

LBRIS

We know
books

LUIZA-MARIA FILIMON

**ON POSTMODERNISM IN INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS (1): POSTSTRUCTURALIST
CONSIDERATIONS ON THEORY,
LANGUAGE, AND DISCOURSE**

t...

TRITONIC

Tritonic Books

București - 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISCLAIMER	11
FOREWORD	13
INTRODUCTION	19
• Terminological Clarifications: Poststructuralism vs. Postmodernism	22
• The State of the Field: Romanian IR and the Subfield IR Theories	24
• Literature Review	29
• Research Context	32
• Research Design, Research Questions, and Objectives	37
• Structure of Research	40
Chapter I: The Poststructuralist View on Discourse Analysis ..	40
Chapter II: IR Theory and Disciplinary History	41
Chapter III: The Advent of Postpositivism in IR	42
Chapter IV: The Poststructuralist Theory: Challenging Disciplinary Order	43
CHAPTER I.	
AN ATTEMPT TO CONFIGURE A POSTSTRUCTURALIST RESEARCH FRAMEWORK THROUGH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	45
I.1. Defining Discourse in Discourse Analysis	48
I.2. Discourse Analysis and Poststructuralism	54

I.2.1. Points of Contention? Structuralism versus Poststructuralism	54
I.2.2. The Contribution of Michel Foucault to the Study of Discourse	56
I.2.3. Jacques Derrida's View on Discourse	62
I.3. Poststructuralist Forms of Analysis: Strategies and Methods	70
I.3.1. Grammatology	70
I.3.2. Deconstruction	75
I.3.3. Archaeology	81
I.3.4. Genealogy	85
I.4. Approaches to Discourse Analysis	90
I.4.1. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory	90
I.4.2. Critical Discourse Analysis	94
I.4.3. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis	103
I.5. Methodological Tools for Conducting Discourse Analysis	111
I.5.1. Predication	112
I.5.2. Presupposition	114
I.5.3. Subject positioning	116
I.5.4. Articulation	118
I.5.5. Interpellation	121

CHAPTER II.

LOCATING POSTSTRUCTURALISM IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. A DECONSTRUCTION OF THE "GREAT DEBATES" NARRATIVE	125
II.1. Introductory Elements	125
II.2. The Theory of International Relations and the Great Debates	129
II.2.1. What Makes a Theory?	129
II.2.2. The Framework of the Debates: An Unstable Analytic	132
II.3. A IR Tale about Binary Pairs	135
II.3.1. Overview of Great Debate	135
II.3.2. The First Great Debate: Realism versus Idealism	143
II.3.3. The Second Great Debate: Traditionalism versus Behavioralism (Positivism)	153

II.3.4. The Third Great Debate or the Inter-Paradigm Debate: (Neo)realism,(Neo)liberalism and (Neo)-Marxism	163
II.3.5. The Fourth Great Debate: Rationalism versus Reflectivism	175
II.3.6. Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, and the Fourth Debate	188
II.4. The Field of IR in the Aftermath of the Great Debates	192

CHAPTER III.

REVISITING DISSIDENCE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY: INTERPRETIVISM, POSTPOSITIVISM, ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM	195
III.1. General Considerations	197
III.1.1. The Meta-theoretical Predispositions of IR	201
III.2. On the Issue of Traditions and Myths in IR	206
III.2.1. The Role of Political Theory Tradition in IRT	208
III.2.2. Critical Views of Tradition in IR	213
III.3. Research Paradigms in IR Theory	215
III.3.1. Positivism	218
III.3.2. Interpretivism	223
III.3.3. Postpositivism	232
III.3.4. Anti-foundationalism	239

CHAPTER IV.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: AN OUTLIER <i>THEORY</i>	247
IV.1. Revisiting the Terminology: Postmodernism vs. Poststructuralism	247
IV.2. Poststructuralism and the Fourth Debate	250
IV.2.1. Relation with Reflectivism, Postpositivism, and Anti-foundationalism	255
IV.2.2. The Poststructuralist Critique of Neorealism	261
IV.2.3. Poststructuralism and the Accusation of Obscurantism	266
IV.3. Point of Origin: The French Poststructuralist Connection?	269
IV.4. Meta-theoretical Considerations	279
IV.4.1. A Poststructuralist Meta-Theoretical Critique of Mainstream Theorization	282

