering that this issue is published in a Greek academic journal with a longstanding tradition in social sciences, our aim is to promote Critical Discourse Studies among both Greek and international readership, while advancing the ongoing dialogue about its academic recognition and institutional presence in Greece. This objective has guided the selection of contributors, most of whom are Greek.

As Editors of this Issue, we have invited contributions to explore the following central questions:

- How have CDA/S scholars embodied the "critical impetus" in their work?
- To what extent do we, as CDS researchers, articulate an explicit position of scholarly dissent in relationships of societal dominance and inequality?
- To what degree do we apply "critique" to our own work and researcher positionality methodologically and/or theoretically?

We specifically asked contributors to the Special Issue to wrestle with some reflexive questions in their CDS research:

Theoretical foundations of the research

- To what extent does their research encompass both linguistic/semiotic and social dimensions? How balanced is the treatment of these aspects, and how do they intersect and inform each other within their analysis?
- Do they employ the concept of "critique" or "critical" within their research framework? How do they conceptualize these notions?
- Do they integrate the concept of "ideology" into their research? What theoretical underpinnings shape their conceptualization of ideology?

Socio-political underpinnings of the research

- In what ways is their research problem-oriented, delving into the intricate dynamics of discourse to unearth underlying social injustices and inequalities? What are these "social wrongs" they research and how do CDS contribute to their understanding?

- How are issues of power relations raised (implicitly or explicitly)? What are the most salient power dynamics emerging in their research and how do they shape and perpetuate social realities? How do these power dynamics manifest linguistically and semiotically?

Researcher positionality

- What is their researcher positionality within the research process? Have they critically reflected on their own political stance and biases?
- How does their positionality influence the selection of the research topic, the interpretation of data, and the overarching analytical framework?

Through this discussion, our hope is that existing theoretical frameworks will be problematized/challenged, and therefore, developed and amplified to provide for a more grounded approach on the "Critical" and beyond.

A reflective piece is, at its core, a scholar's invitation to the reader to join them in an intimate space—where the scholarly and the affective, the academic and the personal intersect, and where contradictions and tensions may emerge in raw, unfiltered ways. As editors, we approached our contributors' invitations into these reflexive spaces with respect, engaging more as critical friends than as "objective reviewers." In the same spirit, we now extend that invitation to you, our readers, and ask that you approach this space critically, with thoughtfulness and openness.

The editorial process opened up new spaces for all three of us. We found ourselves grappling with the vulnerability of laying our scholarly selves bare —exposing ideologies, values, and beliefs in ways that are often dismissed as "nonacademic" or not sufficiently serious in the academy. Writing reflexively is never easy. It is inextricably tied to the politics of expression, the conditions under which individuals and groups are allowed to speak, to write, and to be heard, and how these conditions are structured by relations of power.

Even within post-positivist and critical traditions, we are often trained to keep the self outside the bounds of scholarship, or, at best, to bring it in with caution, as if asking for temporary permission to justify our interest in and engagement with a topic. Rarely are we encouraged to use the self and our knowledge of the self as a legitimate epistemology in our analytical and conceptual work. But we must ask: What spaces are available to CDS scholars to think, create, and be heard? What stories are deemed worthy of telling? Expression is not a neutral act; it is shaped by racialized, gendered,

classed, and other histories of exclusion. Reflexivity is not a contaminant that threatens disciplinary rigor —it is a way of claiming space and asserting epistemic authority. Expression is intimately tied to structural access, legitimacy, and power.

We noticed this challenge early on in the editorial process. Despite our open call encouraging authors to write in the first person, almost all of them hesitated to bring positionality into the foreground. While the pieces we received were rigorous and compelling in their theoretical and methodological contributions, the first-person voice was often subdued. We highlighted this through the review process and encouraged revisions that would amplify reflexive presence. Still, we did not anticipate how deeply we, too, would struggle with asserting intellectual and creative agency in our own editorial writing.

We were encouraged by the work of autoethnographers, who have long used personal narrative as a lens through which to interpret the world — stories that reveal how the self is shaped by, and responds to, its sociocultural context. These narratives are not merely confessional; they are analytical, helping us understand how environments shape perspective, behavior, and meaning-making. In turning toward such models, we found inspiration to view reflexivity not as a detour from theory, but as its deepening.

Working on this special issue was also an opportunity for self-awareness and personal discovery. At the same time, the collaboration between three CDS scholars —each coming from different intellectual starting points but sharing a common understanding of critique and ideology— proved to be a deeply enriching experience. Our Zoom meetings became spaces, not only for rich academic exchange, but also for mutual support during challenging personal times. Through our editorial work, then, a meaningful friendship was forged.

4. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

In this Special Issue, we bring together a set of contributions that critically revisit the role of "critical," reflecting on the theoretical, methodological, and ethical contours of CDS in their own work. The first three contributions come from the editorial team, offering a reflexive perspective on our own CDS research, while the remaining four are by other scholars —primarily Greek— who have conducted extensive work in the field.

In *From "Guilty Pleasure" to Critique: Critical Discourse Studies, Reflexivity and Pop Culture*, I, Anastasia Stamou, reflect on my personal

and scholarly trajectory across CDS and pop culture, centering on the enduring tension between academic "guilt" and personal "pleasure"—particularly my enjoyment of Greek TV programs often dismissed as culturally "lowbrow." Drawing on this ambivalence, I examine how CDS, much like my own experience, has historically privileged the analysis of elite and overtly political discourses while marginalizing everyday media and affective engagements. I argue that embracing reflexivity as an epistemological stance can expand the scope and relevance of CDS by acknowledging scholars' own cultural investments and the emotional, lived dimensions of popular media.

In *Wrestling with the Right Side of History: On Discourse, Pedagogy, Time, and the Ethics of Critical Scholarship*, I, Panayota Gounari, explore how "dwelling in the unfamiliar"—as a Greek immigrant intellectual in the United States— becomes both a personal condition and a critical stance, fostering an ethic of discomfort, reflexivity, and resistance to neoliberalism. In a context marked by commodified academia and rising authoritarianism, I argue that exercising criticality requires a deeply historical, politicized, and embodied praxis that resists reduction to a mere analytical lens and remains grounded in social transformation.

In *Critique and Argumentation: Rethinking Antisemitism as Common Sense*, I, Salomi Boukala, reflect on how my work experience in journalism provided me with practical and theoretical insights into the workings of media discourse and its entanglement with political processes. These experiences sparked my critical engagement with CDS and argumentation theory to scrutinize how political arguments —such as antisemitic tropes— are normalized as common sense. This trajectory highlights how professional practice can inform and sharpen scholarly critique.

Lilie Chouliaraki, in *A Historical Overview of Theoretical Narratives and Research Agendas*, offers a sweeping and incisive genealogy of how discourse has been theorized in relation to mediation and power. Tracing four influential paradigms —discourse as communicative power, popular empowerment, textualization of power, and symbolic power— she exposes the shifting epistemological commitments across the humanities and social sciences. The piece culminates with a call to reimagine discourse in the age of algorithmic mediation and AI, urging scholars to hold onto questions of power and critique in computationally infused research landscapes.

Argiris Archakis, in *Critical Notes on the Greek Homogenizing National Discourse from the Perspective of the Post-National Discourse*, interrogates the discursive mechanisms that sustain the Greek racio-national imaginary

in the context of migrant populations in Greece. Drawing on his extensive body of work, Archakis demonstrates how CDS —especially through the lens of Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) concept of critique— offers a powerful framework for exposing what he calls the "hypocrisy of the 'humanitarian/antiracist values' of national discourse" strategies that mask exclusionary and racist discourses under a humanitarian/antiracist guise. Emphasizing the interplay between macro- and micro-levels of analysis and combining ethnography with discourse analysis, he foregrounds the emancipatory potential of prospective critique in unsettling dominant narratives.

In *Exploring the Critical in Critical Approaches to Language Education*, Bessie Mitsikopoulou unpacks the multiple meanings and pedagogical trajectories of "the critical" in language education. Situating the discussion within broader critiques of positivist assumptions in early Applied Linguistics, she maps how notions of criticality —across critical thinking, pedagogy, literacy, and language awareness— challenge apolitical framings of language learning. By juxtaposing these paradigms, she exposes their distinct epistemological and political commitments and considers whether the term "critical" has reached a point of saturation. Her intervention reaffirms language education as a vital terrain for ideological contestation and social transformation.

Finally, Dimitris Serafis and Samuel Bennett, in *Between Methodological "Ebb" and Emancipatory "Tide": Reflecting on the "Critical" Core of Critical Discourse Studies in our Own Work*, revisit the four dimensions of critique —immanent, socio-diagnostic, retrospective, and prospective— while grappling with CDS's internal tensions. They problematize the dilution of critique in discourse analytic work that remains detached from the field's theoretical foundations, and they call for deeper reflexivity about scholars' own roles in sustaining inequalities. Importantly, they advocate for integrating post- and decolonial thought, arguing that CDS must not only lend tools to other fields but also be transformed by them in order to remain relevant in the face of global social injustices.

Together, these contributions compel us to reflect critically on the evolving meanings and practices of "the critical" in CDS and to reimagine our scholarly responsibilities in unsettled political and epistemological times. We hope that the articles will establish a reflexive intertextuality in their critical dialogue.

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