The Greek Review of Social Research, 2025, 165
Print ISSN: 0013-9696 Online ISSN: 2241-8512

Dimitris Serafis[*], *Samuel Bennett*[**]

BETWEEN METHODOLOGICAL "EBB" AND EMANCIPATORY "TIDE": REFLECTING ON THE "CRITICAL" CORE OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDIES IN OUR OWN WORK

ABSTRACT

This article offers a reassessment of the use of the "Critical" in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). In doing so, it aims to "breathe new life" into the discussion so that the concept can be reconsidered and better understood. We return to the immanent - socio-diagnostic, retrospective- and prospective critiques, introduced by the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as a valuable heuristic for considering the "Critical" in CDS. After pinpointing some limitations in contemporary CDS-oriented research, we present examples from our own research practices to show both how "critique" can be foregrounded and how different "forms" of critique can, and should, be combined.

Keywords: *critique; argumentation; normalisation; decolonisation; self-reflexive practice; discourse-historical approach; Frankfurt school*

[*]Assistant Professor, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, The Netherlands, e-mail: d.serafis@rug.nl

[**]Assistant Professor, Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland, e-mail: sbennett@amu.edu.pl

Received: February 20, 2025 Accepted: March 25, 2025 Published: July 30, 2025

Δημήτρης Σεραφής[*], *Samuel Bennett*[**]

ΑΝΑΜΕΣΑ ΣΤΗ ΜΕΘΟΔΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ «ΥΦΕΣΗ» ΚΑΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΠΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΩΤΙΚΗ «ΠΑΛΙΡΡΟΙΑ»: ΕΝΑΣ ΑΝΑΣΤΟΧΑΣΜΟΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ «ΚΡΙΤΙΚΟ» ΠΥΡΗΝΑ ΤΩΝ ΚΡΙΤΙΚΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ ΛΟΓΟΥ ΜΕΣΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΗ ΔΙΚΗ ΜΑΣ ΕΡΕΥΝΑ

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το παρόν άρθρο προσφέρει μια επαναπροσέγγιση της χρήσης της έννοιας της «κριτικής» εντός του πλαισίου των Κριτικών Σπουδών Λόγου (ΚΣΛ). Κατά αυτόν τον τρόπο αυτό, στοχεύει να «δώσει νέα πνοή» στη σχετική συζήτηση, ώστε η έννοια να επανεξεταστεί και να γίνει καλύτερα κατανοητή. Επιστρέφουμε στις μορφές της «κριτικής», που εισήγαγε η Λογο-Ιστορική Προσέγγιση (ΛΙΠ), δηλαδή της «κριτικής που ενυπάρχει στα κείμενα ή στον λόγο» (immanent critique), της «κοινωνιοδιαγνωστικής κριτικής» (socio-diagnostic critique), της «αναδρομικής κριτικής» (retrospective critique) και της «προοπτικής κριτικής» (prospective critique), ως πολύτιμη ευρετική για την εξέταση της εν λόγω έννοιας εντός των ΚΣΛ. Αφού επισημάνουμε ορισμένους περιορισμούς στη σύγχρονη έρευνα που εντάσσεται στις ΚΣΛ, παρουσιάζουμε παραδείγματα από τις δικές μας ερευνητικές πρακτικές για να δείξουμε πώς μπορεί να δοθεί έμφαση στην έννοια της «κριτικής» και πώς μπορούν και πρέπει να συνδυαστούν οι διαφορετικές μορφές κριτικής.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: *κριτική, επιχειρηματολογία, κανονικοποίηση, αποαποικιοποίηση, αυτοαναστοχαστική πρακτική, Λόγο-Ιστορική Προσέγγιση, Σχολή της Φρανκφούρτης*

[*]Επίκουρος Καθηγητής, Πανεπιστήμιο Groningen, Ολλανδία.

[**]Assistant Professor, Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) –or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)– was launched as an academic venture back in 1991, when scholars including Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, Theo van Leeuwen, and Ruth Wodak, among others, gathered to outline ways of doing discourse-analytical research with a view to unraveling how opaque ideological beliefs penetrate public text and talk, and how these end up (re)producing power inequalities and problems in society/ies (see Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 4). van Dijk (2001a) eloquently summarizes it as follows:

> [CDS] is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily *studies* the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by *text and talk* in the social and political *context*. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit *position*, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality (van Dijk, 2001a, p. 352; emphasis added)

Among the distinctive features that constitute the core of this way of doing discourse-analytical research are "[its] constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary approach" and a "critical investigation" of every social phenomenon (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, pp. 2-3 and references therein). At the same time, the rapid rise in popularity of CDS outside of linguistics has arguably diluted the field's reliance on its foundational concepts. CDS scholarship was soon criticized as being "activist" or "ideological", raising at the same time a mostly methodologically-oriented criticism against CDS, regarding the analysis, the collection and use of data, and the proper discussion of the terms employed (e.g. Widdowson, 1995; Žagar, 2010, see below for further discussion). In this regard, some CDS practitioners

1. We would like to thank the researchers that reflected with us on the thoughts that are included in this paper. In particular, we are grateful to Viviane de Melo Resende, Bernhard Forchtner, Audrey Alejandro, Benno Herzog, Theresa Catalano, Stavros Assimakopoulos, Michał Krzyżanowski, Crispin Thurlow, Chris Hart, Salomi Boukala and Eleonora Esposito, for their input and stimulating discussions during the symposium "Reassessing the 'Critical' in CDS". The symposium was co-organised by Samuel Bennett and Dimitris Serafis, hosted by Jolanta Drzewiecka at USI - Università della Svizzera italiana (Lugano, Switzerland) on March 21-22, 2023, and funded by the SNSF - Swiss National Science Foundation (IZSEZ0_216750). Moreover, we are grateful to our colleagues in Poznan and Groningen for offering input and bearing with us while were thinking out loud about these ideas. Last but not least, we owe you a special ''thank you'' for offering us the inspiration for the ''ebb'' and ''tide'' metaphor used in this paper; you know who you are.

have spent the subsequent decades reinforcing their methodological and analytical tools (e.g. Reindorf, 2019). All in all, this concerted effort to hone and develop CDS methodologies has resulted in several publications that synthesize new methods, from several disciplinary areas, such as corpus- (Baker et al., 2008, 2013), cognitive linguistics (Hart, 2010), multimodality (van Leeuwen, 2008; Machin, 2013), and argumentation theory (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Boukala, 2019; Serafis, 2023) that could strengthen CDS, adding rigour to the relevant set of approaches. Nowadays, CDS is recognised – even by its fierce opponents– as a well-respected disciplinary area in social sciences and humanities and today research projects and academic curricula revolve around the methods employed and the topics studied by the field.

