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New opportunities for discourse studies: combining Discourse Theory, Critical Discourse Studies and Corpus Linguistics

Katy Brown

Manchester Metropolitan University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5405-2322>

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Abstract

This paper proposes a methodological framework that integrates poststructuralist Discourse Theory (DT), Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and Corpus Linguistics (CL). While previous research has discussed potential compatibility between combinations of these approaches, there have been few attempts to bring them all together into a cohesive research programme. Fostering dialogue between diverse methodological perspectives can facilitate multi-level analysis to capture the complex dynamics of sociopolitical issues. In this vein, the article presents the methodological tree, an analogy used to illustrate how these traditions may come together to complement one another. This foundation lays the groundwork for practical application in discursive analysis, with a flexible analytical structure proposed and examples provided to illustrate its implementation. It is hoped that the article can stimulate further discussion around how DT, CDS and CL can be brought together to harness their strengths.

Keywords: Discourse Theory, Critical Discourse Studies, Corpus Linguistics, poststructuralism, mixed-methods, discourse

Introduction

Discourse studies as a broad field has demonstrated openness to incorporating mixed methodologies and perspectives to provide a range of insights into complex phenomena. As Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002, 4) state, “multiperspectival work is not only permissible but positively valued in most forms of discourse analysis. The view is that different perspectives provide different forms of knowledge about a phenomenon”. With clear benefits from combined approaches, this article proposes a new framework which brings together the diverse traditions of poststructuralist Discourse Theory (DT), Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and Corpus Linguistics (CL). While there are some excellent examples of work combining two of these approaches, particularly CDS and CL (Bednarek and Caple 2014), and a growing discussion around the potential compatibility of DT and CL (Wilkinson 2022), or DT and CDS (De Cleen et al. 2021b), there have been very few attempts to bring them all together into a coherent research programme. The aim here then, expanding on recent studies conducted using this framework (Brown and Mondon 2021; Brown et al. 2021; Brown 2022), is to

develop a detailed account of how this combination can be achieved and what benefits it brings to the field of discourse studies.

To do so, the article first establishes the methodological tree, an analogy used to represent the differing yet overlapping roles played by each approach in the novel framework. By visualising their individual contributions through the features of a tree (roots, trunk and branches), their interconnected nature is emphasised. This more abstract elaboration of the framework lays important groundwork for the second section of the article, which focuses on practical application in discursive analysis. A flexible analytical structure is proposed which combines the values, concepts and techniques offered by each approach, with examples from recent empirical studies to illustrate its implementation. Although this is presented in the form of different phases, outlining potential analytical steps and avenues to take, it is not intended as a prescriptive model to follow but rather a starting point that can be adapted accordingly. It is hoped that this article can stimulate further discussion about the way that DT, CDS and CL can be combined, with potential for the framework to be refined and expanded on within the field.

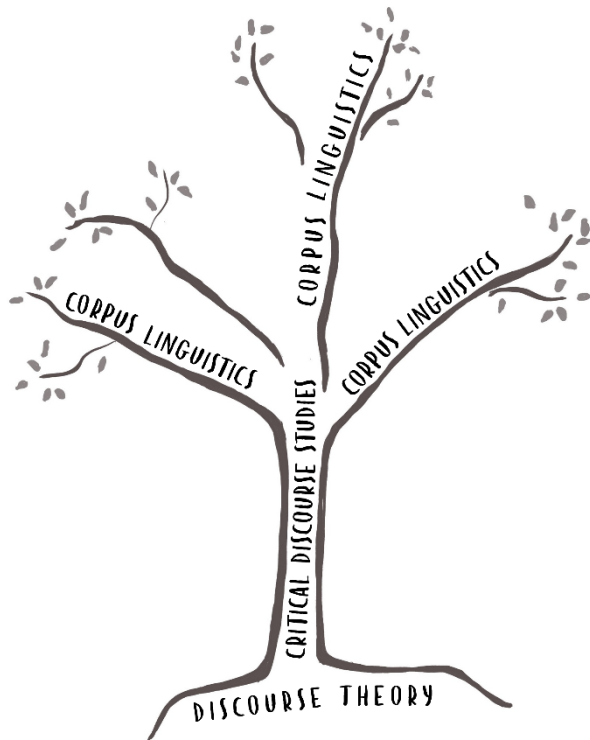
Towards a methodological tree

With the ever-changing sociopolitical landscape, it is vital that our approach to discursive phenomena remains similarly dynamic and open. The decision to find potential pathways for bringing DT, CDS and CL together emerges from the sense that there is real opportunity in drawing insights from across these well-developed and diverse traditions. Despite the call from reviewers to identify the 'deficiency, shortcoming, or problem that the paper seeks to remedy', the motivation for pursuing this approach does not come from a lack *per se*; my intention is rather to focus on the productive possibilities that such a combination promises if we open ourselves to looking beyond the methodological boundaries that have been established and reinforced over the years. Of course, this is not to say that there are not significant challenges in finding common ground or that there are not good reasons to be wary of the importation of incompatible principles from other approaches, but perhaps we can open up new opportunities to respond to contemporary discursive challenges by engaging in dialogue across traditions. These conversations have certainly been happening already in some cases, so this work is very much indebted to those contributions and acts as an extension of these synergies.

