Reframing the Language of International Relations: A Postcolonial and Discursive Reappraisal

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Abstract
This study explores the discursive construction of meaning and power in International Relations (IR), with a focus on how linguistic choices shape and reinforce dominant ideologies within the field. Situated within the interpretivist paradigm, the research adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach that foregrounds context, reflexivity, and meaning-making over positivist objectivity. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary methodology, the study draws on Fairclough's three-dimensional model—textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—while also integrating insights from postcolonial and decolonial theorists such as Hobson, Acharya, Foucault, and Said. The analytical corpus consists of three categories of texts: (i) foundational IR theory (Morgenthau, Waltz), (ii) canonical postcolonial critiques (Hobson, Acharya), and (iii) institutional discourse (UN Security Council resolutions, speeches, policy texts). Key IR terms such as sovereignty, anarchy, civilization, and developing world are examined to uncover how they function discursively to legitimize hegemonic perspectives and marginalize non-Western epistemologies. The findings reveal that mainstream IR discourse, particularly through figures like Morgenthau, uses modality, metaphor, and syntactic structures to naturalize realist assumptions prioritizing power and national interest over ethical or pluralistic considerations. In contrast, postcolonial critiques deconstruct this hegemony by exposing epistemic violence and advocating for epistemic pluralism through concepts such as Global IR. Institutional texts, including UN resolutions and diplomatic speeches, are shown to reproduce geopolitical hierarchies via ambiguous modality, rhetorical framing, and silences that obscure responsibility and exclude marginalized voices. This study is significant for its multi-layered investigation of how IR discourse functions not only as a reflection of global politics but as an active mechanism of power production and maintenance. It

demonstrates that language in IR is not neutral; it is ideologically loaded and instrumental in shaping what counts as legitimate knowledge, actor, and action. The implementation of this study has implications for critical pedagogy, curriculum decolonization, and institutional reform in IR scholarship and policymaking. By revealing the linguistic underpinnings of power, the research contributes to broader efforts aimed at epistemic justice, encouraging the inclusion of diverse worldviews in global political thought.

Background: Evolution of International Relations as a Discipline

The formal study of International Relations (IR) as a distinct academic field emerged in the aftermath of World War I, driven by a desire to understand and prevent the catastrophic conflicts that had gripped Europe. In 1919, the University of Wales established the first formal Chair of International Politics (the Woodrow Wilson Chair), marking the genesis of IR as a standalone discipline in response to the devastation of the Great War (Zimmern, cited in Political Science View, 2020). This institutional development was shortly followed by similar initiatives in the United States, including the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown (1919) and the School of International Relations at the University of Southern California (1924) (cited in Political Science View, 2020).

The interwar period was characterized by "idealism" or "liberalism," which posited that diplomacy, international law, and collective institutions most notably the League of Nations could foster peaceful cooperation between rational actors (Devetak et al., 2012; Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014) However, the outbreak of World War II shattered this optimism and ushered in a realist paradigm centered on power, state sovereignty, and security pioneered by scholars such as E. H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and reinforced during the early Cold War era (Carr, 1939; Morgenthau, 1948; Devetak et al., 2012)

Throughout the mid-20th century, IR witnessed methodological innovation. The "behavioral revolution" introduced scientific rigor and empirical methods in the 1950s and 1960s, sparking debates between traditionalists and positivists (second "Great Debate") . By the 1970s and '80s, the emergence of neo-realism (e.g., Waltz, 1979) and neoliberal institutionalism (e.g., Keohane & Nye, 1984) introduced a compelling interplay between material power and institutional frameworks what some scholars term the "third" or inter-paradigm debate

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a further transformation with the rise of constructivism, challenging materialist assumptions by emphasizing the social construction of norms, identities, and language in international politics (Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1992)Simultaneously, critical and postcolonial approaches grew in prominence, questioning the field's Western-centric foundations and advocating for perspectives from the Global South (Acharya & Buzan, 2010; Hobson, 2007)

The discipline of International Relations has long been critiqued for its deep-rooted Eurocentrism, which privileges European historical experiences, intellectual traditions, and linguistic frameworks. This bias is reflected in the discipline's ontological assumptions, such as the universality of state sovereignty and the normalization of Western conceptions of security, development, and modernity (Hobson, 2012; Haldane, 2021). Eurocentrism functions as a system

of knowledge that constructs Europe as the universal standard, implicitly marginalizing non-Western epistemologies and perpetuating colonial hierarchies in global discourse (Seth, 2011; Quijano, 2000). Language plays a central role in this epistemic dominance not only through the prevalence of English but also in the translation of IR concepts that carry latent cultural biases (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994). Postcolonial scholarship has shown that IR discourse often reproduces Eurocentric ideas inadvertently, even under critique, making the discipline resistant to epistemic change (Haldane, 2021; Whitman, 2021). This linguistic and conceptual hegemony limits the field's capacity to incorporate pluralistic epistemologies and understand the diversity of global actors and contexts.

