A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF POWER, IDEOLOGY AND GENDER REPRESENTATION IN ACT 3, SCENE 4 OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

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Abstract:
This paper provides a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the play, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, regarding the interaction of power, ideology, and gender, in Act 3, Scene 4, which Evidently, is known as the Closet Scene. Through the application of the three-dimensional CDA model of Norman Fairclough and Feminist CDA model of Michelle Lazar, the research unveils the way language works and perpetuates the patriarchal and ideological systems in the Elizabethan period. A qualitative study of the interaction between Hamlet and Queen Gertrude proves that imperatives, pronouns, metaphors, and interruptions are used linguistically as control measures. At the end of it all, findings indicate that the moral rhetoric of Hamlet and the verbal repression of Gertrude uphold the patriarchal ideology, which links virtue to masculinity and guilt to femininity. This work extends CDA and feminist studies of Shakespeare by showing how power operates not just within the story or the characters but also within the nuances of the structure of language in such a way that discourse seems to be a product, as well as an instrument of ideological reproduction.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), Closet Scene, Power and Ideology, Gender Representation, Elizabethan Patriarchy.

Introduction
Hamlet by William Shakespeare is one of the most popular objects of the critical analysis because it examines ethical issues, the fall of government, and complexity of psychology. However, beyond these thematic dimensions, there is a complex system of language exchanges that reflect more deep-seated systems of power and ideology. Hamlet, placed in a kingdom where kingship is dominated by the divine power of gods and the rules and conventions of the male power, depicts that power can be upheld not only by the rule of law and by the sword but also by the word. The language of the play constructs the lively environment of ideological discourse, in which words are used as a means of persuasion, moral judgment and social control.

The Closet Scene, as it is frequently called, is the third scene of the first act, Scene 4, which creates a unique and language-rich environment where the interactions are illustrated most effectively. The conflict between Hamlet and Gertrude does not only represent a conflict between the family members but also a verbal conflict where the male domination and female subordination is performed, argued, and observed. Hamlet assumes the role of a moral censor, condemning the second marriage of his mother as a filthy scuttlecock, but Gertrude in her discontinuous and self-excusing speech creates a sense of the limited power that she has had in the male-dominated order of Elizabethan society. Such a dialogical communication offers

a fertile ground of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which shows how power relations were articulated in texts, socially justified, and ideologically maintained with the help of using ordinary language.

The need to have such approach in feminism and linguistics is emphasized by recent scholars. According to Roy (2024), Shakespearean women often play a game between opposites; they are rebellious and subordinate at the same time, and due to their ambivalent roles as both moral agents and a weapon against patriarchy, they are paradoxical. Similarly, Ali, Awad, and Safr (2025) argue that women of Hamlet and Macbeth are complex identities that alternated in the power and weakness, which depicts that female subjectivity of the Shakespearean tragedy is formed more by linguistic and ideological processes than character psychology. According to Amiri and Khoshkam (2024), Judith Butler also employs the notions of gender performativity when it comes to the works by Shakespeare, and the authors argue that the aspect of gender in the mentioned plays is not an inherent trait, but rather a performative effect of the repetitive discursive acts. This fits precisely well with the concerns of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2005) that emphasizes the power of discourse to construct, normalize, and sometimes upset gender hierarchies.

CDA is a sound methodological ground on this kind of research. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse can be considered as operating at three intertwined levels that include the textual, discursive, and the social in its operation, which are a reflection of how power and ideology are expressed and reproduced through language and which are maintained on an institutional level, as well as a formative force that shapes the cognition, identity, and hegemony. van Dijk (1998) and Wodak (2001) add to this idea, indicating that discourse is not only a reflection of the social reality but also a These perspectives make CDA particularly applicable to Shakespearean drama, and the role of personal expression and societal structure is pivotal in generating meaning in Shakespearean drama. Tariq, Nawaz, and Farid (2020) applied the Fairclough framework successfully to the analysis of contemporary political communication and showed how the oppositional binaries such as us vs. them are used to reinforce the ideological division in a way that the moral language used in Hamlet, which separates purity and corruption on gender-related grounds.