However, while this emerging mosaic of approaches can be seen as having strongly enforced the analytical and methodological power of the field, there still remains "a certain gap in CDS theory", which, in its turn, has led to CDS practitioners having to "rethink CDS' theoretical foundations" (Krzyżanowski & Forchtner, 2016, p. 256). Indeed, van Dijk (2008, p. 823) has claimed that there is a "lack of theory about the norms and principles [of CDS'] own critical activity. The field is, by its very nature, homogenous, and one that takes its influences from in- and outside of linguistics. This leads us to a situation in which "[h]ow CDA validates and grounds its own critical standards is therefore not easy to answer" (Forchtner 2011, p. 1). This very assumption has triggered an open-ended debate about the theoretical heterogeneity of the field, and some scholars have gone back to their "critical roots" in order to recentre the "critical" core of CDS, better define the notions employed, and discuss the type(s) of critique that CDS put forth (see Herzog, 2016, 2018; Krzyżanowski & Forchtner, 2016; Graham, 2018).

As we argue in this paper, deciding how much emphasis is placed on the "C" in CDS is part and parcel of the identity of individual scholars, who always have to navigate between the "ebb" of an attempt to put forth rigorous methodological/analytical standards (as everyone in linguistic-oriented social research does) and the "tide" of an attempt to realise a dissident perspective to social injustice and inequalities, and an emancipatory approach to academia (as very few in linguistic-oriented social research were doing thirty years ago). This is the starting point, we argue, for a need to reassess the different angles of critique in CDS and it is in this vein that the "Reassessing 'the Critical' in CDS" symposium was organised, in March 2023, and what we base this paper on.

In the following sections we first introduce what we see as some limitations in the way "the critical" is currently understood and implemented in CDS (see Section 2). Using our own research practices we then present two ways in which criticality and critique can be foregrounded in investigations. In particular, we will showcase how studies from inference in argumentation can foster critique of problematic micro-textual strategies against the macro-level dominant discourses they interrelate with (see Section 3.1) and then delve into the historical trajectories through which macro-level discourses have been normalized, all the while showing the importance of an integration of decolonial studies in a critical discourse-analytic approach (see Section 3.2). Following this, we will forward some concluding thoughts on the topic (see Section 4).

2. LIMITATIONS OF "THE CRITICAL" IN CDS AND A RETURN TO "CRITIQUE"

Like many early career researchers in discourse analysis the formative years of our careers – and in particular our respective first books (Bennett, 2018; Serafis, 2023) – in part consisted of appraising existing approaches to the field, identifying what we considered to be missing and forwarding our own approaches that "plugged a gap." The process of writing doctoral dissertations, articles, books, symposia abstracts and the like, necessitate the critical reading of key texts. But this does not happen in a vacuum and the ideas that this paper builds on should be seen as part of a broader and longer thread of critique of CDS that has percolated since the field's inception and, as we have indicated above, can/should be taken as an important element of field. To paraphrase Kristeva (1980) on intertextuality, it is only later, through the potential for reflection granted to us by temporal distance from that work, that we can insert our own texts into a series of other texts, thus recontextualising the notion of critique. With that in mind, the aim of this section is to parse what we see as an inexhaustive list of the limitations of the dominant notion of "the Critical" in CDS. By foregrounding these, we are problematising "the Critical" and calling for the concept to be reconsidered or at least better used. In so doing, we hope to "breathe new life" into the discussion.

2.1. The Success of CDS and the Law of Unintended Consequences

The first limitation can perhaps be seen as the result of CDS' success as an inter- or trans-disciplinary approach that can be tailored to the study of socio-political phenomena in the humanities. During CDS' early years it was criticised for being both methodologically and conceptually weak. On the former, Widdowson (1995) leveled the criticism that CDS work on, e.g. race, ''cherry picked'' data and was therefore over-interpretive, a refrain that CDS scholars will commonly be met with at more traditional linguistics conferences. From a different starting point in Conversation Analysis (CA) Schegloff (1997) claimed that CDS takes too wide an approach to context and that taking into account anything outside the local context of interaction would lead to merely ideological inferencing. Hammersley (1997), on the other hand questioned the underlying premise of CDS that power-relations need to be taken into account in analysis, arguing that orthodox Marxist theory had been largely discredited (see Breeze, 2011, p. 498).

There is no need here to lay out here the details of how CDS as a field responded (see Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Breeze, 2011; Waugh & Catalano, 2022 for overviews), but the main point for our paper is that these criticisms from outside the field led to those individuals inside to focus more concertedly on methodologies for analysing text and discourse, and on being better aware of the need to define key concepts. And herein lies a problem, and the question of whether CDS has not become a victim of its own success. CDS now offers a rich array of methodologies that can be used in linguistics, discourse studies or further afield to study texts. Among others, van Dijk's (1998) ideological square, the five micro-level strategies of analysis in the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), van Leeuwen's (2007) strategies of legitimation are all so well explained that they are now used in what is termed CDS research, but which lacks explicit critique or fails to engage sufficiently with the theoretical bases of CDS.