Language is not merely a neutral conduit for conveying ideas; it is a foundational mechanism that shapes the very structure of knowledge in International Relations. Discourse constructs social realities and embeds power relations by determining what can be said, who may speak, and which worldviews are deemed legitimate (Milliken, 1999; Aydın-Düzgit & Rumelili, 2019). This symbolic architecture influences policymaking, academic hierarchies, and global governance frameworks.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) shows how language usage within IR perpetuates ideological dominance and maintains systemic inequalities (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). For instance, terms like "failed states" or "rogue regimes" are not objective descriptors but discursive tools that frame entire societies as pathologized Other, justifying interventionist policies or exclusionary practices. These lexical choices reveal invisible power dynamics embedded in everyday language (Fairclough, 1992; Milliken, 1999).

Moreover, the linguistic turn in social sciences has marked a critical departure from positivist conventions, highlighting the constructed nature of knowledge and the importance of context, interpretation, and reflexivity (Aydın-Düzgit & Rumelili, 2019). Understanding how discourse generates epistemic authority is thus essential for decolonizing IR and fostering epistemic justice, where diverse forms of knowledge including indigenous and Global South perspectives gain recognition and legitimacy (Godinho, 2016; Aras & Güleç, 2023).

By foregrounding language as both a tool and a territory of intellectual power, this study seeks to reveal the discursive foundations that sustain the dominance of Western frameworks in IR. Recognizing and dissecting these linguistic structures enables the development of more inclusive, pluralistic theoretical paradigms that better capture the complexities of global political life.

Research Objectives
   i.   To explore how language shapes the discourse in IR.
  ii.   To identify hegemonic concepts and their impact on theory.
 iii.   To propose alternative, pluralistic approaches.

Literature Review
IR as an "American Social Science" – Stanley Hoffmann
Stanley Hoffmann (1977) famously characterized International Relations (IR) as an "American social science," arguing that the discipline's institutionalization, research agendas, and normative frameworks were deeply embedded within the

intellectual and political context of the United States post-WWII. Hoffmann emphasized that IR emerged in U.S. universities amid distinctive historical circumstances namely, America's rise to global power and the institutionalization of graduate schools of foreign affairs resulting in a field narrowly anchored to U.S. policy priorities and intellectual traditions (Hoffmann, 1977) . His analysis triggered ongoing debates on disciplinary parochialism, with critics acknowledging that while IR's American origins remain undeniable, the field has nonetheless grown in diversity over time, even if elite scholarly networks continue to concentrate in North America and Western Europe (Kristensen, 2013) .

Eurocentrism and the "Myth of the West" – John Hobson
John Hobson offers a compelling critique of mainstream IR through his concept of the "Eurocentric conception of world politics." Hobson (2012) contends that IR theory consistently enshrines Western experiences dating back to thinkers like Kant, Smith, and Morgenthau as universal paradigms, obscuring their historical specificity and colonial underpinnings. He highlights how this martyrdom of Western rationality both legitimizes global domination and marginalizes non-Western understandings (Hobson, 2012).Hobson distinguishes between overt imperialist Eurocentrism and more subtle, "critical Eurocentrism," both of which reproduce Eurocentric hierarchies even within ostensibly anti-Western or critical IR frameworks (Hobson, 2012). His insights have sparked vibrant scholarly responses advocating a pluralistic reconceptualization of IR one that dismantles the myth of Western universality and acknowledges a multiplicity of global actors and narratives.

Discourse Theory – Michel Foucault, Laclau & Mouffe
Post-structuralist discourse theory, as developed by Michel Foucault, underscores that discourse constitutes our understanding of social phenomena by producing knowledge and shaping power relations (Fournier, 2014). Even though Foucault did not explicitly theorize international politics, his concepts such as governmentality, regimes of truth, and discursive exclusion have been widely applied to global IR studies, highlighting how language determines which actors and issues are visible or silenced on the world stage. Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe advanced discourse theory by demonstrating the inherently contingent and conflictual nature of social constructs, arguing that meanings emerge through discursive articulation amid antagonisms, rather than stemming from fixed essential properties of actors (Holzscheiter, 2010; Simon, 2019). Their work enables IR scholars to uncover how dominant concepts such as "security" or "human rights" are actively constructed through political struggle over discursive hegemonies