In the literature that incorporates CDA, authors such as Yasmin and Akhtar (2022) have used Othello in order to unravel how the aspects of linguistics, especially the use of pronouns and modality, express racial and gender stratifications. Using corpus-aided feminist stylistics, Sayyed and Anjum (2024) found that women in Hamlet are also linguistically depicted using moralized adjectives that reinforce patriarchal ideology, which characterize women as weak, submissive or immoral. Such findings affirm that the linguistic analysis can show the concealed ideological connotations that are often overlooked within the psychological or structural interpretations about Shakespeare.

With these observations, this paper particularly looks at Act 3, Scene 4 where moral accuser Hamlet expresses his dominance in discursive manners on Gertrude. The linguistic characteristics of the situation commands, metaphors, judgmental phrases, and disruptions depict the expression of patriarchal beliefs at the micro-level of communication. Using the three-dimensional model of CDA presented by Fairclough (1995) and Feminist model of CDA presented by Lazar (2005), this paper will examine the interaction of power, ideology and gender in the dialogue between Hamlet and Gertrude. It is an exploration of how language challenges and strengthens patriarchal ideology which shows that the work of Shakespeare is not only a reflection of Elizabethan ideology but also a dynamic site of ideological production.

The current article in question tries to fill a research gap. Even though past criticism has focused on the psychological and moral dimensions of Hamlet, very few have employed

CDA to bring out the linguistic processes that support ideological meanings. The paper shows how language is changed into the arena where gendered power relations are negotiated through the placement of the textual microstructures in the broader discursive and social context. Finally, the study aims to prove that Shakespeare, Hamlet, evaluated in the context of Critical and Feminist Discourse Analysis suggests that the strongest forms of power are not applied through power, but through the language.

Research Focus and Objectives.

This paper discusses the way in which language acts as an ideological control mechanism, and gendered subordination in Act 3, Scene 4. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. How does linguistic performance create power relations between Hamlet and Gertrude?
2. The construction, resistance or internalization of gendered ideologies through discourse.
3. Explain how the language of Shakespeare is an expression and replication of Elizabethan ideology of patriarchy and monarchy.

Research Questions.

1. What is the way in which Hamlet uses language to practice power and authority over Gertrude?
2. What exchange ideologies are embedded in their exchange?
3. The question is how does discourse mirror patriarchal forms of Elizabethan society?

Literature Review.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an interdisciplinary method of exploring how language is a symptom of social hierarchy of power and disparity. This framework of Fairclough (1995) considers discourse as a sort of social practice operating in three dimensions: the textual (linguistic features), the discursive (construction and comprehension), and the social (greater ideological setting). van Dijk (1998) extends this perspective by explaining how discourse affects thought and substantiates authority in terms of social reproduction. Wodak (2001) adds on this by asserting that CDA in historical and political contexts should put the texts in context to demonstrate how ideology becomes normalized in everyday interactions.