The following conceptualisation is one possibility for such an exchange, where I use the components of a tree to indicate the varied yet overlapping contributions that each tradition makes. To be clear, this tree is not intended as a summary of their existing contributions, nor the developmental relationship between them, but rather a novel way of bringing them together to harness their respective strengths. As should become apparent through the discussion, this approach is very much grounded in the critical perspectives offered through post-Marxist and poststructuralist accounts, so it is through this lens that other concepts, ideas and techniques are integrated. An important note is that while I propose a structured framework here, it is certainly not intended to be set in stone. The tree metaphor not only

captures their individual contributions but the necessarily dynamic nature of the combination itself, where growth and change should be actively encouraged. As such, it forms part of an ongoing discussion around methodological innovations, which I hope can stimulate further dialogue down the line.

First, DT forms the roots of the tree, grounding the research philosophically, establishing its underlying assumptions and providing strong theoretical foundations. Next, CDS constitutes the trunk of the tree, which remains closely interlinked with theoretical concerns, but most significantly provides a strong structure for multi-layered empirical analysis. Finally, CL adds branches to extend the range of insights available through greater scope and additional tools, as well as establish further avenues for exploration. Critically, all these components are intimately linked, so they have a dynamic influence at each level, informing and building on one another.



The roots: DT as the theoretical foundations

Literature on the many forms of discourse analysis is quick to emphasise that its reach extends far beyond purely methodological or analytical concerns. As Linda Wood and Rolf Kroger (2000, 3) underline, it is “not simply an alternative to conventional methodologies; it is an alternative to the perspectives in which those methodologies are embedded.” DT, in particular, has dedicated significant attention to these concerns, where it has notably offered a discursive reading of the social rather than a series of methodological processes. As Benjamin De Cleen et al. (2021b, 27) emphasise, it is “first and foremost a discursive approach – in the sense of being interested in the circulation of discourses (as structures of meaning) in society – and not a method for analyzing texts”. Indeed, while it does still present significant possibilities for such empirical analysis, it is at the theoretical level that DT offers its principal contributions. By starting from the conceptualisations of discourse that the tradition elucidates (ibid., 24-8) – from a discursive reading of the social, to the way that discourses form this reality, to how they are embodied through texts – we are encouraged to connect these different levels and situate our work within wider frames. It is for this reason that DT provides an ideal foundation on which to build the framework.

Developed from post-Marxist theory (Laclau and Mouffe 1987; 2014), DT possesses a rich theoretical core which is premised on a detailed conceptualisation of discourse construction and reconstruction. In this poststructuralist account, it takes from structuralism the notion of

Figure 1: The methodological tree (image by Dima Albadra)

a web of meaning produced through signs (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, 10), but rejects the supposed stasis of the resulting structure. Indeed, one of its defining features is its emphasis on radical contingency (Sjölander 2011, 27), establishing that meaning is never definitively fixed, even if it may appear so. Apparent stability in this regard is the result of discursive processes, whereby discourse is “an attempt to fix a web of meanings within a particular domain [...] to the exclusion of other meanings” (Rear 2013, 6). It therefore imposes (temporary) stasis on the movable structures described above by reducing what is ostensibly conceivable within the field of meaning. Discourses therefore exercise considerable power because ‘their formation is an act of radical institution’ (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 4) which narrows rather than broadens the range of possibilities seemingly available.

By centralising contingency and holding that ‘*all* objects are objects of discourse’ (ibid., 3), DT encourages us to question taken-for-granted assumptions which are the site of hegemony. It not only provides a highly developed account of discourse on which we can base our analysis, but it can also push our focus towards areas which may otherwise be overlooked. It encourages us to examine the structures of meaning that are constitutive of discourse and be attentive to the interconnections between different ideas, thereby offering a comprehensive means through which to critique and challenge powerful discourses. Of course, DT is not alone in this endeavour, with CDS equally oriented towards such aims, but the depth with which it conceptualises discourse at different levels makes it ideally suited to forming the basis from which varied analyses can be developed. Philosophically, too, its core assumptions around ineliminable discursivity (in contrast to CDS which delineates between the discursive and non-discursive) mean that it poses a powerful critique of positivist and objectivist approaches to research, rejecting the idea that ‘truth’ can be unearthed from beneath the debris of language. In line with this assertion, Wilkinson (2022, 2) suggests that CDS ‘often assumes a pre-discursive subject which is being represented or, indeed, *misrepresented*’, whereas DT emphasises the radical contingency of identities and calls into question the categories themselves. As such, it alters our starting point for analysis and offers more radical possibilities for challenging hegemonic positions.

The trunk: CDS as the empirical bridge

Where DT shines in its theorisation of discourse, there have been recent calls for methodological concerns to become more integrated (De Cleen et al. 2021b, 28). It is here that I suggest that CDS can take on a complementary role to address this area for development. As a tradition, it has dedicated significant attention to how theory can be applied to problem-driven research based on empirical analysis of textual data (Reisigl, 2018, 49). There may be understandable reticence about the compatibility of the approaches, particularly given DT’s emphasis on discursive dynamics far beyond text, but this is actually not an assumption on which the two diverge too greatly and the marked benefits of drawing insights from an approach where textual analysis is key means that it is certainly worth pursuing these pathways. Some of the possible tensions that arise are discussed later, but for now, the emphasis within CDS on bridging the gap between theory and analysis indicates its suitability as the trunk of the methodological tree.

