

## Discourse Analysis and its Cognitive Features in Society

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the intersection of discourse analysis and cognitive science, focusing on how language use in social contexts reflects and shapes human thought processes. Discourse analysis examines language beyond the sentence level, while cognitive features include mental models, framing, metaphor, presupposition, memory schemas, and social categorization. The article argues that understanding cognitive features of discourse is essential for analyzing how ideologies spread, how power is maintained, and how collective beliefs are formed in society. Real-world examples from politics, media, education, and law are provided, along with methodological recommendations and discussion of challenges.*

**Key words:** *Discourse Analysis, Cognitive Features, Social Cognition, Framing, Metaphor, Mental Models, Ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis*

### 1. Introduction

Language is the primary medium through which human beings coordinate action, transmit knowledge, express identity, and exercise power. Every day, billions of spoken and written exchanges occur across families, classrooms, courtrooms, parliaments, newsrooms, and digital platforms. Yet the relationship between what is said and what is thought remains surprisingly undertheorized in much discourse-analytic research.[1] Traditional discourse analysis excels at describing linguistic patterns and social contexts but often treats the human mind as a black box. Conversely, cognitive science meticulously studies mental processes but frequently examines decontextualized sentences rather than natural discourse. This article bridges that gap by systematically examining discourse analysis and its cognitive features in society.[2] The central argument is this: Discourse influences society through cognition.[3] Cognitive features such as mental models, frames, metaphors, presuppositions, narratives, and social categorizations are the psychological mechanisms that translate linguistic input into beliefs, attitudes, memories, and actions. Without understanding these mechanisms, one cannot explain why a single political slogan convinces millions, why a news headline changes public opinion overnight, or why a courtroom narrative determines a jury's verdict.[4]

### 2. Methodology

This article has three main objectives:

- a. To define discourse analysis and its cognitive dimensions.
- b. To identify key cognitive features operating in everyday discourse.[5]
- c. To demonstrate how these features function across various social domains (politics, media, education, law, health, digital communication).

Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary field that studies language use beyond the boundaries of isolated sentences.[6] Rather than asking what a word or grammatical structure means in the abstract, Discourse analysis asks how people use language to accomplish social actions in specific

contexts. The term "discourse" itself has two main senses: (a) language in use (spoken or written), and (b) systems of knowledge and practice that constitute social reality. For example: "medical discourse," "legal discourse". [7]

### 3. Results and Discussion

Major traditions within Discourse analysis Table 1. include: Critical Discourse Analysis examines how discourse reproduces, legitimates, or challenges social inequality, power relations, and ideology. It assumes that language is never neutral but always serves particular interests. Conversation Analysis: Originating in sociology with Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, Conversation Analysis studies the sequential organization of talk-in-interaction.[8] Discursive Psychology: Developed by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, this approach investigates how psychological phenomena—memory, attitudes, emotions, identity—are constructed in discourse rather than being internal states that cause discourse. Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis: Influenced by Michel Foucault, this tradition treats discourses as historically specific systems that produce knowledge, truth, and subjectivity. It asks: *What can be said? Who can say it? Under what conditions?* Cognitive features refer to the mental structures and processes involved in producing, comprehending, remembering, and being influenced by discourse. Unlike purely linguistic features (phonology, syntax, lexicon), cognitive features operate at the level of representation and computation. [9]

**Table 1.** Cognitive features

Cognitive Features	Key features	Key Scholars
Mental	Dynamic internal representation of a specific situation, event, or state of affairs	Johnson-Laird, van Dijk
Frame	Stable structure of expectations about a concept or domain	Fillmore, Minsky, Goffman
Conceptual metaphor	Understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another	Lakoff & Johnson
Scheme	Generalized knowledge structure for recurring event types (scripts)	Schank & Abelson, Bartlett
Presupposition	Background assumptions taken for granted in an utterance	Frege, Strawson, Stalnaker
Cognitive dissonance	Psychological discomfort from holding contradictory beliefs	Festinger
Availability heuristic	Judging frequency or probability by ease of recall	Tversky & Kahneman
In-group/out-group categorization	Mental division of social world into "us" and "them"	Tajfel & Turner

These features are not mutually exclusive; they interact dynamically. For example, a metaphor can activate a frame, which in turn shapes a mental model.[10]

Teun van Dijk provided the most influential integrative framework. He argued that any adequate theory of discourse must account for three interconnected levels: Society: The macro-level of social structures, institutions, power relations, cultural norms, and shared ideologies. Discourse: The meso-level of actual text and talk—speeches, conversations, articles, laws, advertisements. Cognition: The micro-level of individual mental representations and processes beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, memories, intentions, emotions.[11]

