



Extended Abstract

DOI: 10.22099/JBA.2025.50944.4553

A Discourse Analysis of Power and Ideology in Two Letters from Nizami's *Iskandarnameh* Based on Fairclough's Method

Zahra Bahreinian 

Seyede Maryam Rozatian*  (Corresponding Author)

Omid Zakeri Kish 

Masoud Algoune Jounaghani 

Introduction

The influence of the intellectual and social context of each historical period on the creation of literary works is undeniable. Therefore, studies examining the context of a literary work's production are of significant importance. Norman Fairclough's method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one such approach that analyzes a work through the broader structures of society, power relations in social interactions, and the production or reproduction of discourses and ideologies emerging from them. The social and intellectual conditions of Iran and Azerbaijan in the sixth century AH (12th century CE), as well as the dynamics of political power, are reflected in Nizami's *Iskandarnameh*.

This study seeks to answer the following question: What discourses of power from the sixth century are reflected in Nizami's *Iskandarnameh*, and how does Nizami engage with these discourses? To this end, a section of Nizami's *Sharafnameh*, comprising the correspondence between Darius (Dara) and Alexander (Iskandar), is analyzed using Fairclough's CDA approach. Examining these two letters through this

* Prof of Persian Language and Literature, Isfahan University, Isfahan, Iran.
rozatian@yahoo.com

Article Info: Received: 2025-02-14, **Accepted:** 2025-07-29



COPYRIGHTS ©2026 The author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, as long as the original authors and source are cited. No permission is required from the authors or the publisher.

framework can illuminate the emergence, persistence, opposition, and dissolution of prevalent discourses in the sixth century.

Research Method

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing note-taking and library-based research. The selected text consists of 149 verses from Nizami's *Sharafnameh*, focusing on the correspondence between Darius and Alexander before their battle.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a modern approach to studying and analyzing linguistic texts. The two key elements in this approach are "language" and "society." CDA encompasses various sub-approaches, among which Norman Fairclough's framework is prominent. Fairclough emphasizes the interwoven relationship between text, interaction, and social context, highlighting the role of power institutions in producing, modifying, and reproducing discourses through ideology. His theoretical foundation primarily rests on the concepts of ideology and power. CDA scholars argue that dominant institutions use ideology to create a "common sense" to maintain and exercise power in society. Fairclough analyzes texts in three layers: description, interpretation, and explanation.

Discussion and Analysis

The selected text is analyzed in three layers: description, interpretation, and explanation, as follows:

1. Description: At the description layer, the focus is primarily on the text itself. Drawing on Halliday's linguistics, Fairclough seeks to examine vocabulary, grammar, and cohesive relations—encompassing experiential, relational, and expressive values—based on their social functions to uncover hidden meanings in the text.

2. Interpretation: At the interpretation layer, the analyst moves slightly away from the text to examine it within the context of social interactions. This section relies on the concepts of situational context and intertextual context to interpret the selected text.

2.1. Situational Context: Nizami lived in Ganja, Azerbaijan, between 535 and 607 AH (1141–1213 CE). During the sixth century, several major and minor dynasties ruled in Azerbaijan, including the Seljuks of Asia Minor, the Ildegizids (Atabegs of Azerbaijan), the Ahmadilis, the Shirvanshahs, and the Mengujekids. Nizami interacted with some of the rulers of these dynasties in various ways. Beyond these dynasties, the Abbasid Caliphs still held relative influence and power across Islamic territories. In such a tumultuous era, continuous wars among rival claimants to power were common. Additionally, Ganja, located on the border between Islamic territories and Christian regions, was a site of conflict between Muslims and Christians. Consequently, the discourse of militarism, sometimes aligned with the discourse of power and sometimes independent of it, gained prominence. Another significant social institution during this period was religion, along with related disciplines such as theology (*kalam*) and hadith studies. Ash'arite thought dominated most Islamic territories, and Nizami himself was an Ash'arite, with traces of this ideology evident in his

works. In the *Iskandarnameh*, discourses of fatalism, Ash‘arism, and rationalism/anti-rationalism prevalent in the sixth century are observable.