For CDS to successfully fulfil this role, its core assumptions and values can be used to determine the overarching objective, design and analytical structure of a project. The tradition's clear focus on practical application derives from its explicitly political aims to challenge discourses which support the interests of dominant groups and reinforce structures of inequality (Samaie and Malmir 2017, 1353). CDS is therefore oriented towards addressing current social problems in their real-world context, so analysis often centres on contemporary issues enacted by elite groups. There are a number of schools within CDS with divergent origins (Krzyżanowski 2010) and centres of focus (Wodak and Meyer 2015), but they all share these underlying foundations and produce a range of strategies for textual analysis. Like DT, CDS is resistant to recipe-style approaches to analysis, but the tradition puts forward a range of techniques that can be applied according to the needs of a research project. As such, CDS can certainly stand alone as a research programme, and there are numerous examples of this (Hart and Cap 2017), but we can also derive benefits from bringing in the wider frames and perspectives of DT, while significantly strengthening DT's engagement with textual features. Visualised as the trunk of the tree, therefore, we can see its close relationship with the roots but also how it is fundamental in driving research towards empirical analysis.

For the purposes of this framework, the specific tradition adopted here is that of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), developed largely by Wodak and associates (e.g., Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2008; Reisigl and Wodak 2009; Forchtner 2011) which has become 'one of the most prominent critical approaches to the study of discourse' (Reisigl 2018, 44). There are three main reasons for this choice: (1) the emphasis on context, (2) the principle of triangulation and (3) the clear analytical framework. First, while context is central in all approaches to CDS, it plays a particularly important role in the DHA. Wodak (2011, 359) regards the 'attempt to integrate all available background information systematically' as its distinctive feature. The pursuit within this framework of theoretically and empirically informed analysis, deriving from DT's multi-layered conceptualisations of discourse, means that the DHA's four levels of context, from intra-text to socio-political context (Reisigl 2018, 53), are key in bringing these insights together. Second, the guiding principle of triangulation is similarly not exclusive, but the DHA shows real openness to the incorporation of different methods, sources and disciplinary perspectives. With the combined approach adopted here, as well as the emphasis on analytical flexibility, triangulation is core to the success of the framework. Finally, the DHA offers great clarity in terms of practical application for empirical analysis, outlining a three-stage process involving the broader identification of topics, the investigation of discursive strategies and the establishment of how they are realised linguistically (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 93). With DT's emphasis on structures of meaning and CL's potential to facilitate at each level, the DHA to CDS offers the ideal bridge to bring the framework together.

The branches: CL as the analytical extension

Both DT and CDS necessitate a form of involved engagement that either favours theoretically-focused approaches or smaller scale problem-driven studies. These are significant strengths of their offerings, so the final component does not seek to undermine but rather complement

these insights. CL is characterised as ‘a collection of methods that use specialist computer programmes to study large collections of machine-readable text’ (Wright and Brookes 2019, 62). It thereby broadens the scope of a project based on its ability to synthesise and perform complex tests on large amounts of data. Although more quantitative in its origins, the wide-ranging tools offered by CL allow it to also facilitate closer readings and qualitative interpretations. Through these capacities, it can both guide the analyst to previously unidentified phenomena and solidify/challenge prior analysis. There are many examples of the varying ways it has been used to drive or support discourse analytic work, from adding further techniques to explore the contents of one corpus (Bachmann 2011), to investigating the construction of certain lexical items within a corpus (Hunt 2015), to comparing different corpora (Taylor 2014). Rather than playing an equal role in the framework, I suggest that CL should be used in a more supportive capacity because it provides less of a comprehensive philosophical and theoretical offering than DT and CDS. It is for this reason that CL forms the branches of the tree; it has the ability to extend the range of insights and open further avenues, but it is not as fundamental to the structural integrity of the tree.

Despite its more limited use within the framework from a theoretical and critical perspective, CL has a great deal to offer in terms of extending analytical capabilities. The main benefit to the framework is that it can help to uncover broad patterns which may point to the dominance and hegemony of certain discourses. Situating what CL offers in terms of the theoretical assumptions of DT and CDS, the “bird’s eye view” (Taylor 2020, 5) it provides can help to identify prominent patterns across a large corpus, potentially pointing to hegemonic discursive formations which exclude other possibilities within the field of meaning. CL allows these potential ‘patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures’ (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2008, 6) to be detected on a large scale, then explored, probed or challenged in more qualitative forms of enquiry. Framed in this way, the incorporation of CL into the framework is not about adding ‘rigour’ to DT and CDS but rather acting as an extension of them, offering new tools to help identify significant elements of discourse that they have so thoroughly theorised.