IV.4.2. The Poststructuralist Relation with Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology	286
IV.5. The Discursive Universe of Poststructuralism	293
IV.5.1. The Importance of Language	295
IV.5.2. On the Issue of Power and Discourse	297
IV.6. Research Preoccupations	301
IV.6.1. Power	301
IV.6.2. Sovereignty	305
IV.6.3. Identity	310
CONCLUSION	317
Research Overview	317
Contributions to the Field of International Relations in Romania and Limitations of Research	324
REFERENCES	329

DISCLAIMER

This volume is based on the author's doctoral thesis, titled "The Poststructuralist Theory In International Relations: Deconstructing Diplomatic and Security Practices in the Contemporary Period" (thesis defense in 2017), conducted under the supervision of Prof. Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Ph.D., at the Multidisciplinary Doctoral School of National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest.

The present volume covers the first four chapters of the thesis, focusing on aspects pertaining to the disciplinary history of the field, development of the poststructuralist theory in International Relations, relation with other theories, methodology, and conceptual application. A second volume is projected to encompass and develop the remaining chapters of the original thesis.

relativity of language, poststructuralism has been castigated as nihilistic. This was the case especially in the beginning when its predilection for critical meta-theoretical soliloquies garnered the opprobrium of its detractors. After all, the critics likened themselves to be far removed from the taint of power, politics, and ideology with which poststructuralism was so concerned with. Yet, as this chapter shows, the theory did not stray too far from the core topics generally associated with the practice of international relations, bringing a valuable contribution to the study of key concepts in IR.

Based on what I have discussed so far, the research will try to illustrate how discursive practices dominating the IR, some bearing profound ramifications at the policy level – have been granted somewhat of a conceptual immunity, having been imbued with axiomatic legitimacy. We see this, as mentioned, in relation to the various contemporary global crises that have led to the creation of new discursive parameters for representing the Other in the context of specific identity frameworks designed to marginalize, exclude, erase, or silence. Rather ironic when considering that poststructuralism has been somewhat marginalized in IR for not being the right kind of theory, analyzing the right kind of subjects in the right kind of way. In this sense, the present volume brings a modest contribution to understanding the origins, scope, and impact of poststructuralism in IR, examining the discursive structures that constitute it and that also constitute *the world of international / intertextual relations*.

CHAPTER I.

AN ATTEMPT TO CONFIGURE A POSTSTRUCTURALIST RESEARCH FRAMEWORK THROUGH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

*Without theory there is nothing but description,
and without methodology
there is no transformation of theory into analysis.*

Lene Hansen (2006)⁴⁵

In the field of IR, one of the main critiques directed at poststructuralism has revolved around the idea that this theory rejects – or is by design – incompatible with the notion of methodology. While this accusation stems from criticisms of neorealist, neoliberal, and even constructivist persuasions, some proponents have been complicit in promoting the idea that poststructuralism is anti-method since, as Lene Hansen points out, the methodological aspects had not been awarded “prominence of place”⁴⁶. When poststructuralism was first developed as an IR theory, the shortcoming of the *methodology blackout* was attributed to the fact that methods were not adequate to challenge the traditional theories – especially in their neo-neo interparadigmatic expressions.

⁴⁵ Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice. Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xvi.

According to Hansen, the critique of International Relations “required an exposure of ontological and epistemological foundations, and methodology could never be the medium through which this was done”⁴⁷. The solution to this analytical conundrum – that had so many disputing the validity of poststructuralism – was found in a particular approach to discursive practices which treated “texts as social instantiations”⁴⁸. As such, the focus of the analysis in this context switched from *why-questions* to *how-possible questions*. In Roxanne Doty’s view, while the former are regarded as incomplete since they tend to assume that a particular event was inevitable⁴⁹, the latter analyze “how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects / objects, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others”⁵⁰. Even today, poststructuralism lacks a definitive methodological grounding though this can also apply to other IR theories such as constructivism that break the positivist mould and where methodology is regarded as the “missing link” between the theoretical approach and research⁵¹. What some perceive as a rejection of science is, instead, an attempt

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Jan Wright, “Poststructural Methodologies – The Body, Schooling and Health”, in *Body Knowledge and Control. Studies in the Sociology of Physical Education and Health*, ed. John Evans, Brian Davies, and Jan Wright (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 19.