Postcolonial and Decolonial Critiques in IR
Postcolonial IR scholarship critically interrogates mainstream IR's assumptions, arguing that the discipline frequently ignores colonial legacies that shaped the modern international system (Wikipedia: Postcolonial IR, 2025). Scholars like Seth (2011) and Said, Spivak, Fanon, and Bhabha emphasize the ongoing cultural, political, and epistemic consequences of colonialism that prevent the universal applicability of Western theories . They call for "provincializing

Europe" and recognizing the subaltern's voice, thus challenging epistemic dominance and facilitating the re-narrativization of global histories through indigenous perspectives (Seth, 2011; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Fanon, 1961; Bhabha, 1994) . As IR continues to be shaped by colonial power relations, postcolonial scholars advocate for more pluralistic, decolonial epistemologies that foreground Global South agency and voice.

Language and Power in the Social Sciences
Language is a pivotal element in constructing social hierarchies and knowledge systems. Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., Fairclough, Wodak & Meyer) has demonstrated that linguistic practices reflect and reinforce existing power asymmetries by framing certain groups, issues, or narratives as "other" through everyday terminology . This paradigm emphasizes the need for reflexivity, as language both shapes and is shaped by social structures and power dynamics. In the context of IR, critical social scientists use discourse analysis to reveal how dominant language serves to legitimize hegemony in international institutions, governance practices, and policymaking processes

Methodology
Research Approach: Qualitative, Interpretive
This study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach to explore how language constructs meaning and power in IR. Interpretivist paradigms emphasize context, reflexivity, and understanding over objectivity or replicability, core tenets shaping this research design. The goal is to illuminate how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce discursive structures within IR.

Method: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
This paper employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), emphasizing the intersection of language, ideology, and power. CDA focuses on how discourse both reflects and constructs social relations, uncovering implicit hierarchies and assumptions. Following Fairclough's model (1992), analysis proceeds in stages: identifying problematizing discourses, examining discursive practices, and interpreting relations between text and socio-political context. Additional guidelines from Cummings, de Haan, and Seferiadis (2020) on policy-text analysis inform our structured, phased approach.

Corpus: Selection of Texts
The analytical corpus includes:
- Foundational IR texts (Morgenthau, Waltz, Keohane & Nye)
- Canonical postcolonial critiques (Hobson, Acharya)
- Policy documents, speeches, and institutional literature

Text selection follows purposive sampling criteria: influence on mainstream IR, representation of hegemonic or contested discourses, and scope for postcolonial reinterpretation.

Analytical Framework
The analysis targets key IR terms "sovereignty," "anarchy," "civilization," "developing world" examining both their discursive functions and their historical contestations .

The multi-tiered CDA approach consists of:
1. **Textual analysis**: Linguistic examination of syntax, metaphors, modality.
2. **Discursive practice**: Contextual and intertextual investigation.
3. **Social practice**: Interpretation of how discourse maintains or challenges power structures.

Complementary methods such as thematic analysis for reflexivity and emergence of discursive patterns enhance interpretive depth

Reflexivity and Validation
Recognizing the inherently interpretive nature of CDA, reflexivity is maintained through a reflexivity journal, documenting researcher positionality and analytical choices. Analytical rigor is further supported by systematic coding, inter-coder consistency checks, and triangulation across texts.

Analysis
Textual Analysis: Morgenthau's Politics Among Nations
Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this section dissects how Morgenthau's language constructs power, morality, and state behavior:

Syntax & Modality
Morgenthau asserts, "The statesman must think in terms of the national interest, conceived as power among other powers"

The modal necessity ("must think") encodes a normative imperative statesmen are obliged to prioritize national interest over moral ideals, reflecting the realist injunction that power supersedes ethics.

Similarly, he posits: "Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied… the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care" .

The negation "cannot" sharply delineates moral territories off-limits for states, reinforcing the primacy of raison d'état and distancing state action from universal ethics.

Metaphors
Politics is portrayed via psychological metaphor: "Political power is a psychological relation…".

This metaphor transforms abstract notions of power into interpersonal influence, humanizing state behavior as a mind game, reinforcing discourse that states "manipulate minds," not just wield force.

Discursive Implications
These linguistic strategies create a coherent discursive architecture:
1. **Modality** "must," "cannot" establishes a normative hierarchy, privileging power considerations over moral or legal ones.
2. **Metaphor** "psychological relation" frames power as subtle, cognitive, not material, smoothing the justification for realist state behavior.
3. **Syntax** structured to contrast "state vs individual" (e.g., morality vs survival) foregrounds the distinct normative realm of the state, detached from universal ideals.