Given these processes, we feel there is a legitimate question of whether CDS is becoming CDS-as-method, especially for those outside of linguistic/discursive institutional units. As journal editors and organisers of symposia and conferences we have first-hand experience of this and have lost count of the abstracts, presentations or papers that purport to use CDS but are in actual fact merely applications of methodologies of discourse and text analysis that are almost entirely detached from the theoretical foundations of the field, not least the notion of critique.

There is perhaps not much that CDS can do to rectify this; to some extent the methodologies have ''flown the nest'' and are no longer subject to parental control, though this observation should not be taken as a gatekeeping move. It is also worth pointing out that despite the approach(es) being diluted, the 'brand name' continues to grow in strength, which is good news within the neoliberal university setting of today, as will be discussed later in this paper (see Schmenk et al., 2019 on sloganization and academic branding). Nonetheless, there are consequences, and the refocus on methodologies and concepts perhaps comes at a cost if it is not explicitly accompanied by a "critical", theoretically informed apparatus that employs analytical methods and categories attached to an emancipatory goal. Not least of these is that the critical element in CDS often seems to be underplayed, or at the very least under-defined. For example, a key element of some CDS approaches is its prognostic critique, grounded in many authors' work including the emancipatory critique of Althusser and Adorno. And yet, comparatively few CDS publications do much more than pay lip-service to this and all too often this research stays inside the academy, although Catalano and Waugh (2022) do an excellent job of highlighting such projects (see also Julios-Costa 2025). Lastly, the success of CDS has perhaps led to a situation where other forms of doing discourse analysis critically are not given the space they deserve within the field or happen without 'us' within CDS because they are being done in other fields.

2.2. Not Practicing What We Preach

A second way in which critique has been somewhat forgotten in CDS is through a lack of self-reflection at the individual and field level on our own blind spots regarding our role(s) in maintaining inequalities. There is a "sanctioned ignorance" (Spivak, 1988) concerning the double-hermeneutic (Giddens 1987) position of CDS as an academic field. How do we analyse data using the knowledge of dominant knowledge frames, whilst also trying to challenge them? Despite all of the best intentions of socio-diagnostic critique, how does critical discourse work (including research and institutional praxis) exclude and marginalise? To paraphrase Spiderman: "with great power, comes great responsibility", but is CDS being responsible enough? We see two elements to this conundrum, the institutionalisation of CDS and the eurocentricism of the field, and whilst the former has been flagged up before, the latter is a new challenge.

First, as CDS has solidified as a field or sub-field, there is a risk of it becoming part of a network of power within the neoliberal university structure that some of us claim we seek to challenge. Journals, handbooks, special issues and conferences, the lure of guest lectures, the search for funding, and the emergence of departments and chairs, all ensure that CDS practitioners work within a very narrow set of institutional guidelines. We do not claim that there were halcyon days when CDS was at the barricades or at the vanguard of the revolution; though to be sure, the field emerged out of the values of 1968. Nor is our claim a new one. Billig (2002) wrote about this over twenty years ago, stating that

> [t]he very success of critical psychology – or indeed any other critical sub-discipline based within the current structures of academia – may easily lose its radical impetus as it builds its own institutional basis within the conventional structures of contemporary academic life. The question, therefore, does not concern the success of the critical enterprise, at least as understood in conventional terms. The questions concern the consequences of academic success for a critical endeavour, [and I suggest] that in the present climate success is double-edged. (Billig, 2003, p. 6)

We hesitate to use the word "worsened" here, for as Billig notes, this is the other side of the success. Nonetheless, from the perspective of today, almost a quarter of a century after Billig's intervention, the situation has only become more complex.

Linked to this, we are also reliant on Billig (2008, p. 783) for pointing to a further facet of the double hermeneutic of CDS, this time showing a lack of critical self-awareness of the language used by scholars. Billig (ibid.) notes that these writers "have suggested that nominalization (along with passivization) has important ideological functions such as deleting agency and reifying processes." Yet they are also seemingly blind to the fact that they "tend to use, and thereby instantiate, the very forms of language whose ideological potential they are warning against - such as deleting agency, using passives and turning processes into entities" (see also the Introduction of this volume). Billig also points out that "the concept of 'nominalization' is itself a nominalization; it is typically used in imprecise ways that fail to specify underlying processes". Furthermore, the use of technical jargon makes it harder to understand such texts and therefore they have less chance of reaching general audiences. In his response to Billig's article, Fairclough (2008, p. 811) concedes that "we should be careful about how we write ourselves, and make the question of how we write more of an issue than we have done",

yet nonetheless maintains that "we write with different purposes for different readerships, and that this requires different ways of writing." He goes on to claim that rather than not use problematic language, "we should avoid using such language in problematic ways", and posits that "nominalizations, passives and metaphors as 'good things' that can be 'used badly'".

What this debate shows is that a level of self-reflexive critique is vital to CDS, which brings us to the second point. CDS is still Eurocentric, if not in its geographical reach, then certainly in terms of the origins of its foundational works and the theories underpinning them most of which masquerade as universal but are unaware of the power and origin of "universalising" theories. This has two important consequences we feel the need to discuss here. First, as CDS has spread geographically outwards from Europe, it has come to be used in spaces where critiques of state power are discouraged and in some cases illegal. Analysts in this space become hamstrung in terms of what phenomena they opt to research and how, yet still want to use the methodologies offered by CDS, for example in China or Saudi Arabia. With an increasing illiberal turn in the global North, faculty and students fall victim to reduced national funding streams for some topics and governmental and para-political surveillance or constraint of their work, which can lead to self-censorship in terms of the approaches used and how they are applied. Examples of this include extra funding streams for "patriotic" research in Poland during the Law and Justice government of 2015-2023, potential threats by the "Balanced Internationalisation" bill and accompanying austerity-driven budget cuts in the Netherlands, and the defunding of research projects the US based on a set of undesirable keywords.