⁴⁹ They do not question the possibility behind a likely course of action since they assume “a particular subjectivity (i.e., mode of being), a background of social / discursive practices and meanings which make possible the practices as well as the social actors themselves” (Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines”, *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (September 1993): 298).

⁵⁰ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction”, 298.

⁵¹ Ioana Leucea, *Constructivism și securitate umană* (Iași: Institutul European, 2012), 31.

to extend the field of analysis, to encompass things outside the perimeter of scientific methodology, and uncover for example, the “undervalued and hidden influences at work within science”⁵². James Williams argues that poststructuralism does not delimitate knowledge into separate fields of analysis (i.e.: science, ethics, and aesthetics), instead it considers “the extra-scientific”⁵³ as well. While it might seem counterintuitive, this does not exclude the “scientific”: “Scientific theories and facts must therefore be seen as part of a much wider series of extra-scientific theories and criticisms, in particular, in terms of the impossibility of final theories or final truths”⁵⁴.

In this chapter, the objectives consist in identifying and analyzing “discourse” as the research medium receptive to poststructuralist endeavors, followed by the methods that aid the researcher in showcasing how “textual and social processes are intrinsically connected and [...] describ[ing], in specific contexts, the implications of this connection for the way we think and act in the contemporary world”⁵⁵. In terms of the research questions, the analysis is concerned with finding an answer to the following issues: How can we reveal the power / knowledge relations through a poststructuralist approach?; How does a poststructuralist research approach avoid the traditional inductive / deductive trappings of analysis?; or What are the criteria in developing a research framework for discourse analysis?

⁵² James Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), 16.

⁵³ Williams defines *the extra-scientific* as something that is “beyond the limits of restricted definitions of science in terms of method, in terms of relation to truths, and in terms of forms of evidence and logic” (Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism*, 17).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁵ Jim George, *Discourse of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 191.

Using discourse analysis as a springboard for outlining a poststructuralist research framework is not less frowned upon than the poststructuralist theory itself. Neorealists (John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt) and liberal institutionalists (Robert Keohane) consider the discourse based framework of analyzing IR to be tantamount to *bad* or *dangerous* science. As Jennifer Milliken puts it, *bad* because it does not easily lend itself to “testable theories or empirical analyses”⁵⁶ and *dangerous* because discourse analysis looks accessible which consequently predisposes it to bouts of prolixity and self-indulgence⁵⁷.

In reviewing the *sui generis* methods associated with poststructuralism – like Michel Foucault’s genealogy and Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction – and the subsequent discursive techniques employed in the study of international relations and foreign policy (predication, presupposition, subject positioning, etc.), the chapter argues that both subjects and objects alike do not exist independently of the discursive practices that create, enable, and employ them.

1.1. Defining *Discourse* in Discourse Analysis

The concept of “discourse” can be applied to various conceptions of speech. When engaging in discourse analysis, the researcher should carefully define and normatively frame

⁵⁶ Jennifer Milliken, “The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods”, *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (June 1999): 227. See also: John Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions”, *International Security* 9, no. 3 (Winter 1994–1995): 5–49; Robert Keohane, “International Institutions: Two Approaches”, *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (December 1988): 83–105. For an application of Milliken’s theorization of discourse, see Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction”.

⁵⁷ Ibid. See also: Stephen Walt, “The Renaissance of Security Studies”, *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (June 1991): 211–40.

the concepts as to avoid a discombobulating and indeterminate use of the terms. Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips note that the haphazard proliferation of the term “discourse” has diluted its meaning, having been associated with the notion “that language is structured according to different patterns that people’s utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life”⁵⁸.