2.2. Intertextual Context: Every text is historically situated and meaningfully connected to contemporaneous and earlier texts and historical collections. Based on folk tales, historical sources, other *Iskandarnameh* texts, and Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, certain presuppositions about Darius and Alexander exist among the audience. The critical question is to what extent these presuppositions, derived from intertextual contexts, are shaped by power institutions. Are these presuppositions factual, populist, or ideological? In the case of Alexander and Darius, it is clear that these presuppositions are not factual; rather, in *Iskandarnameh*, they are largely ideological, while in other texts, they may sometimes be populist.

3. Explanation: At the explanation layer, the analyst focuses on social foundations, changes in background knowledge, the reproduction of prevalent discourses and ideologies, or resistance against them. The relationship between text producers and background knowledge is either normative (reinforcing a specific discourse) or creative (producing a new discourse).

3.1. Social Institution of Power: Analysis of the selected text reveals the presence of discourses of kinship, religiosity, and militarism for acquiring power in the sixth century. The discourse of kinship is based on the ideology that political power stems from royal lineage, with Darius representing this discourse. In contrast, the discourse of religiosity for gaining political power is articulated by Alexander. Nasser al-Din Allah (575–622 AH / 1180–1225 CE), the Abbasid Caliph, represents the religiosity discourse, while Atabeg Mohammad Jahan Pahlavan (571–582 AH / 1175–1186 CE) represents the militarism discourse, which associates political power with martial prowess. Nizami appears to adopt a normative approach toward the discourses of religiosity and militarism, reinforcing them. The Turco-Arab power institution during this period constructs a discourse of xenophilia, which Nizami also normatively endorses.

3.2. Social Institution of Religion: The Islamic discourse held a prominent position in Iranian society during this period. Political power institutions, such as the Atabegs and Seljuks, sought to promote an extreme form of Islamic religiosity discourse, positioning it against the discourses of non-Islamic religions, such as Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Another prevalent discourse rooted in the religious social structure is Ash‘arism, which, in addition to opposing Mu‘tazilite thought, also contends with philosophical discourse. Nizami’s engagement with the Ash‘arite discourse is creative; while adhering to Ash‘arite ideology, he emphasizes the importance of reason and rationality for rulers, thereby producing a new discourse.

Conclusion

This study, employing Fairclough’s CDA at the levels of description, interpretation, and explanation, analyzes two letters from Nizami’s *Iskandarnameh*. The findings indicate that the Abbasid Caliph represents the discourse of religiosity for achieving rulership, while the Atabegs of Azerbaijan represent the discourse of militarism for gaining political power. Additionally, the discourse of kinship for attaining the highest level of power is somewhat prevalent in the social structure of Nizami’s era. Nizami reinforces

the discourses of religiosity and militarism while challenging the discourse of kinship. He also creates a form of discourse centered on meritocracy. Influenced by the power institution, Nizami promotes the ideology of xenophilia in *Iskandarnameh*, which contrasts with the pre-Islamic and early Islamic discourse of xenophobia and nationalism.

The political power institution, in collaboration with the religious power institution, seeks to consolidate its foundations. Furthermore, the power institution promotes a form of Ash'arite discourse that reinforces the ideology of fatalism, opposing philosophical and rationalist discourses. While endorsing certain ideologies derived from Ash'arism, Nizami creates a more flexible version of this discourse, slightly softening its rigid framework.

Keywords: Nizami's *Iskandarnameh*, Ideology, Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, power

References

References

Aghagolzadeh, F (2013) A Descriptive Dictionary of Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics. Tehran: Elmi. (in Persian)

Aghagolzadeh, F, Fallah, G, & Morādi, (2021). The Establishment of Ash'ari Discourse against Reason-Oriented Discourses According to Access Factor. Journal of Pazhoohesh-nāmeḥ-ye Naqd-e Adabi va Balāghat, 10(2), 5-27.

<https://doi.org/10.22059/jlcr.2020.300068.1450>

Amini Shalamzari, Z. (2021). Critical Discourse Analysis of Epic, Lyrical, and Mystical Language in Nezami's Masnavis. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Isfahan. (in Persian)

Amini Shalamzari, Z., Nasrasfahani, M. R., & Rouzatiān, S. M. (2023). Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates: A Faircloughian Reading of Nizami Ganjavi's Iqbal-Nameh Journal of Naghdo Nazariyeh-ye Adabi, 8(2), 27-53.