Interpretation in Context
These textual features work together to naturalize state self-interest and underscore an exclusive political rationality. By repeatedly deploying necessity, negation, and relational metaphors, Morgenthau frames power-seeking as the rational axis of state conduct, effectively discursively marginalizing normative and non-Western epistemologies. This reflects broader IR hegemonic discourses that privilege Western realist paradigms by defining acceptable conceptual boundaries.

Discursive Practice: Contextual & Intertextual Investigation of Morgenthau
This analysis utilizes Fairclough's discourse practice dimension, focusing on intertextuality and contextual positioning within foundational IR discourse.

Institutional Context
Morgenthau's Politics Among Nations (1948) emerged during the early Cold War when realism was institutionalized in American foreign policy schools. As an academic at the University of Chicago and a public intellectual, his work was deeply embedded in U.S. policy networks, thus reflecting not only scholarly but also geopolitical discourses. The text's production and dissemination through American universities and policy circles reinforced realism as the dominant lens and shaped the reception of its discursive framing of national interest and power.

Manifest Intertextuality
Morgenthau directly positions his arguments in dialogue with earlier thinkers and policy treatises. For example, he critiques Wilsonian idealism, stating that moral principles cannot drive state action in a world governed by "struggle for power" (Morgenthau, 1948). This is an instance of manifest intertextuality, where Morgenthau's realism is in explicit dialogue and opposition to liberal and idealist paradigms .

Constitutive Intertextuality
Beyond explicit rebuttals, Morgenthau's text is saturated with constitutive intertextuality: it assumes conventions of realism, notions of balance-of-power, state sovereignty, and power politics prevalent in classical political thought (e.g., Hobbes, Thucydides, Machiavelli). These discursive conventions frame the normative backdrop of IR, naturalizing the realist worldview and marginalizing alternative epistemologies.

Networks of Discourse
Drawing on intertextual logic, Morgenthau's text aligns with a broader realist discourse community, connecting to policy documents, think- tank reports, and governmental doctrines. His framing of conflict, moral sovereignty, and national interest resonates with U.S. strategic policy, reinforcing discursive continuities between academia and policymaking . This network reproduces power dynamics whereby academic discourse legitimates state-centric expressions of power.

Silences and Absences
Intertextual analysis also highlights what is left unsaid: Morgenthau's text

glosses over non-Western perspectives, such as colonial critiques or indigenous conceptions of sovereignty. This discursive omission is not accidental; it is part of the structuring of IR discourse, where non-Western epistemologies are rendered invisible or irrelevant ("silent murmuring" in Foucauldian terms) . These absences serve to delimit the boundaries of legitimate IR discourse.

Interpretation
Through intertextual connections both manifest and constitutive Morgenthau's work is embedded within a system of ideological reproduction that privileges realist assumptions and American policy concerns. Discourse practice thus reveals how knowledge production in IR is not only linguistic but deeply systemic: embedded in institutional networks, responsive to ideological imperatives, and reliant on shared discursive conventions. By uncovering these layers, CDA exposes how realism became naturalized and universalized, at the expense of alternative and pluralistic voices.

Social Practice: How Morgenthau's Discourse Upholds Power Structures
In this final analytical stage, we interpret how Morgenthau's language practices not only reflect but also sustain dominant power relations within the IR field, embedding a realist ideology within institutional structures.

Power-Knowledge Reinforcement
Morgenthau's realist formulation "national interest… conceived as power among other powers" (Morgenthau, 1948) actively constructs power as authoritative knowledge, determining what counts as legitimate IR knowledge. This aligns with Foucault's concept of power-knowledge, where discourse simultaneously produces knowledge and consolidates power, reinforcing hierarchies through institutionalized discourse

Naturalization of Realpolitik
By consistently using modal verbs like "must" and "cannot", Morgenthau's text positions power-maximization as both ineluctable and normative not merely descriptive but prescriptive making realist assumptions appear common sense rather than contested theories. CDA scholars note that such linguistic strategies normalize dominant ideologies and obscure their historical contingency .

Institutional Embedding of Realist Discourse
Morgenthau's work did not speak into a vacuum it influenced and was endorsed by American IR institutions and policy networks, reinforcing realist paradigms across academia and governance. This synergy between discourse and institutional practice reflects Fairclough's idea of "power behind discourse", where ideological systems constrain what is considered thinkable and speakable .