A gendered element in the framework of Fairclough, Feminist CDA has been created by Michelle Lazar (2005); it emphasizes the importance of language that is a crucial place to build and maintain patriarchy. Lazar contends that discourse carries out ideological tasks that both legitimize and obscure gender disparities. Her concept of "discursive silencing" illustrates how women's voices are sidelined through conversational control, interruptions, and judgmental framing by male speakers.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) utility is not limited to the interpretation of classical literature, but it is an important approach to comprehending the presence of power and ideology in the modern institution or society. The recent scholarship shows that the same forms of control and discursive silencing occurring in Shakespearean drama are reflected in the contemporary educational and organizational environments. As an example, the current research on socio-cognitive barriers to language adoption (Mehmood, Ziauddin, and Naseem, 2025) demonstrates that external social forms of constraint and cultural barriers inhibit the linguistic agency of an individual, similar to how the patriarchal systems of Hamlet silenced the voice of Queen Gertrude. Such systemic pressure is also demonstrated in the research on organizational stress (Al-Qudwah, 2024), where high-pressure conditions are formed by administrative levels and institutional requirements and influence the psychological and communicative condition of people. In addition, the digitalization of public schooling (Mehmood et al., 2025) and the attempt to make indigenous cultural practices meet
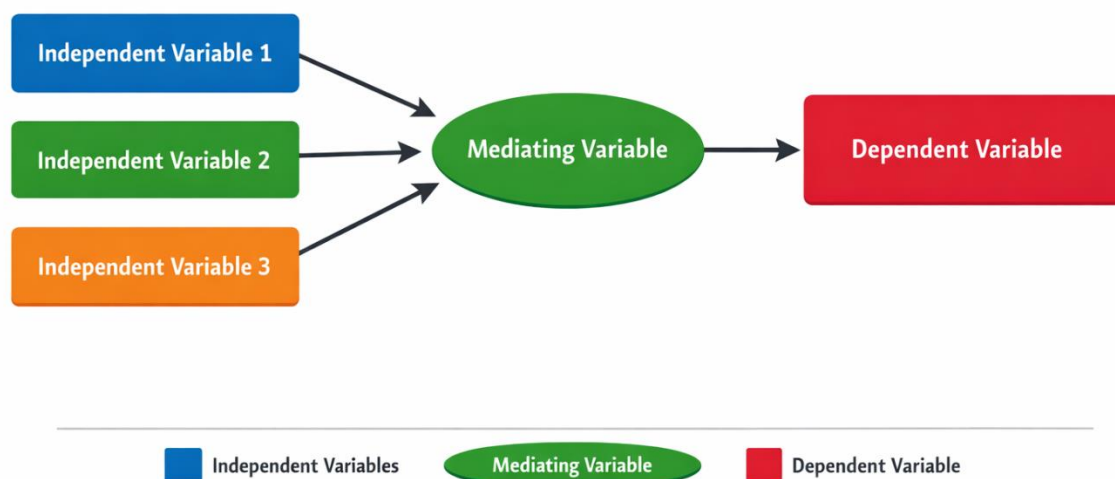
(Mehmood, Ain, Jamal, and Bhatti, 2025) show how the dominance and local identities continue to negotiate against each other. Using these 21st-century systemic obstacles and institutional power relationships, this study will locate the linguistic domination and ideological replication that exist in Hamlet on a continuum of other scholarly studies, demonstrating that discourse is still one of the main mechanisms of both upholding and challenging social order.

Researchers have progressively utilized CDA in Shakespearean plays. Yasmin and Akhtar (2022) analyzed Othello using Fairclough's framework and demonstrated how language patterns support racial and gender hierarchies. Ali, Awad, and Safr (2025) examined the intricacies of women in Macbeth and Hamlet, illustrating how patriarchal narratives shape female oppression. Using corpus-assisted feminist stylistics, Sayyed and Anjum (2024) investigated gendered adjectives in Hamlet and found that women characters are presented in the form of submissive or moralized language. Similarly, Amiri and Khoshkam (2024) applied the concept of gender performativity introduced by Judith Butler to understand female characters of Shakespeare as linguistic representations of compliance and remorse. All these works confirm the essence of CDA as a means of literary analysis and still leave much room to deeply examine a particular scene linguistically.

Despite this development, there has been very little research that has specifically focused on Act 3, Scene 4, in which moral, gender-based, and ideological contradictions converge in a very dramatic way. The previous feminist discussion tended to emphasize the psychological or moral levels of Gertrude rather than her rhetorical position in patriarchal ideology. The identified research gap will be filled using the frameworks presented by Fairclough and Lazar in order to expose how power and gender are constructed linguistically and ideologically in this critical scene.

Theoretical Framework.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the three-dimensional paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that is presented by Fairclough (1995), in which discourse is seen as a dynamic interaction between textual analysis, discursive and social practice. At the textual level, the focus is made on vocabulary, grammar, modality and transitivity linguistic features that display the presence of ideology in language. The degree of discursive practice examines the process of

text production and interpretation in specific cultural locations and the social practice dimension relates discourse to broader ideology such as patriarchy, monarchy and religion. Fairclough treats language as a form of social action, which mirrors and affects reality and emphasizes its role in sustaining power relationships. This concept is further developed by researchers like van Dijk (1998) and Wodak (2001) who show how discourse can be used as one of the tools of ideological domination. Tariq, Nawaz, and Farid (2020) demonstrate the applicability of this model to analysing political discourse in showing how the binary oppositions influence the ideological divisions. The application of these lessons in Hamlet shows that Shakespearean language is a way to manifest and reinforce gendered power relations, which are particularly practiced in the Elizabethan culture of that era that believed in patriarchy.