With such a capacity for expanding the scale of discursive analysis has come susceptibility to criticisms of superficiality and decontextualisation (Thornbury 2010, 275). However, the notion that the pursuit of breadth comes at the expense of depth is not wholly representative of CL’s potential in the field. In fact, its breadth can be the source of depth by allowing analysts to investigate in detail the context and construction of a term or phrase across the whole corpus. CL is therefore able to extend beyond simply distinguishing potentially salient recurring words towards identifying patterns within patterns, a form of in-depth analysis across an extended corpus. Of course, if dealing with fragments of a text, the problems of decontextualisation are still prevalent, with concerns around the implications of “truncated concordance lines [being] examined atomistically” (Flowerdew 2009, 395). This is why such analysis is necessarily complemented by the insights of DT and CDS, ensuring that neither the bigger picture nor the finer details are lost.

The tree: a coherent approach to discourse studies

These sections have introduced how DT, CDS and CL can be harmonised into a coherent approach to discourse analytic work, which may be used both to build broader theories of discourse (re)construction in a particular field and to conduct detailed empirical analysis with great scope and depth. Before looking at its practical application, it is important to address some of the clear differences between the approaches. Rather than take these issues as evidence of their incompatibility, this framework emphasises how their respective strengths can be harnessed around a united approach. First, the three components derive from different theoretical backgrounds, with DT ‘firmly situated in the fields of democratic theory and political theory more broadly’ (De Cleen et al. 2021b, 23), CDS drawing its origins more from critical theory and linguistics (Wodak and Rheindorf 2022) and CL from linguistics (O’Keeffe and McCarthy 2012). As such, they have tended to pursue somewhat different objectives and their development has taken on varied forms. For instance, with their critical and reflexive foundations, DT and CDS consciously revisit theoretical and conceptual debates to drive the field forward (Krzyżanowski and Forchtner, 2016; De Cleen et al., 2021a), whereas CL has tended more towards developing new tools and methods (Baker 2023). It is precisely this diversity that strengthens the framework, because with approaches deriving from both political and linguistic traditions and following different developmental paths, we can better understand and offer insights at each level.

Their origins have resulted in some diverging conceptualisations, most notably around discourse itself. Howarth (2000, 4) argues that poststructuralists ‘put forward much more comprehensive concepts of discourse’ than other disciplines. De Cleen et al. (2021, 24–28) elucidate three levels of meaning to the term ‘discourse’ within DT, placing it as (1) “an ontological category”, (2) “relational structures of meaning” and (3) “different kinds of texts”. They underscore how these understandings move “from the more abstract to the more concrete” (ibid., 24), starting from a discursive reading of the social, to the way that discourses form this reality, to how they are embodied through texts. As a result, DT offers us a way to connect these different levels to understand the dynamics at play. CDS, on the other hand, takes a more linguistic approach to the definition.¹ Discourse is understood generally in CDS as “language use in speech and writing” and as “a form of social practice” (Wodak and Meyer, 2015, 6) which has significant influence in shaping and being shaped by events, thereby playing a powerful role in societal issues. It is clear that CDS takes a narrower perspective yet still accounts for wider significance, so although there are differences, there remains common ground from which a combined approach can be built.

Similarities within CDS, relating to the features of DT discussed earlier, involve an acknowledgement that discourses exclude other possibilities within the field of meaning and that “sometimes what is not said or written is more important than what is there” (Baker 2023, 24). Furthermore, CDS scholars recognise the potential dynamism of discourse, noting that it “is not a closed unit, but a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009, 89), which in part lines up with the notion of contingency. The relationship between discourse and power is similarly central to CDS, and indeed, its emphasis on the role of powerful actors proves useful at the analytical stage.

¹ Different schools vary in their emphasis but share this core foundation.

However, Bucholtz (2001, 170) states that “if we are to do critical analysis, we will need a better concept of power than critical discourse analysis offers”. DT provides the tools for understanding the different arenas of power by creating a coherent link between the different levels of discourse. We can therefore take inspiration from CDS’s understanding of discourse at the linguistic level but rely on DT to interpret its further significance. Indeed, through its conceptualisation of how discourses are formed and how they can become hegemonic via the articulation of signifiers around nodal points, but equally how they are contingent and can be challenged via articulation/re-articulation, DT brings together all these elements to form a cohesive whole. Many of the contributions within CDS that work towards developing a comprehensive research programme communicate these features effectively, but DT amalgamates them, offering a firm and coherent grounding for understanding, evaluating and challenging discourses.

Before detailing the role of the branches, it is worth emphasising the interconnectedness of the roots and trunk. Although DT’s greatest intervention is theoretical, it should not be overlooked at the analytical stage and can constitute an effective partner for CDS, because many concepts overlap, or address weaknesses associated with the other. As David Rear (2013, 22) suggests, “despite their epistemological differences, the two approaches share enough in common that the analytical constructs they provide can be operationalised in conjunction with each other in the discursive analysis of texts.” In particular, with its wider theoretical focus, DT provides the means and vocabulary by which a broad map of the data can be established. It can therefore address the first stage of the DHA by identifying major topics and providing an initial overview. However, its use extends beyond this first phase, because through later detailed analysis and the operationalisation of key concepts within DT, it can become a more intricate reflection of the discursive field. It adds greater depth by establishing links between topics, assessing the effect this has on their meaning and on the wider discourse. Crucially, it can provide a clear picture of how micro-level results feed into the broader system of meaning and macro-level structures of domination, while acknowledging the potential for change and transformation.