Marginalization Through Omission
Crucially, Morgenthau's realist lexicon omits colonial, indigenous, or non-Western epistemologies. By framing state interest and sovereignty as universally binding, the discourse erases alternative meanings and experiences, excluding Global South voices from legitimate inquiry. Such discursive erasure entrenches

hegemonic dominance by rendering some perspectives invisible .

Interpretive Summary
Through its immersion in power-knowledge dynamics, modal naturalization, institutional reinforcement, and discursive silencing, Morgenthau's Politics Among Nations exemplifies how IR discourse can manufacture and legitimate power structures under the guise of scholarly neutrality. These practices demarcate the boundaries of legitimate knowledge and sustain a realist hegemony that charges language with regulatory authority.

Textual Analysis: Canonical Postcolonial Critiques (Hobson, Acharya)
John Hobson
Syntax & Modality
Hobson critiques mainstream IR's universal ambitions with assertive syntactic constructions:
"International theory ... celebrates and defends Western civilization as the subject of, and normatively superior referent in, world politics".Here, the triple-layered clause ("celebrates... and defends... as..."), presented as factual, indicates a declarative stance that portrays Eurocentric bias as an unquestioned reality.

Metaphor
He uses metaphor to unveil discursive layers:
Eurocentrism is characterized as a "twin-revisionist narrative," tying it to discursive twin-ness, implicitly recognizing both depth and complexity, while implying the discipline needs re-writing from two vantage points, both deconstructing and reconstructing.

Discursive Implication
The use of declarative syntax and layered metaphors constructs Hobson's discourse as analytically powerful, breaking the veneer of neutrality in IR theory and re-casting the "universal" West as a political discourse, not an epistemic default.

Amitav Acharya
Syntax & Modality
Acharya reports the supremacist structure of IR publication norms:
"IR scholarship has tended to view the non-Western world as being of interest mainly to area specialists... rather than of 'thinkers'" .
The contrastive clause "rather than" underscores a bias that relegates non-Western scholars to object/subject roles devoid of agency linguistic marking of epistemic marginalization.

Metaphors & Lexicon
Acharya uses the metaphor of academic "colonisation":
"Western intellectual colonisation plays a deciding role in... what is considered proper knowledge".
Here, colonisation is framed not only in geographic terms but symbolic and epistemic terms, exposing the coloniality of knowledge within IR.

Discursive Implication

By framing scholarly discourse in militaristic terms colonisation, deciding, erasure Acharya positions the West as an active, powerful epistemic agent, while non-Western voices become passive targets of discursive violence. This redefines academic voice and legitimacy as contested terrain.

Interpretation

These linguistic strategies assertive syntax, layered metaphor, and evaluative modality function discursively to:

1. **Expose dominant epistemic positions** in IR as historically and politically situated, rather than objective or neutral.
2. **Reposition IR discourse** from a monolithic Western project to a contested field, acknowledging epistemic violence and silencing.
3. **Advance a discursive opening**: enabling alternative voices to claim legitimacy, not by arguing better scholarship but by shifting the **terms of discourse itself**.

Discursive Practice: Contextual & Intertextual Investigation of Postcolonial Critique (Hobson & Acharya)

In this section, we apply Fairclough's discourse practice lens to examine how Hobson and Acharya's texts function within broader institutional and discursive networks. We analyze how these critiques position themselves against dominant IR paradigms and reshape institutional understandings of legitimate knowledge.

Institutional Context

- **Hobson** (2012) writes within a critical academic tradition that intersects with postcolonial studies and IR. His affiliation with leading universities and participation in scholarly networks reflected by prestigious recognitions like ISA's Francesco Guiccardini Prize situates his work firmly within a transnational intellectual network challenging mainstream IR discourse .
- **Acharya** (2020) addresses journal publication practices, indicating the discipline's gatekeeping norms. By analyzing ISA journal data, he exposes how institutions systematically marginalize Global South scholar contributions .

Manifest Intertextuality

- **Hobson** explicitly engages with Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, drawing a direct line between Said's critique and IR theory thus embedding his work in a broader postcolonial discourse .
- **Acharya** cites Foucault's notion of power–knowledge to demonstrate how knowledge production is structurally skewed toward Western paradigms, reinforcing colonial unevenness.

Constitutive Intertextuality

- Both authors embed their critique within academic discourses around Eurocentrism, academic gatekeeping, knowledge hierarchies, and epistemic justice. Hobson's reliance on terms like "Western civilization as the normative referent" operates within a discursive tradition that questions Western centrality .

- Acharya's work on epistemic hegemony and coloniality of knowledge draws from decolonial theorists like Quijano and Foucault, indicating an intertextual reliance on decolonial vocabulary and epistemic frameworks .