In the context of social studies in general, and of the field and subfields of IR in particular, discourse analysis represents a host of various methodologies that investigate these patterns. Where poststructuralist discourse analysis is concerned, its influence can be attributed to French philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida or Jacques Lacan. French poststructuralist theory critiqued the structuralist idea – identified in Ferdinand de Saussure’s work – according to which the structure of language is stable⁵⁹. Instead, the poststructuralists argued that while signs are dependent on one another to acquire meaning (where “meaning depends on the difference of these elements vis-à-vis all possible elements of a language”⁶⁰) – they are also suggestible to the context which employs them. The immediate effect of this view translates into the notion that while words are not opened

⁵⁸ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, 2002), 1.

⁵⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory argued that “signs acquire their meaning by their difference from other signs. [...] [S]tructuralist theory rests on the assumption that signs are locked in particular relationships with one another: every sign has a particular location [...] and its meaning is fixed” (Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, 11). See also: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1915).

⁶⁰ Johannes Angermuller, *Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis. Subjectivity on Enunciative Pragmatics* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 8.

EBRIS We know books.

to infinite meanings, they also “cannot be fixed with one or more definitive meaning(s)”⁶¹.

Discourse analysis allows one to understand and trace back the way in which various courses of action transpire, how different potential outcomes are contextually imposed or why actors regard one another as either friends or foes. In the field of IR, the study of discourse is considered a classic qualitative tool that was initially advanced by poststructuralist authors like Richard Ashley, Robert Walker, Michael Shapiro or James Der Derian, in an attempt to challenge the foundations of the discipline. They are exponents of a *dissident scholarship* that rejected traditional research criteria seen as reinforcing the pre-existent structures of control and domination. Meanwhile, on the positivist front, it is thought that the absence of a formal recognized methodology incapacitates the researcher and denies them access to an objective framework represented by “standardised criteria for data collection, case selection and the limits of research”⁶². In the absence of verifiable criteria based on rationalistic premises, critics argue that the research becomes vulnerable, undependable, and unconvincing. On the other hand, Richard Ashley and Robert Walker posit that adapting to pre-established frameworks is counterintuitive, preferring instead to open the research to multiple angles of analysis. The evolution of poststructuralism in IR has enabled it to transition from a preliminary critique of its theoretical kindred, towards an analysis of international relations events through discourse analysis, as seen early on, in James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro’s coordinated volume, *International / Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (1989), and later, with the works

⁶¹ Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, 11.

⁶² Ashleigh Croucher, “The Discursive Turn in International Relations Research: Bad Science?”, *E-International Relations*, October 16, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/10/16/the-discursive-turn-in-international-relations-research-bad-science/>.

of Lene Hansen – *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (2006).

Hansen analyzes poststructuralism’s discursive ontology, finding that language is “an inherently unstable system of signs that generate meaning through a simultaneous construction of identity and difference”⁶³. Through the examination of “utterances”⁶⁴ (texts, signs recognized as text, and even societal processes), discourse analysis outlines what Iver Neumann describes as “the bandwidth of possible outcomes”⁶⁵. By expanding the frame of reference through the inclusion of marginal and exiled voices, poststructuralism illustrates how knowledge and power are articulated and how discursive practices become entrenched. Hansen also highlights how discourse depends on “particular constructions of problems and subjectivities”, and at the same time, constructs and enables these particular instances (especially where policy discourse is concerned, for example)⁶⁶. Hansen’s application of discourse analysis focuses on outlining the connections between foreign policy and identity where the former is “performatively linked” to the latter⁶⁷. In Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen’s view, Hansen’s exercise in discourse analysis illustrates how the discourse, which presents an actual event, also has a role in constituting it⁶⁸.

⁶³ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 15.

⁶⁴ In Hansen’s view, discourse is not limited to “ideas”, it also encompasses material and ideational factors: “an inherently unstable system of signs that generate meaning through a simultaneous construction of identity and difference” (Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 15).

⁶⁵ Iver B. Neumann, “Discourse Analysis”, in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations. A Pluralist Guide*, ed. Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 62.

⁶⁶ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁸ Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations. Theories and Approaches (Sixth Edition)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 236.