Second, post- and decolonial work in humanities has left Critical Discourse Studies CDS relatively untouched up until only very recently. Alongside Bennett (2025), we can point here to the work of Esposito (2021) and Barros and Resende (2021), to work in sociolinguistics by, e.g. Pennycook and Makoni (2020) and Ndhlovu (2021), and to recent workshops on decolonising discourse studies in Augsberg (2022) and Valencia (2024). Thus, whilst claiming to be working critically, at the same time there is not enough problematisaton by CDS scholars, especially in Europe, of their own practices and how, for example, course content and reading lists might inadvertently be perpetuating a colonisation of knowledge and dominant epistemologies, and what this might mean for teaching and research. Likewise, through informal networks established over time across multiple spaces, such as Europe-based journals, workshops and conferences, the

gatekeepers of CDS knowledge are largely white Europeans.[2] We believe there is a real and pressing need for CDS scholars to become much more aware of this imbalance, the consequences in light of the field's purported goal of emancipation and bettering socio-political situations around the world. But has to be more than just following the academic zeitgeist and the "decolonial bandwagon" as Moosavi (2022) calls it. Just giving up the odd 'seat at the table', which for Fuñez-Flores (2023a) is "the liberal notion of individual success, which will always render structural change unnecessary, unrealistic, and undesirable". The integration of post- and de-colonial theories, as well as those from critical pedagogy and global sociology shows how, just as CDS offers other fields a range of excellent theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools, so too can it learn and borrow from others to move the field forward and allow it to meet the challenges it faces today.

2.3. Reisigl and Wodak's Typology of Critique

Just as there are different approaches to the critical study of discourse, there are many understandings of critique (e.g. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). That being said, we believe that Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) list of four ''levels'' of critique is the most comprehensively explained with the field and therefore can, we argue, be operationalised more easily.

More specifically, according to Reisigl & Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), there are four, interrelated types of "critique" that CDS scholarship is (supposed to be) putting forth, namely, (a) "text or discourse immanent critique", (b) "sociodiagnostic critique", (c) "prospective-" and (d) "retrospective critique" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 32; see also Archakis, this volume).[3] These authors define text or discourse immanent critique being "[…] based on a hermeneutic exegesis with the help of specific linguistic and discourse-analytical tools". In other words, at this point, a CDS scholar "aims at discovering inconsistencies, (self-)

2. It should be mentioned, though, that there is a very strong network DNC/ALED conference part of DiscourseNet that has been working on this with a specific group focusing on Discurso y Descolonialidad

3. It is worth pinpointing here that Reisigl & Wodak (2001, p. 32) officially distinguish among three types of critique. Retrospective critique is introduced "as a very specific form of critical social practice directed against the status quo [...] critically reconstructing the past" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, pp. 34-35). So, the authors see this as a specific form of critical social practice, and so we treat it here as separate. We also see this element of critique as central to the DHA, which we both use in our work.

contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse internal […] structures" (Ibid.). As we will show in the next section, an analytical perspective which thoroughly incorporates argumentation theory can enable us to set out to unveil the reasoning that can potentially justify hazardous ideological beliefs and normalise unequal power relations in society (see Serafis, 2023; Serafis & Greco, forthcoming). Most importantly, immanent critique can further inform sociodiagnostic critique. As Reisigl & Wodak (2001, pp. 32-33) put it, this "aims at detecting problematic […] social and political goals and functions of discursive practices […] which are either inferable from the (spoken or written) discourse itself or from contextual, social, historical and political knowledge". At this point, "the analyst exceeds the purely textual or discourse internal sphere [and] makes use of [their] background and contextual knowledge and embeds the communicative or interactional structures of a discursive event in a wider frame of social and political relations, processes and circumstances". In other words, based on a rigorous analytical apparatus (see immanent critique), this is the point when CDS scholars take a stance against dominant discourses that foster inequality; it is at this interplay of the micro-level (see immanent critique) and the macro-level (sociodiagnostic critique) that CDS scholarship can bring to the fore a discourse-analytical emancipatory agenda. Last but not least, this transition from immanent to sociodiagnostic critique enables CDS scholars to move towards prospective/retrospective critique, which is the moment where CDS "seeks to become practical and to change and transform things" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 33ff). To do so, CDS moves back and forth to identify previously established discourses throughout history and seeks to raise critical awareness, for example, by actively participating in consultancies, raising awareness events, that can create cracks in existing discriminatory practices all the while igniting alternative forms of action. It is here where CDS scholarship can consciously translate into 'activism' and responsible citizenship.

3. INTEGRATING CRITIQUE INTO CDS: TWO CASE STUDIES

Having surveyed what we see as some of the issues with critique and ''the critical'' in CDS, in this section we present two brief case studies that show how we have reappraised and integrated critique in our own work. In each, we are drawing on our own recent work included in Serafis 2023 (see Section 3.1) and Bennett forthcoming (see section 3.2).

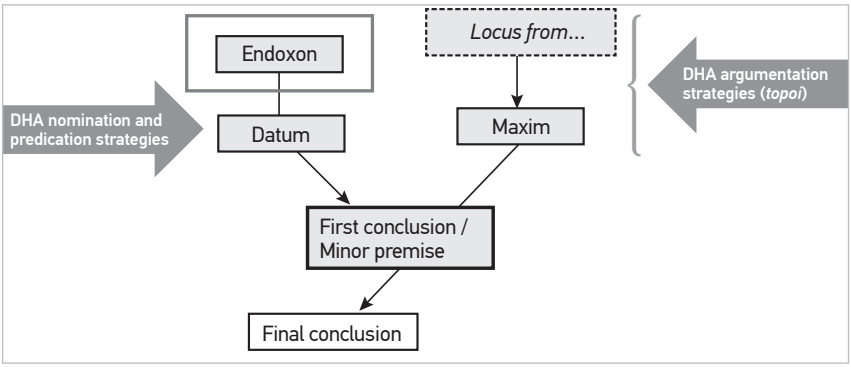
3.1. From Immanent to Socio-Diagnostic Critique