Besides such an approach, the studies apply the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) by Lazar (2005) and include gender as an essential part of the discourse analysis. FCDA discusses the role the language plays to construct and control gendered identities, showing the ways in which the forms of patriarchy are embedded into the language practices. According to Lazar, feminist CDA does not only describe power relations of a gendered nature but also challenges their ideological foundations. This theory provides an approach which makes possible a re-evaluation of the speech of Gertrude in Hamlet: her syntax, which is disjointed, the defensive way in which she speaks and the limited agency portrays tendencies of linguistic subordination. Similarly, Amiri and Khoshkam (2024) argue that Shakespearean representations of gender are executed through repetitive linguistic actions imperatives, pauses and moral judgments that construct femininity. This aligns with the theory of gender performativity of Butler and supports the view of Lazar, who believes that gender is constructed in discourse by enacting and enforcing gender.

The existing studies confirm the significance of including CDA and FCDA in the analysis of Shakespearean tragedies. According to Roy (2024) and Ali, Awad, and Safr (2025), such female roles as Gertrude and Lady Macbeth are the complexities of power and oppression, which are most comprehensible in the discursive approaches. Sayyed and Anjum (2024) show that evaluative adjectives like the frail and obedient are gender-biased in Hamlet and Yasmin and Akhtar (2022) show that the language construction of silence and subordination in women also takes place in Othello. All the above views will confirm that Shakespearean tragedies are ideological spaces in which language affects power and gender. In this work, Fairclough (the CDA) and Lazar (the FCDA) are applied in order to provide a multi-level analysis of Hamlet in the Closet Scene (Act 3, Scene 4) and investigate the functioning and reproduction of the patriarchal ideology in the broader context of Elizabethan morality and power hierarchy.

Analysis and Discussion.

Textual Level.

On textual level, it is possible to describe the speech of Hamlet as full of orders such as Do not go to my uncle bed, and Admit your sins to heaven. With the support of deontic modality (must, shall not), these syntactic directives have linguistic power. The ethical evaluation and religious signs are interlaced in the dialogue of Hamlet, such as rank corruption, black and grained spots, which symbolically connects the sexuality of Gertrude to the degradation of the morals. The idea of the textual power by Fairclough depicts how language creates ideological domination: the structures of command and evaluative metaphor reproduce male domination as a moral fact.

By contrast, Gertrude is terse, fragmented and insecure in her utterances, including the ones in which she tells Hamlet to say nothing more and whether or not she has done anything to arouse his suspicions. The use of questions and modal ambiguity (may, perhaps) shows that

she is defensive, and she must control her emotions. The asymmetry of the declarative and interrogative speech acts is there because of the inequality in society: Hamlet declares, Gertrude defends.

Discursive Engagement.

Hamlet has an even greater impact on discursive practice than single utterances; he has an influence on the structure of conversation itself. He constantly distracts Gertrude and takes control of the conversation and restricts her independent decision. Lazar Feminist CDA views this as discursive silencing, which is a common feature of patriarchal speech in which the male speaker takes up interpretive power. Hamlet determines what truth and morality is and Gertrude attempts to defend herself is sabotaged or even stopped. The expression What shall I do? is used in a way that shows her verbal submission and it shows how she has integrated an inferior identity through the use of language.

Social practice.

These language interactions reflect the ideological constructs of Elizabethan England, the patriarchal world and the world of God at the level of social practice. The control of female sexuality by men was an ideological norm and this is evidenced by the fact that Hamlet investigates the bodies of Gertrude and her morality. His status as a judge of morality continues patriarchal rule in the guise of a son. The alternation between thou and you contributes to the additional layers of relational power: thou is the expression of emotional possession and leadership whereas you is the pronouncement of some formal reproach. These pronoun alterations linguistically point out the variability of power in a patriarchal discourse.