Similarly, CDS offers important contributions at the theoretical level too. Its orientation towards practical application and studying social problems means that it has dedicated attention to evaluating the role of the researcher within this process. Although DT acknowledges the researcher’s situatedness within discourse, and indeed the inescapability of discursivity constitutes one of its distinctive features, there has been surprisingly limited explicit consideration of how this translates into reflexive processes: “the problem is largely ignored by Laclau and Mouffe, their theory and analysis being presented as if they were objective descriptions of the world and its mechanisms” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 22). These considerations are certainly not ignored completely within the field and important works have engaged seriously with them (e.g., Glynos and Howarth 2019, 112), but it has long formed an integral part of the development of CDS. As such, reflexivity, referring to the “active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation” (Horsburgh 2003, 308) and transparency, whereby “every political scientist should make the

essential components of his or her work visible to fellow scholars” (Moravcsik 2014, 48), form cornerstones of the philosophical approach adopted here.

In terms of CL, scholars favourable towards its inclusion have suggested that it can reduce the influence of bias in discourse analysis through its use of automated and quantifiable tests (Thornbury, 2010, 273). Given the political objectives of critical research, this may seem an attractive prospect because such claims can be used to counter attempts to discredit findings on the basis of subjectivity. However, by framing it as a way to reduce bias, it appears almost as an apology for constructionism, an attempt to appease objectivist and positivist influences within the social sciences. DT and CDS are explicitly political and there should be no shame in approaching issues of inequality through a critical lens. One of the aims here is to articulate how CL can be integrated without bowing down to the unwarranted demands or discourse of positivism. Many scholars have offered fervent critiques of the claim to objectivity and neutrality, for instance in upholding white supremacy, privileging Western thought and placing white men’s experiences as universal (e.g., Meer 2019, 501–2; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008; Smith 1999, 56; Mills 1999, 17-8, Harding 1988, 7), yet these harmful benchmarks of validity still prevail in many circles. Instead of trying to appease such unattainable, and indeed undesirable, requirements for ‘scientific’ research, our methodological approach must be firm and unashamed in its political stance. The objective of integrating CL is to broaden the range of insights available (by allowing us to work with more data and use new tools), add greater depth and improve transparency, rather than placing it in terms of bias, dictated by positivist frames of rigour. In this way, CL can be incorporated without threatening the constructionist foundations underpinning the methodology.

Making use of the tree

Having outlined the three traditions and their principal contributions, it is now time to examine how these foundations can be converted into an analytical framework. Of course, before analysis proceeds, any research project based on this combined approach must be clearly grounded in social and political phenomena. Taking from DT the more theoretical orientation (De Cleen et al. 2021b, 29) and from CDS the problem-based stimulus (Reisigl, 2018, 49), such research will necessarily address sociopolitical issues at various levels. For instance, in my PhD project (Brown, 2022), I was interested in exploring the role of mainstream elites in the mainstreaming of the far right. To do so, I centred my analysis around the case of Brexit campaign discourse, where far-right talking points had found significant expression through mainstream actors. My research was therefore concerned with theoretical questions around the underexplored role of the mainstream in mainstreaming and indeed the very construction of the ‘mainstream’ itself. However, it was also problem-oriented, both in needing to draw attention to the harmful effects of mainstream discourses and in attempting to challenge the modes of exclusion that were pushed by the official campaigns, not just the far right, during the referendum. This is just one example of how grounding a project in the foundations of DT and CDS shape it from start to finish and go on to inform the approach to linguistic analysis.

The following framework (see *Figure 2*) takes the stage of linguistic analysis as its starting point. Of course, much work occurs before this moment in setting out the sociopolitical issues and context driving the research, but this initial phase is highly project-dependent, so the model focuses principally on data analysis procedures. This is not to say that data analysis is not highly project-dependent too – it certainly is – but this framework is proposed as a general set of guidelines which should be adapted according to the needs of the individual study. Within DT, there is significant reticence about generating such step-by-step procedures (Sjölander 2011, 35). It must therefore be emphasised that this is not a rigid or prescriptive model. Instead, it fits within the logic of retroduction, which denotes “a kind of restless ‘spiral’ because as we move from one ‘moment’ to the next, and back again, revising aspects of our account in light of adjustments made in other moments, we never return to the same spot” (Glynos and Howarth 2019, 118). Starting from an explicit political commitment as encouraged by DT and CDS, the framework is used as a set of initial parameters from which analysis can proceed and evolve. Although CL tools are used at each stage, it is crucial to reiterate the importance of contextualising any resulting insights through DT and CDS perspectives.