Immanent critique mostly targets the micro-textual level of discourse to unveil problematic choices and strategies that potentially convey (ideological) meaning making and therefore reproduce (power) social inequalities (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 32). To approach this level of critique, one could firstly draw on the set of DHA micro-level discursive strategies[4] that provide us with insights regarding the discursive construction and qualification of social phenomena/events, actors and the actions they undertake and undergo (see "nomination-" and "predication strategies", respectively) as well as the "justification and questioning of claims" (see "argumentation strategies") that emerge on the basis of these discursive constructions/qualifications through "topoi", that is "content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules' which connect the argument(s) with the conclusion, the claim" in terms of "conditional or causal paraphrases such as 'if x, then y' or 'y, because x'" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, pp. 33-35; see also Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, pp. 75-80). This ensemble of strategies, can inductively highlight the ways in which social reality is discursively mobilised and certain claims can be inherently inferred given the premise that discourse "suggests a way of looking at the surrounding world" (Amossy, 2009b, p. 254) and is used "to act upon an addressee by modifying (or strengthening) [individuals'] representations of the surrounding world" (Amossy, 2009a, pp. 313-314); this is what Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 37) define as the inherent "argumentativity" of discourse.

Serafis (2023) suggests that this set of discursive strategies should be put to work cohesively together in a thorough reconstruction of what is inherently and argumentatively inferred in (con)text to enforce CDS's immanent critique. To do so, the author synthesises the discussion revolving around the DHA micro-level strategies with the "quasi-Y structure" provided by the "Argumentum Model of Topics" (AMT; Rigotti and Greco 2019). As will be shown in the analysis included in this section, the AMT enables us to put together "nomination-", "predication-" and "argumentation strategies" (see Figure 1) to a consistent argumentative reconstruction of the "argumentativity" (see Amossy, 2009a, b; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016) of certain discursive wrappings (see Serafis & Greco, forthcoming). More specifically, the AMT offers us two main 'lines of

4. All the while clarifying that this is not the only micro-textual framework of analysis employed by research projects that fall under the CDS umbrella.

FIGURE 1
How the AMT quasi-Y reconstruction can incorporate/advance DHA analysis of discursive- argumentation strategies (adapted from Rigotti & Greco, 2019)



reasoning' along which standpoint-argument couplings can be reasonably inferred in certain texts/discourses and contexts.

The first one, namely the "procedural-inferential component", includes the logical premises of an act of argumentation in discourse, which are exemplified in terms of the "locus" (see topos in Latin) i.e. the (onto-) logical basis from which an argumentation departs, and the "maxim", i.e. the inferential principles that connect with each locus (e.g. "if A similar to B rightly does C, then B is supposed to do C" is one of the possible maxim connected with a "locus from analogy"; see Rigotti & Greco, 2019, pp. 261-262); this relation between the two elements of the AMT procedural-inferential component seems to coincide with the way in which the DHA perceives the "topoi-conditional" relation (e.g. in a "topos of danger/ threat", a connected conditional could be "if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them"; see Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 77). The AMT further instantiates these logical premises/schemes in real-life (con)texts through the elements included in the "material-contextual component", namely the dominant societal/cultural views that are represented by the Aristotelian "endoxon" and the textual elements and their meaning potential that are labelled as "datum"; according to recent studies, the datum can be exemplified through the use of nomination and predication strategies and their realisations (see Boukala & Serafis, 2022). While investigating this particular element (i.e. "datum") we can apply several analytical apparatuses (e.g. Halliday's analysis of transitivity,

FIGURE 2
UKIP's poster

van Leeuwen's social actors analysis, critical metaphor analysis etc.) to unravel the meaning making that interrelates with endoxical (i.e. dominant contextual) premises (see e.g. Serafis, 2022; Serafis & Assimakopoulos, 2023). The two components meet in terms of a "first conclusion/minor premise" that represents the convergence of the (onto)logical and (con) textual premises and can reasonably lead to the sustained claim in each particular case (i.e. "final conclusion"), when working along the lines of the "maxim" (see Rigotti & Greco 2019, pp. 208-216, for an overview). We illustrate this synthesis in terms of the following example coming from UKIP's campaign on Brexit.

In Figure 2, UKIP is putting forth an explicit claim (i.e., 1 Leave the European Union on 23rd June). This is backed up by several explicit or implicit arguments, which, in turn, are realised in different modes. For instance, two explicit arguments in this case are the following ones: 1.1 We must break free and take back control of our borders, 1.2 The EU has failed us; both realised in the verbal mode on the poster and 1.3 This is our breaking point; realised verbally, all the while being salient in visual terms. Most importantly, 1.1 can be seen as implicitly being backed up by a visual argument which is realised by the relevant photo. Facilitated by the specific shot, an endless march of migrant populations is portrayed as heading towards/ close to the UK borders, the social actors' characteristics are not easily distinguishable and therefore a visual "activation" and

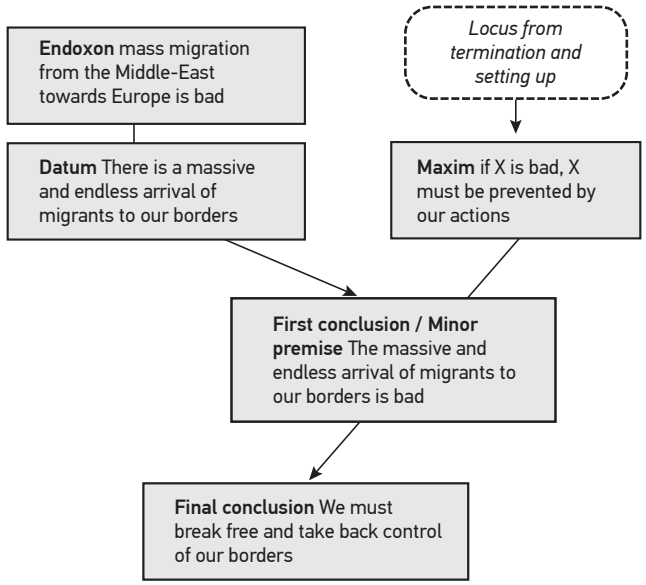
"assimilation" (see van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 33, 37) of a mass of "migrant-Others" is constructed as a danger or a burden for which the UK should take action, in the sense of taking back control of its borders (see argument 1.1). This visual argument could be verbalised as "1.1.1 There is a massive and endless arrival of migrants to our borders". Ultimately, the argumentative reconstruction of UKIP's poster could be the following one:

1 Leave the European Union on 23rd June
  1.1 We must break free and take back control of our borders
    1.1.1 There is a massive and endless arrival of migrants to our borders
  1.2 The EU has failed us
  1.3 This is our breaking point

Focusing on the relation between 1.1 and 1.1.1 with a view to unveiling the inference that binds this coupling, from a DHA perspective, this reasoning could be based on a "topos of threat/danger", which usually connects with the conditional "If there are specific dangers or threats, one should do something against them" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 77) or on a "topos of burdening or weighing down", which relates to the conditional "if a [...] 'country' is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish these burdens" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 78). In AMT terms, those two topoi can be "abstracted" (see Serafis & Greco, forthcoming) and put together under the label of a "locus from termination and setting up" (see Rigotti & Greco, 2019, p. 263), which connects with a "maxim" such as: "if X is bad, X must be prevented by our actions"; taken together, locus and maxim constitute the "procedural-inferential component" of the quasi-Y structure described in Figure 1. On the "material-contextual component" of the same structure, the "datum" is the verbalisation of the visual element of the poster that the analysis along the lines of van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semiotic approach unveiled (i.e. "There is a massive and endless arrival of migrants to our borders"). This "datum" interrelates with dominant macro-level discriminatory/xenophobic perspectives on migration, namely, an "endoxon" along the following lines "mass migration from the Middle-East towards Europe is bad".[5] Then, the

5. As evident by recent research, the construction of migrants mobilisation from war and conflict zones in the Middle-East was construed as a "crisis" (Bennett, 2019) to facilitate an overall anti-immigration hatred rhetoric (e.g. Serafis et al., 2021, 2023), which was "politicised" by right-wing voices during the EU referendum, while pinpointing EU's 'crises' to establish a Brexit claim (e.g. Krzyżanowski, 2019).

FIGURE 3
The AMT reconstruction of the inferential relation between 1.1 and 1.1.1



endoxon-datum interplay, can lead to the "first conclusion/minor premise": "The massive and endless arrival of migrants to our borders is bad" and, when combined with the "maxim" (i.e. "if X is bad, X must be prevented by our actions"), lead us to the "final conclusion": "We must break free and take back control of our borders", which corresponds to the inferentially sustained 1.1 (see Figure 3).

The AMT reconstruction thus offers a solid foundation for a detailed, step-by-step examination of the argumentative inferences triggered by discursive strategies embedded in public texts, thus highlighting problematic lines of reasoning in discourse and as such, it strengthens the practice of immanent critique in CDS (see Serafis, 2023, p. 49; see also Serafis and Greco, forthcoming). Most importantly, it is along these lines where CDS scholarship should emphasise the contextual premises of implicitly argued inferences (see the elements of the "material-contextual component") and, specifically, draw theoretical conclusions on the ways certain endoxa, that is the dominant values in a context, can be analysed all the while being unveiled as dominant imaginaries that constitute "normalised" (Krzyżanowski, 2020) macro-level beliefs that tend to lose their ideological nature (see Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 2006) while

becoming endoxa; but still constitute, ideologically-loaded perspectives of what appears to be a "new normal" way of acting in polarised contexts (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023). This is where micro-level analysis that aims to unravel problematic linguistic/semiotic choices/strategies and their argumentative dynamic (i.e. immanent critique) can approach sociodiagnostic critique and strengthen CDS's dissident analytical stance through rigorous analytical standards (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 259).

Aristotle claims that "[e]ndoxa are opinions that are accepted by everyone or by the majority, or by the wise men (all of them or the majority, or by the most notable and illustrious of them)" (Topics 100b.21; cited in Rigotti & Greco, 2019, p. 214). As transpires from this definition, an endoxon can be seen as referring to normalised socio-cultural viewpoints in particular contexts. According to the Aristotelian tradition, endoxon belongs to the domain of doxa, which, as Amossy (2002, p. 476; emphasis added) mentions "can be at the same time defined as the criterion of rationality and as the mark of a specific culture: what seems reasonable to anyone according to the particular idea of rationality that the orator builds in a given social and cultural framework". Following suit, an endoxon (or different endoxa) can mirror the accepted rationale in context which, however, is/are "not necessarily true or universally valid" (Braet, 2005, p. 75). In that sense, even if endoxa appear as accepted, valid/true and rational, they can be seen as being constantly located in ideological societal struggle for dominance and, moreover, as having the power to further social inequalities (Boukala, 2016, pp. 252-253). Therefore, adumbrating a way that links a reconstruction of argumentation in discourse (see above) with the concepts of ideology and power seems to be focal for us to reassess the "critical" within a CDS perspective. This is where immanent critique meets sociodiagnostic critique in practice.

3.2. From Retrospective to Prospective Critique Via Self-Reflection

Taking the above into account, we can therefore understand endoxa (such as the aforementioned one: ''mass migration from the Middle-East towards Europe is bad'') as objectivated elements of wider ideologies. However, to fully grasp how these endoxa have become so ingrained and accepted in public sphere discourses, we need to situate them in longer, historical contexts, so that we can unpack how they came to be and unpick their taken-for-grantedness. In doing so, we necessarily move from sociodiagnostic critique to retrospective critique. Furthermore, we argue that to fully realise

the emanicipatory and counter-hegemonic potential of this continuum of critique we need to conceive of ways in which our findings can have an impact in different fields of action, be it within the halls of education, newsrooms, living rooms, or even on the street. To this end, in this section we present one way in which retrospective and prospective critique can be combined to combat racism and exclusion.