Network of Discourse
- Hobson's critique functions within both IR and postcolonial academic networks, evident in citations spanning Cambridge University Press, ISA, and Oxford Academic platforms.
- Acharya's analysis is embedded in institutional policy critique, contributing to collective datasets (e.g., ISA journal data, TRIP surveys), and forming part of a growing literature on "epistemicide" and academic colonization .

Silences & Gaps
Both texts spotlight the **absence** of non-Western epistemologies in IR discourse:
- Hobson details how IR theory omits multiple traditions legal, philosophical, historical from non-Western thought, reinforcing a narrow Western narrative .
- Acharya discusses the structural mechanisms (submissions, editorial selection) that silence non-Western voices, framing knowledge production as a form of epistemic violence .

Interpretive Summary
Hobson and Acharya's critiques position themselves against IR's hegemonic discourse. Through institutional embedding, intertextual borrowing, and exposing silences, they:
1. Create scholarly counter-hegemonies challenging Eurocentric universality.
2. Expose how academic institutions actively produce and maintain knowledge hierarchies.
3. Reopen discursive spaces, calling for epistemic pluralism outside Western paradigms.

Their discursive practices thus serve as strategic interventions: not merely interpretive critique but active efforts to transform the boundaries of who counts as a legitimate speaker in IR.

Social Practice: How Postcolonial Critiques Challenge Hegemonic IR Discourse
This section uses Fairclough's Social Practice level to analyze how Hobson's and Acharya's discourses not only reflect but also actively challenge and transform power structures in International Relations (IR).

Contesting Power-Knowledge Regimes
Hobson problematizes the idea of universal Western authority in IR by exposing it as a legitimizing discourse that has sustained global hierarchies:
"International theory ... celebrates and defends Western civilization as the subject of, and normatively superior referent in, world politics".
This statement explicitly dismantles the epistemic dominance of "Western civilization," repositioning it not as natural or neutral but as a discursive construct that legitimizes Western dominance. By unmasking this, Hobson

disrupts the power-knowledge nexus that undergirds mainstream IR.

Revealing Epistemic Violence in Knowledge Production
Acharya highlights structural discrimination within academic publishing:
"IR scholarship has tended to view the non-Western world as being of interest mainly to area specialists ... rather than of 'thinkers'".

This brings attention to the epistemic violence embedded in the institutional processes of academic knowledge production, whereby non-Western scholars are relegated to footnotes or peripheral roles. By naming these injustices, Acharya directly challenges the institutional boundaries of legitimate academic knowledge.

Institutional Disruption & Discursive Change
Both Hobson and Acharya perform structural interventions:

- **Hobson** not only critiques but also reconstructs narratives: in Eastern Origins, he re-centers Asia in world history, demonstrating that European modernity is neither universal nor autonomous . This reorientation overturns hegemonic historical narratives and opens discursive space for non-Western epistemologies.
- **Acharya** proposes Global IR an alternative epistemic paradigm that integrates diverse scholarly traditions without rejecting mainstream IR completely .His work transforms the discursive framework of the discipline from exclusionary to pluralistic universalism.

Shifting Social Norms and Institutional Practices
Hobson's and Acharya's discourses contribute to the following shifts:

Practice Level	Discursive Impact
Cognitive (mindsets)	Undermining the myth of Western epistemic superiority
Normative (standards)	Questioning what counts as rigorous IR knowledge
Institutional (structures)	Encouraging editorial boards, syllabi, and funding bodies to broaden their epistemic inclusivity
Public discourse	Influencing policymakers and academics to reassess disciplinary boundaries and embrace diverse perspectives

Through these discursive interventions, postcolonial critiques perform real-world institutional work: they reshape gatekeeping, redefine legitimacy, and strengthen epistemic justice.

Interpretive Summary
Hobson and Acharya serve as discursive disruptors: they confront mainstream IR's silences, repurpose institutional spaces to legitimize non-Western voices, and catalyze structural transformation. Their analyses demonstrate that:

- Discourses are not merely descriptive they are constitutive of social reality.
- Postcolonial critiques function as both academic inquiry and political praxis.
- Language, at this social-practice level, becomes an active tool for

reconfiguring power relations within IR.

Textual Analysis: Policy Documents, Speeches, and Institutional Literature

1. Modality in UN Security Council Resolutions

Research shows UN resolutions often use vague modal verbs "shall," "should," "may" to create intentional ambiguity, enabling flexible interpretation that serves geopolitical interests .