The relationships are bidirectional. Social structures shape what discourses are produced and how they are interpreted Example: who gets to speak in court. Discourses shape cognitive representations Example: repeated media framing changes beliefs. Cognitive representations shape subsequent discourse Example: what a person believes influences what they say. And aggregated cognitive representations across individuals constitute social shared knowledge and ideology.[12] Thus, studying cognitive features of discourse is not a detour from social analysis but a necessary component of it. Without cognition, society is an abstract structure with no mechanism for influencing individuals; without discourse, cognition is an internal process with no access to the social world. The next key concept framing - **Definition:** Framing is the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, while simultaneously downplaying or omitting other aspects. **Linguistic indicators:** Word choice “tax relief” vs. “tax burden”, metaphors, examples, catchphrases, depictions.[13]

**Cognitive effect:** Frames activate particular schemas, guiding attention, inference, evaluation, and recall. Once a frame is accepted, alternative frames become cognitively costly to access.

**Example:** Consider framing of a protest:

"Freedom fighters" (heroism frame) - positive evaluation[14]

"Rioters" (criminality frame) - negative evaluation

"Desperate citizens" (sympathy frame) - mixed evaluation[15]

Conceptual metaphor Table 2. is understanding one abstract or unfamiliar conceptual domain (the target) in terms of another more concrete or familiar domain. Linguistic indicators: Conventionalized expressions that cross domains: “He attacked my argument,” “We are at a crossroads,” “The economy is ailing.” Cognitive effect: Source-domain structure (including logic, evaluation, and imagery) maps onto the target domain, often unconsciously. This shapes reasoning, emotion, and action. [16]

**Examples of common conceptual metaphors:**

Conceptual metaphor	Source Domain	Target domain	Linguistic Examples
Argument is war	War	Argument	indefensible position, shot down, won the debate
Time is money	Time	Money	Spend time, save hours, waste minutes
Love is a journey	Journey	Relationship	At a crossroad, stuck, moving forward
Nation is family	Family	Nation	founding fathers, brotherhood, motherland

**Cognitive effect in politics:** When a nation is metaphorically a family, the president becomes a father figure, citizens become children, and dissent becomes disobedience. This naturalizes hierarchy.

The next key concept is a presupposition is background information that a speaker treats as already known or assumed to be true, rather than asserted as new information. **Linguistic indicators:** Definite descriptions ("the king of France"), factive verbs ("know," "regret" – "He regrets leaving" presupposes he left), change-of-state verbs ("stop," "start" – "She stopped smoking" presupposes she smoked), iterative words ("again," "back" – "He came back" presupposes he was here before). **Cognitive effect:** Presuppositions are processed automatically, without critical evaluation. Listeners tend to accept presupposed content as true even when the main assertion is questioned. This makes presupposition a powerful tool for manipulation. [17]

**Example:** Political ad: "Why does our opponent continue to support failed policies?" Presupposes: opponent supports policies, policies are failed, opponent continues. All of these are slipped in as background, not argued.

Cognitive features across social domains which is media discourse demonstrates how cognitive features operate in specific societal contexts. News media are the primary source of public information about events beyond direct experience. Cognitive features shape what the public knows and feels. **Headline effects:** Headlines are the first and often only part of a news story many people read. They establish a primary frame (primacy effect). Changing one word changes interpretation: "*Police kill unarmed man*" - *police blamed* "*Man with knife shot by police*" - *man blamed* **Source selection:** Whose voice is quoted? Experts, officials, witnesses, victims? Each source carries cognitive authority. **Emotional vocabulary:** "Slaughter" vs. "die" vs. "pass away" carry different emotional loads and activate different schemas. **Agenda-setting effect:** Media do not tell people what to think but what to think about. Issues mentioned frequently become cognitively accessible; when asked for opinions, people retrieve the most accessible information.[18]

#### 4. Conclusion

Discourse is the bridge between individual minds and collective society. To study discourse without cognition is to describe a bridge without understanding how people cross it. To study cognition without discourse is to study minds in isolation from the social world that shapes them. This article has argued for integration. The cognitive features of discourse—framing, metaphor, presupposition, narrative, pronouns, and their relatives are not peripheral curiosities but central mechanisms of human social life. Understanding them is essential for anyone who wishes to communicate effectively, think critically, or act justly in a world saturated with language.

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