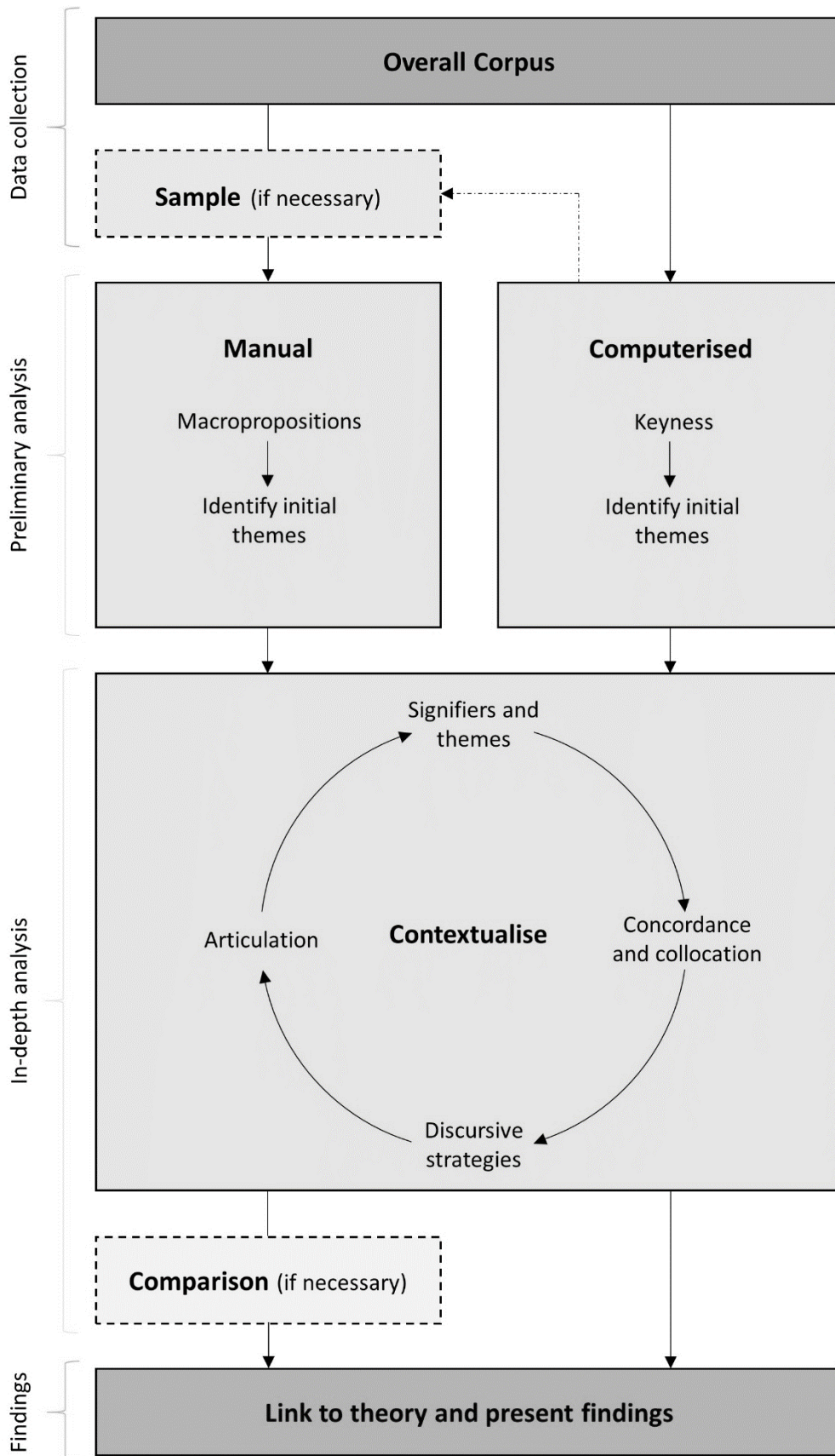


Figure 2: Analytical framework incorporating DT, CDS and CL

Phase 1: Data collection

To start, clear criteria for data selection are laid out to produce a comprehensive overall corpus. This may include a specified timeframe, justified selection of sources and clear guidelines for including texts. These elements should be carefully considered and fully justified, because while the overall corpus need not be limited by size (given CL's capacity to work with large datasets), it must be precise for the most relevant interpretations. This could centre around the use of a particular signifier – for instance, the Guardian's use of 'populis*' within a one-year period (Brown and Mondon 2021) – or a specific event, such as website material from campaign groups during the British referendum on EU membership (Brown 2022). By specifying and providing details openly, this phase offers transparency at the earliest stage.

If needed, a smaller sample is then selected from the overall dataset for the purposes of in-depth analysis. This is not always necessary as the corpus may be sufficiently large to justify the use of CL but also feasible in terms of manually analysing texts (e.g., Brown 2020). Sample choice may be based on pre-determined criteria, such as timeframe, author/speaker, source, etc. For example, when collecting data from the *Vote Leave* campaign website during the Brexit referendum, a tab entitled 'Key speeches, interviews and op-eds' offered a natural starting point for compiling a more manageable and highly relevant sample for in-depth analysis. Alternatively, corpus linguistics tools and practices employed in the phase of preliminary analysis may also be used for this purpose (see below). Whatever the case, these decisions should be based on the needs of the project and communicated transparently.