Within sociology there have been increasing calls for the need to historicise research and not treat the objects of study as phenomena without backstories or antecedents (Bhambra, 2022). Crucially this also includes the role that Eurocentric knowledge regimes play and played in these same objects, not least colonialism and the effects that are still manifest today, for example. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, there is a "profound historical forgetfulness…a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression" (Hall, 1978, p. 25) about the British Empire. Up until recently, the history of the Empire was rarely taught in schools and even then it was not connected to the present day. Similar lacunae can be found in other fields, especially culture. This has led to a unique sense of British exceptionalism and an a-historical reading of current crises, including the Windrush scandal in the UK or rise of far-right, exclusionary discourses of (anti-)immigration, whereas in reality they are the result of longer processes of racialised exclusion.

An example of this is recent excellent CDS work on the normalisation and mainstreaming of far-right language in the public sphere. For Krzyżanowski and colleagues (2023, p. 418) the "key values of 20th century liberal democracy have encountered a salient 'cultural backlash' and have been seen as leading to the 'authoritarian contagion'". Work on normalisation aims to address "the huge complexity of the historical and contemporary global/regional/local conditioning of the far right's growing acceptance in European and global societies and political spheres of the early 21st century" (Krzyżanowski & Ekstrom 2022, p. 720). In our claims below, we do not argue that normalisation is not occurring but that a more nuanced approach is needed to ensure that not every instance of normalisation is seen as something "out of the blue". Rather, by integrating decolonial theories, we would like to critically appraise the use of the term. The issue we see with the "normalisation" is that it relies on the presumption that there exists a good, liberal consensus in the body politic that has recently become "infected" by exclusionary, far-right, illiberal frames. This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, despite foregounding the importance of recontextualization, work on normalisation

not infrequently is chronocentric or a-historical, presenting exclusionary frames as comparatively new elements of discourse. Secondly, this fails to problematise the historical importance of liberal values to the legitimation of the colonial oppression and violence that was wrought in the name of the European "civilising mission". Thus, it is important to note that not all instances of far-right language in the mainstream are new examples of normalisation and there is a danger of over-extrapolation or over-use of the term. Research on normalisation should not fall into this same trap of seeing the "centre" as pure/liberal/good, for, by seeing normalisation as heralding in new forms of discourse, we risk missing the longer geneses of these discourses. Likewise, a chronocentric analysis of "normalisation" cannot account for the historical nature of "sanctioned ignorances" (Spivak, 1988, p. 2) about racism in public discourses.

Thus, immanent linguistic analysis can only take us so far and history has to be brought into our analyses. Yet, as critical linguists and those attuned to the importance of language we understand and underscore the need to account for exclusionary, racist language at the textual level. It is therefore unsurprising that both authors of this paper work with the Discourse- Historical Approach. We argued in section 2 that there was a danger of CDS becoming "CDS-as-method", with some researchers using just the linguistic categories of analysis and jettisoning the theoretical bases. This is particularly the case for the DHA, with use often reduced to the five categories analysis, and often only nomination and predication. In reality though the DHA is ideally suited to studies that try to link the past with the present: it already offers a flexible analytical toolkit that includes recontextualisation, it specifically calls for socio-prognostic and self-reflexive critique and it was forged through an interest in how the past impacts on the present and how collective memory and narratives are so important to regimes of exclusion. We therefore argue there is progress to be made by combining the DHA with decolonial theories. This allows us to re-orient DHA and make full use of its focus on recontextualisations of historical discourses and provide robust textual evidence of more interpretative analyses within the social sciences. A better integration of history enables us to better identify intertextual nuances in data. Furthermore, it offers space for a greater self-reflection at the level of the individual researcher and the field of CDS more generally (see Alejandro 2021, and below on self-reflexive discourse analysis).

One example of how this can be operationalised is in analyses of current discourses of migration in the UK; more specifically in recent media

attention on the rhetoric and policy approach to migration, particularly that coming from the Conservative Party. Those critical of the policies, including some in the Labour Party claim that this is something new and accuse a host of prime ministers and senior ministers of pandering to the far-right. This is mirrored in a lot of research on anti-immigration and racism in the UK. In doing so, the historical roots of such policies are ignored. Britain has a history of racialised and restrictive immigration policy stretching back to 1905. In particular, since 1948 citizenship and race have become linked in legislation. Moreover, whilst overt language may differ in tone, a policy consensus on immigration has existed for decades. In the 1970s, Sivananden said: "In terms of the history of race and immigration in this country… What Enoch Powell says today, the Conservative Party says tomorrow, and the Labour Party legislates on the day after" (Srilangarajah, 2018).

Bennett's recent work (2025) has used decolonial theory to investigate "sanctioned ignorances" of narrative absences in British migration discourse. Through an analysis of different genres of texts and spanning the last 120 years, Bennett shows how current migration discourse relies on four key myths and shows how, where and why these narratives emerged and become so fundamental to British self-representation: (1) a euphemisation of colonialism that reduces it to the Commonwealth and elides Britain's colonial history; (2) a myth that immigration has enriched "our" nation, but also threatens "us;" (3) a story that Britain has always offered a safe haven to those in need; and (4) a teleological story of British values that marks the country as exceptional and is used a tool for assimilation. Limited space means that there is no room to delve deeper into Bennett's analysis here. However, it is crucial to point out that these myths are not solely the preserve of the right or far-right; quite the opposite is the case: These socially sedimented narratives (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966) of a good, liberal and "not-racist" core of the population find traction with politicians and voters of most political persuasions. It is because of this we can speak of a widespread lack of knowledge about Britain's colonial legacy. In 2023, the sports presenter Gary Lineker commented on social media about the then-Conservative government's increasingly harsh immigration policy, calling it: "An immeasurably cruel policy directed at the most vulnerable people in language that is not dissimilar to that used by Germany in the 30s" (Lineker, 2023). However, Winter (2023) argues such politics of comparison are problematic, and rely on sanctioned ignorances of historical racism that are deeply rooted in liberal and 'progressive'

responses to racism. This allows liberals and progressives alike to use: *this is not who we are as a nation* as a rhetorical device and for it to resonate in the wider public.