<https://doi.org/10.22124/naqd.2024.25521.2506>

Amini Shalamzari, Z., Nasrasfahani, M. R., & Rouzatian, S. M. (2023). Critical Discourse Analysis of Power in Nezami's Khosrow and Shirin. Journal of Matnpazhooheshi Adabi, 96, 174-201 <https://doi.org/10.22054/ltr.2021.51866.3021>

Amirpour, F., & Rouzatiān, S. M. Study of the Pattern of Michel Foucault's Discourse Analysis and Discussions of Semantics in Love Letters of Four Romantic Lyric Poems Journal of Matn Shenāsi-ye Adab-e Fārsi, 38, 53-80.

<https://doi.org/10.22108/rpll.2017.104295.1116>

Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1989). *Discourse Analysis*. New York: Cambridge.

Darpar, M (2013). *Stylistic Analysis of Ghazali's Letters with a Critical Discourse Analysis Approach*. Tehran: Elm. (in Persian)

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity press.

Fairclough, N. (1995a). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Edward Arnold.

Fairclough, N. (1995b). *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Translated by Translator Group. Tehran: Media Studies and Development Office. (in Persian)

Fairclough, N. (2020). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Translated by Rouhollah Ghasemi. Tehran: Andisheh-ye Ehsan. (in Persian)

Flavordeau, J., & Richardson, J. (2018). *Critical Discourse Analysis Guide*. Translated by Translator Group. Tehran: Logos. (in Persian)

Fotouhi, M. (2016). *Stylistics: Theories, Approaches, and Methods*. Tehran: Sokhan. (in Persian)

Ghahramani, M (2015). *Translation and Critical Discourse Analysis: A Semiotic Approach*. Tehran: Elm. (in Persian)

Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (2014). *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*. (Translated by Mojtaba Monshizadeh and Tahereh Ishani). Tehran: Elmi. (in Persian)

Iranzādeh, N., & Maniei, S. (2022). Rereading Discourse Features of Praise in the Prologue of Nizami's *IqbalNameh*, based on Norman Fairclough's theory *Journal of Pazhooreshnāmeḥ-ye Motun-e Adabi-ye Dowreh-ye 'Araghi*, 3(3), 1-21. (in Persian)

Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J. (2010). *Theory and Method in Discourse Analysis*. (Translated by Hadi Jalili). Tehran: Ney. (in Persian)

Karimi Firoozjaei, A. (2017). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Tehran: Ravanshenasan va Jame'e Shenasan. (in Persian)

Momtaz, A. (Year: 2005). [The Political Thought of Iranshahr in Nezami's *Iskandarnameh*]. *Mowlavi Pazhoohesi*, 6, 11-42. (in Persian)

Nizami Ganjavi, E. (2021). *Sharafnameh*. (H. Vahid Dastgerdi, Ed). Tehran: Qatreh. (in Persian)

- Pirnia, H. (1965). Ancient Iran: Darius III. (Book Five). Tehran: Ibn Sina Library. (in Persian)
- Rashidi, M., & Rouzatiān, S. M. (2023). Critical Analysis of Mystical Discourse in Hafez's Sonnets Based on the Textual Metafunction of Language in Halliday's Systemic-Functional Linguistics Journal of She'r Pazhooheshi, 15(1), 83-118. .
<https://doi.org/10.22099/jba.2023.42522.4180>
- Sarvat, M. (1991). Treasure of Wisdom in Nezami's Works. Tehran: Amirkabir. (in Persian)
- Yarmohammadi, L. (2011). Introduction to Discourse Analysis. Tehran: Hermes. (in Persian)
- Zarrinkoub, A. H (1991). Greek Philosophy in Nezami's Alexander's Banquet: A Review of Nezami's Iskandarnamēh. Iran Shenasi, 11, 482-498. (in Persian)
- Zarrinkoub, A. H. (1993). Peyr-e Ganjeh in Search of outopia. Tehran: Sokhan. (in Persian)