Phase 2: Preliminary analysis

This phase consists of two separate forms of analysis conducted in a specific order according to research requirements. If using the entire corpus for both quantitative and qualitative insights, or if the sample is pre-determined, the first stage of preliminary analysis involves the manual coding of macropropositions, which are understood as the main topics of a text and are what "we usually remember best of a discourse" (van Dijk 1997, 11). These can be identified through skimming each sample text to pinpoint the core topics. Where possible, manual coding should be conducted first as it allows the analyst to scan the data free from the influence of computerised results which remain unchanged whatever the order of completion. This was an approach I took in my analysis of Brexit campaign discourse (Brown 2022), finding that my initial macropropositional coding around the topics of *immigration*, *economy*, *sovereignty* and *elites*, matched up with many results from the CL component.

Second (or if sample choice relies on it, first), the corpus undergoes a test of keyness to identify potentially salient topics. Keyness allows us to determine 'which words occur *statistically* more often in word list A when compared with word list B [...] giving a measure of *saliency*' (Baker 2023, 165). By comparing the specialised corpus collected in *Phase 1* with a general corpus (e.g., British National Corpus), unusually frequent words can be identified which may point to their discursive significance. If keyness is allied with DT concepts, keywords may indicate prominent signifiers or even nodal points which have a critical bearing

on discourse formation (Wilkinson, 2022). In this way, we are able to integrate CL techniques in the study of broader discursive formations through DT concepts. If sample choice relies on establishing keywords and their dispersion (where they are more/less frequent) or concordance (surrounding context), these parameters should be defined at this stage and tests conducted to derive the final sample. In our work on far-right discourses in Italy (Brown and Newth *forthcoming*), we use keyness to identify the most salient social media posts in relation to the post-fascist logic and immigration, filtering out any posts where selected words do not occur. Preliminary analysis can be used as an initial mapping technique to provide an overview and further narrow down the most relevant data.

Phase 3: In-depth analysis

From identifying macropropositions and keywords, the third phase proceeds to develop such insights further and extend analysis to different areas based on theory or corpus-driven results. This stage requires multiple close readings of the texts and constant interplay between qualitative and quantitative techniques. Any signifiers identified in the preliminary phase which convey very similar ideas can be grouped under umbrella themes for an initial set of nodes for coding (e.g., 'trade', 'business' and 'cost of EU membership' under the umbrella of 'economy'). A first in-depth reading can start by coding smaller units such as phrases, sentences or groups of sentences to this list of nodes, while adding further categories if other topics emerge during the process. This should produce a clearer image of potentially the most salient ideas across the data.

Next, collocation and concordance tests can be conducted on recurring lexical items of interest, determined by the themes identified above. Collocation denotes the statistically significant co-occurrence of two words next to or near one another (Baker 2023, 136), while concordance provides a list of the "occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus, presented within the context they occur in" (ibid., 107). Both offer an overview of the construction of certain ideas across the corpus and can be used to explore the strategies and textual devices that fix their meaning. For example, collocation and concordance analysis of *migra* (e.g., immigration, migrants, etc.) in our Italian far-right social media corpus (Brown and Newth *forthcoming*) underscored how such groups were often associated with crime in these posts, through top collocates like 'illegal', 'safety' and 'emergency'. Collocation pointed to important patterns of depiction, which we could then explore further through concordance lines and a return to our sample for greater contextualisation.

The next round of coding relies on the five principal discursive strategies identified within the DHA: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation and intensification/mitigation (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 94). By examining how textual devices are used to construct subjects, offer positive or negative evaluations, build arguments, position the speaker relative to the topic or modify the emphasis placed on certain phenomena, we can begin to understand how different ideas come together to form the discursive structure. Projects may focus more clearly on one or more of these areas, for instance using topoi to examine argumentation strategies (Wodak and Rheindorf 2022) or analysing metaphors

which may intensify the sense of threat (Taylor 2020). These strategies and their associated textual devices may be overt or subtle depending on the immediate context of the situation, audience, aims of the speaker/writer, etc. It is the role of the researcher to uncover such strategic work, identify patterns and link them to the broader societal context.

Within the coding process, there should be an explicit focus on the articulation of signifiers to build a contingent web of meaning, drawing on DT's theorisation of discursive formulations. The analytical procedures described above open avenues for exploring the relationship between themes. For example, concordance can be used to establish a 'connectivity index' which assesses the frequency of keywords within +/- 5 words of context around another keyword. Nikos Nikisianis et al. (2019, 280) outline that this process can indicate important nodal points, because they should not only themselves be among the most powerful keywords but also have strong associations with other keywords. Although DT and CL have rarely been combined, this example demonstrates their great potential to work in unison. Once the connectivity index has been established, these associations among signifiers, or the broader themes identified in the first round of coding, should be explored through qualitative enquiry, employing the discursive strategy framework from the DHA to assess the nature and strength of the relationships between them. Consequently, a detailed web indicating nodal points, associated signifiers and the way they are linked should be drawn up. In my work on Brexit (Brown 2022, 153-62), a discursive web was produced for each campaign group which visually represented these features, illustrating how different ideas intersected with one another to form an overarching structure.²

The above processes constitute a general starting point for analysis, but it should be noted that further coding based on theory and problem-driven requirements must be included according to the needs of the specific study. For example, when exploring Islamophobic discourse (Brown 2020), Deepa Kumar's (2012, 41-60) five Islamophobic myths developed from Orientalism proved influential in interpreting the significance of what was expressed. My work on mainstreaming also involved additional coding to specific strategies of talking 'about' the far right (Brown 2022) to assess the implications of the way mainstream actors refer to and discursively construct these groups. Incorporating such theories forms a vital part of the process of contextualisation, which, as emphasised, is critical within the DHA. This principle must be considered throughout, whether it be contextualising utterances within the text, addressing elements of intertextuality across the corpus and beyond, considering what is absent and situating what is said/written within historical developments. Flexibility and triangulation form cornerstones to this approach, enabling the inclusion of a diverse range of insights which can be interpreted with strong theoretical backing. It should be noted that this openness also applies to the concepts used to present the findings, as they may be drawn from different traditions according to analytical needs.