According to CDA, the conflict of Hamlet is not with an individual rather than ideological. What Fairclough defines as inconsistent subject positions, the scene depicts Hamlet as being against the royal corruption and a person who is also capable of supporting patriarchal values. His moral words are a way of assessment and control. The regret that Gertrude shows is because of the ideological pressure, when she mentions that she has turned her eyes into his very soul, this is the highest level of a moral point of view which Hamlet shares with Gertrude. In this linguistic confession, Althusser describes the concept of interpellation where people internalize the ideology which defines them.

Methodology.

This qualitative interpretive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is grounded on three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework by Fairclough (1995) and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) by Lazar (2005). It is the aim of the research to unveil the ways, in which the usage of language in Hamlet, in particular, the Closet Scene in the third act, scene four (Act 3: Scene 4), establishes and supports gender power relationships in the ideological framework of Elizabethan patriarchy. Fairclough has used her framework to inter-relate the detailed textual analysis with the bigger social unit, but Lazar has provided a gender-focused view of the problem of discourse construction and regulating the female identity and gender in her FCDA. Taken together these structures aid a vital analysis of the convergence of language, ideology and power.

Act 3, Scene 4 of Hamlet (Arden Edition) is the primary data used with purpose to select the most powerful themes and language addressing the issues of gender, morality, and power. The dialogue between Hamlet and Gertrude is considered a miniature of patriarchal superiority, with some sporadic references to the speech of Claudius, which supports the same ideological context. Such a deliberate sampling approach aligns with the principles of the qualitative research, which prioritizes the depth of concepts over the representation.

The analysis follows a three-part structure of Fairclough. On the textual level, the studies examine lexical choices, modality, imperatives, pronouns, metaphors, and evaluative adjectives in order to determine how authoritative and subordinate relations are linguistically

encoded. On the discursive level, such features of the interaction as turn-taking, interruptions, and topic management are explored, which helps to show the circulation of the conversational power between the characters. Eventually, on the social-practice level, the findings are placed within the Elizabethan beliefs about patriarchy, monarchy, and religion. Following the example of Tariq et al. (2020) and Yasmin and Akhtar (2022), interpretive validity is attained through the application of triangulation, i.e., a textual, contextual, and feminist theoretical lens to develop a comprehensive and socially informed study.

Findings.

As shown in the analysis,:

1. **Power relations** are formed in the linguistic form of imperatives, modal verbs and interruptions.
2. **Gender representation** is described as having unequal speech acts with the female voices being limited by discursive silencing.
3. **The reproduction of ideology** is done by use of moral metaphors and religious discourse to legitimize patriarchal authority.
4. **The ambiguity of Hamlet** demonstrates how ambivalence to power may go hand in hand with its reproduction, which reflects the concept proposed by Fairclough of ideological contradiction.

Summary.

The study reveals that Hamlet by Shakespeare involves the element of conflict of ideology in its language. The play Act 3, Scene 4 depicts the role of language as a means of social control, moral control, and gendered control. With references to the theories of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), through the analysis of orders, ethical considerations, and interjections of Hamlet, one can see that these constructions linguistically manifest patriarchal and royal ideology, and the disorganized syntax and unconfident responses of Gertrude signify the discursive oppression of female autonomy. The scene can therefore be seen as a miniature of Elizabethan gender relations, a part of which shows how a verbal interaction is built and held up to create uneven power relations.

Conclusion.

The findings corroborate the fact that ideology works best when it is offered in the form of moral certainty. Hamlets morality dialogue transforms power to morality and Gertrude must obey Hamlet not through physical force, but through the guilt and moral sense of duty imprinted in her mind. His language can be regarded as a mirror and a means of the Elizabethan patriarchy to manifest itself, showing the way ideology reproduces itself by means of linguistic normalization.

This CDA framework can be used in future research in other Shakespearean tragedies such as Othello and Macbeth to identify how gendered power and ideology is perpetuated or not. Such comparative analysis would contribute to the knowledge of how the discourse is used as the tool of establishing, bargaining, and maintaining power in the literary and cultural settings.

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