We therefore argue that it is only through more historicised analyses can we uncover the nuances of current discourse. But this is still immanent and historical critique and there are ways in which we can move our analyses towards socio-prognostic critique and produce work that Bhambra terms "reparatory social sciences". As well as the issues levelled against CDS above, there are others. For example, as Bennett (2025) writes:

> A focus on right-wing political actors centres their actions, whilst more words about populism means more populism in the world, especially online, and keeps it in the headlines… CDS needs to consider how we can research difficult topics without contributing to their further reification and negative impact on life – especially minorities.

Additionally, CDS has work to do in how it integrates those targeted by racism and other forms of exclusion into research. For Bennett (ibid.) "by not including those they wish you help or speak for, researchers end up presuming what is desired or required by groups. To some notable extent, then, CDS can be a supposedly critical theory that ultimately silences and speaks for those who it positions as oppressed, despite 'well-meaning' intentions." This ultimately leads to CDS in danger of falling into the same trap of liberal opponents of anti-immigration discourse.

How can CDS move past this? We can find hints in the tradition of radical pedagogy. Over half a century ago, Paulo Freire wrote "no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (1970, p. 39). Continuing that theme, Fuñez-Flores (2023a) argues that "radical sociological thought derives from the 'true genius' that emerges from sites of struggle." We read this as a call for CDS to work, in Fuñez-Flores' words alongside the targets of the language which through socio-diagnostic critique, we have already identified as harmful and in need of challenging. Alternative narratives that counter hegemonic myths need to be "forged *with,* not *for,* the oppressed" (Freire, 1970, p. 48). Within CDS MacGilchrist (2016, p. 264) has proposed a generative critique that would "orient analysis more immediately to generative, ambivalent, reparative critical practices..[and]… move CDA on from post-positivist debates about objectivity and bias, in order to embrace surprise, irony and

transgressive validities", whilst Bennett (2025) uses a linguistic sociology of absences that tries to bring the historical back in to discourse analysis. And yet overall such work is limited and CDS practitioners should consider their role in social critique.

4. A CALL TO RESEARCH AND ACT CRITICALLY

Overall, we argue, we are in need of all four forms of critique to reassess and, most importantly, re-fertilise the "Critical" in CDS. One without the other does not work formally. In this paper, more specifically, we have called for a "rebalancing" of the emphasis, so that CDS remains much more than an discourse-analytical endeavour that simply identifies problematic strategies in text and talk ending up being a disciplinary area, which includes endless case-studies. That would be a CDS merely oriented towards immanent critique, which would crucially miss identifying the historically normalised dominant values against which discursive choices and strategies became problematic (see also Archakis, this volume). This is why socio-diagnostic and retrospective critique is the chariot to which our micro-analytical approaches should be attached to, not only in order for CDS to continue embracing its emancipatory grassroots (that we as CDS scholars can even tend to forget), but most importantly, to step forth towards the most challenging prognostic/emancipatory aspect of critique.

The latter includes more than just academic work; it brings the CDS scholar within the terrain of the broader societal antagonism, within the dominant ideological frames and power relations and calls us to act as scholars who are not dispassionate observers of social inequality but who actively act to mitigate it. While describing prospective critique, Reisigl and Wodak (2001, p. 33) mentioned that this "is associated with [an] ethico-practical dimension. Inasmuch as it is contra-present and seeks to become practical and to change and transform things". The authors were offering examples where scholarly analysis was becoming social practice, enabling "improvement of communication within public institutions by elaborating proposals and guidelines for reducing language barriers in hospitals, schools, courtrooms, public offices, and media reporting institutions [...] as well as guidelines for avoiding sexist language use" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 34 and reference therein). This aspect of critique, which "is nurtured ethically by a sense of justice [...] take sides *against* social discrimination, repression, domination, exclusion and exploitation and *for* emancipation, self-determination and social recognition" (ibid). This is the

FIGURE 4
Screenshot of a composite of Assal Rad's posts on X[6]

very idea (and aspect of critique) that brought to the fore critical language awareness projects (e.g. Catalano & Waugh, 2022), and even active involvement of CDS scholars in everyday practices of social movements where the analytical tools can be attached to a broader societal role to raise awareness against the reasons wars (and even genocides) are taking place in front of our eyes. We have noticed an increasing "trend" on social media of people "re-writing" headlines about the genocide in Gaza to highlight how language can obfuscate agency and mitigate the violent reality on the ground, in particular the posts of the scholar, Assal Rad; which constitutes a very interesting example of bottom-up linguistic reflexivity.

Walking down this road, however, makes us also face our own biases as scholars, born and raised according to the dominant (fundamentally racist, patriarchal etc.) values of the Western-liberal world and its nation-states. It makes (or should make) us think, for instance, about our own role as researchers and teachers working in well-established universities, fully compliant within the neoliberal apparatus of tertiary education where, among other things, we are seeking to publish more and more academic articles in prestigious (so-called Q1-ranked) journals to attract funding to build an antagonistic curriculum ready for sale to the next highest bidder,

6. Original available at https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/scholar-exposes-western-medias-gaza-slant-through-fixed-headlines-17744864

without even having the time to critically reflect on that work, on the produced knowledge and thus, maybe, think of ways to stop reproducing the apparatus and create spaces for alternative frames, able to challenge dominant ones in practice.

If van Dijk (2001b, p. 96) was right when he was claiming that ''CDA is biased -and proud of it''–and we truly believe that he was right– then our own identity as CDS practitioners -willing or not– includes rigorous analytical tools that unveil problematic strategies in text and talk (immanent critique), against the dominant values (sociodiagnostic critique) which have been normalised throughout a broader historical horizon (retrospective critique), in order to enable us to act and mitigate social injustice through our everyday practices and identities (prospective critique), without negating any aspect of this continuum, between our own ebb and tide.

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