- **"Shall"** indicates binding obligation, yet lacks clarity about enforcement.
- **"May"** offers discretionary power, often used in Cluster VII mandates (e.g., "the Council may authorize force"), thus enabling strategic ambiguity in institutional power.

This modal strategy allows resolutions to appear authoritative while concealing political maneuvering, normalizing institutional indeterminacy within IR discourse.

Metaphor & Lexical Framing in Speeches

In official addresses, metaphors and repeating structures (e.g., "tenet of three/four") serve to frame global governance rhetorically. For example, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's UN speech states: "a more just and stable world," "universal peace and prosperity," structured in triadic form .

- These metaphoric phrases position the UN as a "beacon", "repository" of justice, encouraging audience alignment through poetic cadence.

Such rhetorical framing embeds normative values (justice, stability) into institutional discourse, making aspirational goals seem natural and uncontested.

Syntax & Hedging in Resolutions on Palestine

UN resolutions use "floating signifiers" like "secure and recognized boundaries", structured through passive and indefinite syntax .

- The phrase "secure boundaries" lacks a clear agent of action, allowing powerful states to fill interpretive gaps.
- Passive constructions ("boundaries should be secured") obscure who implements the mandate, enhancing ambiguity.

This passive, hedged language functions to evade accountability, demonstrating how institutional texts normalize silence and deflect responsibility.

Interpretive Insights

These linguistic techniques modal ambiguity, metaphorical framing, and hedged structures operate to:

- Legitimize institutional authority while avoiding explicit statements of power.
- Shape perceptions of UN norms as universally desirable, not politically constructed.
- Obscure agency and responsibility, particularly of powerful states, reinforcing institutional inequities.

In doing so, policy and institutional discourse projects a veneer of neutrality while linguistically entrenching hierarchical power relations and masking contestation.

Discursive Practice: Contextual & Intertextual Investigation in Policy Speeches and Institutional Texts

This section unpacks how policy documents, speeches, and institutional literature are embedded within broader discourse networks, drawing on Fairclough's third stage of **discursive practice,** particularly their origins, consumption contexts, and intertextual references.

Institutional Context

Analyses of UN resolutions (e.g., on Palestine and Iraq) reveal they are produced within institutional architectures that shape language to legitimize political ends. The Discourse-Historical Approach identifies how Security Council resolutions employ vague language and modal ambiguity to balance apparent precision with political flexibility, reflecting pressures from member states and power asymmetries in institutional decision-making .

Manifest Intertextuality

Speeches at the UN General Assembly often embed religious, historical, or legal references to frame authority. For instance, Imran Khan's 2019 address draws on Islamic scripture to strengthen ideological resonance and establish a moral-authoritative identity, as shown through explicitly cited texts and shared moral metaphors .

Constitutive Intertextuality

Institutional documents on Palestine, such as Resolutions 242 and 338, rely on prior diplomatic texts, mappings of conflict, and legal conventions, creating a web of intertextual references that embed continuity with past UN positions. These texts echo discourses of "peace," "territorial integrity," and "self-determination," reproducing longstanding institutional narratives .

Audience & Production Context

Analyses (e.g., of speeches by Rouhani and Trump) highlight that institutionalized narrative styles such as repetition, structured triads, and ideological framing are strategically employed to persuade global audiences. These are not spontaneous utterances but highly crafted discursive acts designed to align with institutional expectations and audience ideologies .

Intertextual Power Dynamics

The discourses of state leaders and institutions are shaped by global political hierarchies actors with "symbolic elite" status (e.g., U.S. Secretary-General, P5 members) operate within discourse networks that allow them to set discursive boundaries. Dietary of "necessary measures" or "just peace," these actors maintain control over how institutional discourse is framed .

Silences & Exclusions

Intertextual analysis also exposes what is absent: non-Western or grassroots voices (e.g., Palestinian civil society, indigenous narratives) are typically excluded from UN documents and high-level speeches. This demonstrates how institutional discourse actively marginalizes alternative perspectives by not referencing or acknowledging them .

Interpretive Summary
By probing the contexts of production, key intertextual links, and silences within institutional discourse, this analysis reveals:
1. **Whose voice is prioritized**: institutional texts amplify elite, powerful actors.
2. **How language strategies reinforce authority**: repetition, modality, and historical referencing legitimize institutional claims.
3. **What narratives are suppressed**: peripheral or dissident voices remain unspoken, sustaining dominant power structures.

These findings demonstrate how policy discourse works as a legitimizing mechanism for existing global hierarchies and how selective intertextuality maintains institutional dominance, fulfilling both interpretive critique and structural analysis.