Finally, it must be added that should there be a comparative element to the study, this framework can be implemented and adapted to facilitate both simultaneous and subsequent comparisons. For example, in addition to the test of keyness above based on a general corpus, it is possible to compare two specialised corpora in order to find terms of greater saliency

² See Brown (2020, p.643) for another example.

within one corpus in contrast to the other. Beyond this, rounds of coding may follow the above framework and be conducted in rotation between the samples to allow consideration of similarities and differences throughout.

Phase 4: Findings

Once coding is complete, the results can be condensed and organised into a coherent presentation of the key findings. An issue with CL is that it can produce an almost-unmanageable array of results. However, one of the aims of the proposed framework is to approach analysis with some structure, allowing enough flexibility to encourage creativity while ensuring that results can be cross-referenced with relative ease and sorted accordingly. With the emphasis on contextualisation, particularly at the level of society and theory, results should be presented in relation to broader structures, facilitating criticality and highlighting their relevance beyond the case study. By situating the findings from my study of Brexit within wider frames (Brown 2022, 170), such as narratives of colonial/imperial nostalgia (El-Enany, 2018), it allowed greater reflection on how Brexit both fed into these discourses and crucially drew significantly from them too. DT's different levels of discourse, which encourage the identification of such connections, are critical in interpreting the wider origins and significance of a discursive event.

Finally, a key consideration when communicating findings should also be their potential impact. Research is not separate from societal processes, so in our reflexive approach, we must remain attentive to the possible implications of how our work is presented (Brown 2024). Within CDS, critique is conceptualised at different levels, from problematizing internal contradictions within a text or discourse (Forchtner, 2011, 3) to attempting to contribute to the transformation and improvement of communication. Norman Fairclough (2010, 45) regards this extension to prognostic critique as essential for moving from a descriptive to critical perspective in research. If we are to actively engage in such pursuits, we must necessarily reflect on the discourses to which we ourselves are contributing. Important work on the populist hype (Dean and Maignashca 2020; Eklundh 2020; Glynos and Mondon 2019) has underscored the role of academia in reinforcing and lending credence to harmful false equivalences and power structures. As such, we must be mindful of the lasting effects of our work when we add our voice to debates.

Conclusion: an interconnected approach

In summary, this article has sought to develop a novel framework involving the combination of DT, CDS and CL, with a specific focus on linking theory to analysis in order to approach discourse at both the macro- and micro-level. By amalgamating the theoretical depth of DT, the applied capacity of CDS and the analytical range of CL, I argue that these varied influences can form a coherent whole. With the exception of CDS and CL, there have been very few examples to date of studies combining these approaches, which, as Sjölander (2011, 36) underlines in relation to CDS and DT, has "led to missed opportunities for dialogue and

critique". Indeed, despite some theoretical and practical differences, there are a number of areas of convergence across each approach which make them compatible partners. By visualising this combination through the methodological tree, their respective strengths and weaknesses can be offset against one another to form a balanced structure. This has then been translated into a concrete but flexible analytical framework which serves as a starting point for empirical analysis.

To end, it should be emphasised that the introduction of analytical techniques beyond the traditional realm of DT and CDS, particularly quantitative measures within CL, should not be based on an attempt to appease the demands of positivism within the social sciences. Instead, their incorporation must rest on the principles of extending and deepening the range of insights available, with openness and reflexivity, rather than measurement and objectivity, constituting the cornerstones of rigour and credibility. If consciously grounded philosophically within constructionism, and in particular poststructuralism, the incorporation of additional techniques does not threaten ontological and epistemological integrity. On the contrary, it strengthens the premise of interpretations by providing multiple perspectives, which, if presented appropriately, improve transparency and provide support for findings. Approached in this way, discourse analytic work does not lose its fundamental roots in these core principles. At the same time, further avenues are opened up for exploration, and it is hoped that others can refine and expand on this framework, for instance incorporating the logics approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007), multi-modal analyses (Ledin and Machin 2019) or cross-linguistic components (Taylor 2014). Engaging in these kinds of dialogues will allow for further cultivation of the methodological tree as a philosophical, methodological and analytical structure.

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Katy Brown

Maynooth University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5405-2322>

Katy Brown (she/her) is an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at Maynooth University. Her research focuses on the mainstreaming of the far right, centring principally on the role that mainstream actors play in normalising far-right discourse. Her current project examines the effects of media reporting on the far right across Ireland, France, Italy and the UK.