Social Practice: How Institutional Texts Maintain or Challenge Power
In this final layer of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, we explore how policy documents, speeches, and institutional literature function as social practices actively shaping behaviors, norms, and power dynamics in global affairs.

Institutional Reproduction of Power
Discourse shapes social relations: institutions like the UN embed discourse in laws, rules, and rituals, reinforcing hierarchies. As Mayr (2008) notes, power manifests through habits and norms not merely force making discourse a major vehicle of institutional authority . Thus, phrases like "secure and recognized boundaries" in UN resolutions obscure who holds real decision-making power, enabling the reproduction of global political inequality.

Discourse as Governance
Discourse doesn't just reflect the status quo it governs it. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) explain that discourse both represents and constitutes social practice, defining what counts as valid knowledge and action in policy contexts. For instance, diplomatic speeches (e.g., by Pakistani leaders at the UNGA) use repetition, modal verbs, and rhetorical framing to shape audience beliefs and justify institutional positions.

Reproducing or Resisting Norms
Policy discourse often naturalizes the authority of powerful states. Modal hedging ("may," "should") and empty signifiers ("secure") introduce flexibility that aligns with hegemonic interests and preserves power hierarchies . However, CDA scholars argue discourse can also be **resisting force**: by exposing ambiguity and power asymmetries, critique opens windows for institutional transformation .

Practical Implications
This social-practice lens shows that:
1. Institutional language doesn't just describe it regulates actors' behaviors (e.g., member-state responses to UNSC resolutions).
2. Discourse normalizes authority while concealing contestation (e.g.,

through diplomatic euphemisms).
3. Critical discourse analysis offers tools for challenging institutional power by revealing its linguistic mechanisms.

Interpretive Summary
Institutional texts perform social work: they produce and enforce compliance, shape global norms, and stabilize power structures. But, through CDA-informed critique, these texts can be reclaimed as sites of resistance, informing postcolonial interventions that challenge discursive domination and potentially reshape how power is conceptualized and exercised in IR.

Conclusion: Discourse, Power, and the Contestation of Meaning in IR
This analysis has demonstrated how discourse in International Relations (IR)whether emanating from foundational texts, postcolonial critiques, or institutional literature functions not merely as a vehicle for communication but as a powerful mechanism of social regulation, ideological reproduction, and epistemic gatekeeping.

Through textual analysis, we uncovered how Morgenthau's realist language employs modality, negation, and metaphor to naturalize state-centric rationality, portraying power as both necessary and normative. The syntactic and metaphorical structures in his text align with a hegemonic realist worldview, marginalizing ethical considerations and alternative epistemologies. In contrast, postcolonial critiques by Hobson and Acharya deploy assertive syntax and metaphors of colonization and exclusion to expose the constructed nature of IR's Eurocentric canon. Their linguistic strategies are not only deconstructive but also reconstructive, proposing epistemic reorientation toward inclusivity and pluralism.

Through the lens of discursive practice, we illuminated how the intertextuality and institutional embedding of realist texts reinforce a self-replicating discourse network that privileges certain voices while excluding others. Morgenthau's work, situated within U.S. academic and policy circles, became a conduit for realist ideology to dominate IR's disciplinary core. Conversely, Hobson and Acharya deliberately position their interventions within a counter-hegemonic discourse tradition drawing from postcolonial and decolonial theorists to challenge institutional norms and rearticulate the boundaries of legitimate knowledge in IR.

At the level of social practice, both foundational and institutional texts act as instruments for the maintenance or, in the case of postcolonial texts, the disruption of global power hierarchies. UN resolutions, policy documents, and high-level speeches employ ambiguity, modal hedging, and euphemistic metaphors to sustain institutional authority while masking political asymmetries. These discursive strategies maintain the facade of neutrality while serving dominant state interests. However, the very exposure of these practices through Critical Discourse Analysis opens space for resistance and reform, offering a blueprint for challenging entrenched norms.

Taken together, the analysis reaffirms a core tenet of poststructuralist and postcolonial inquiry: language does not reflect reality it constructs it. The linguistic, discursive, and institutional mechanisms examined in this study reveal how IR is built on and continues to reproduce a Eurocentric epistemology that

privileges Western narratives, marginalizes the Global South, and codifies power as natural. Yet, through critique and discursive intervention, as seen in the works of Hobson, Acharya, and others, there exists the potential to reframe IR as a more pluralistic, equitable, and dialogic discipline.

This study thus underscores the political and transformative potential of discourse. By interrogating how meaning is made, legitimated, and contested, scholars and practitioners can begin to reclaim the language of IR as a site of ethical engagement, epistemic justice, and global inclusivity.

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