DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE POLITICS OF MEANING IN GLOBAL CONFLICT

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: This study explores how language constructs power, legitimacy, and identity in global conflicts through the lens of Discursive Constructivism. The findings reveal that words such as "freedom," "security," "peace," and "sovereignty" function as ideational tools for constructing moral authority and shaping public perception. By integrating constructivist theory with critical discourse analysis, this paper demonstrates that global power today is not only exercised through coercion but through communication. The study concludes that understanding and managing the politics of meaning is essential for modern diplomacy and conflict transformation.

DISKURSIV KONSTRUKTIVIZM VA GLOBAL MOJAROLARDA TUSHUNCHAVIY RAQOBAT

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada diskursiv konstruktivizm nazariyasi asosida global mojarolarda tilning kuch, legitimlik va milliy identitetni shakllantirishdagi roli tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning asosiy g'oyasi — xalqaro munosabatlarda kuch endi harbiy yoki iqtisodiy vositalar orqali emas, balki g'oyalar

raqobati siyosati orqali amalga oshayotgani. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, "erkinlik", "xavfsizlik", "tinchlik" va "suverenitet" kabi tushunchalar davlatlar tomonidan g'oyaviy qurol sifatida qo'llanilib, xalqaro jamoatchilik ongida ma'naviy ustunlik yaratadi. Maqolada konstruktivizm va tanqidiy diskurs tahlili yondashuvlarini birlashtirish orqali zamonaviy diplomatiyada kuchni tahlil qilishning yangi modeli taklif etiladi. Xulosa sifatida, global barqarorlikni ta'minlash uchun ma'no siyosatini boshqarish va til orqali tinchlikni tiklash muhim omil sifatida ta'kidlanadi.

ДИСКУРСИВНЫЙ КОНСТРУКТИВИЗМ И ПОЛИТИКА СМЫСЛА В УСЛОВИЯХ ГЛОБАЛЬНЫХ КОНФЛИКТОВ

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: Дискурсивный конструктивизм, идеационная власть, политика смысла, глобальный конфликт, критический дискурс-анализ, мягкая сила, конструирование идентичности, коммуникация и дипломатия.

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается, как язык формирует власть, легитимность и идентичность в условиях глобальных конфликтов с точки зрения дискурсивного конструктивизма. Автор утверждает, что международные отношения сегодня определяются не столько материальными ресурсами, сколько политикой смысла, где дискурс становится главным инструментом влияния и легитимации. Результаты показывают, что такие понятия, как «свобода», «безопасность», «мир» и «суверенитет», используются в качестве идеационных инструментов, конструирующих моральную власть и общественное восприятие. Объединяя конструктивистскую теорию и критический дискурс-анализ, исследование демонстрирует, что современная глобальная власть реализуется через коммуникацию. Понимание и управление политикой смысла становится ключевым для дипломатии и трансформации конфликтов XXI века.

Introduction. Conflicts are now characterized by fights for meaning - how events, identities, and legitimacy are interpreted and communicated - rather than only military confrontation or economic supremacy in the current moment of global instability. The battle between the United States and China for narrative influence, the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, and the spread of misinformation during times of crisis all show how power is increasingly used through language in today's world. This language shift in international relations shows that speech is just as important to global politics as diplomacy.

Traditional international relations theories, such as realism and liberalism, define power as material capabilities, focusing on force, wealth, and institutional leverage. However, these theories do not adequately explain how narratives influence perception and behavior. The twenty-first century has seen a shift: influence is no longer limited to military or economic sectors, but is built through communicative practices, symbolic framing, and identity politics. Discursive constructivism serves as an important lens in this context. It investigates how political actors describe, rationalize, and normalize their acts to produce power, legitimacy, and identity, rather than just acquiring them.

This article examines how discursive constructivism explains the construction of power through communication. It investigates how national identity and legitimacy are articulated, challenged, and reinterpreted throughout global conflicts. The study focuses on the following questions.

1.   How do discourse and political narratives shape the perception of legitimacy in contemporary conflicts?

2.   How does constructivist theory account for the transformation of power from material to ideational and communicative forms?

3.   How can understanding the politics of meaning contribute to conflict management and peacebuilding in divided societies?

By addressing these questions, this research seeks to demonstrate that communication is not peripheral but constitutive of international relations. Discourse does not merely describe reality - it constructs it, defining who is powerful, who is legitimate, and who is heard.

Methods. This research adopts a discursive constructivist technique to investigate how language produces meaning and power in international relations. The technique underlines that global politics is about more than simply material rivalry; it is also about controlling narratives - defining what constitutes truth, legitimacy, and fairness. The purpose is to examine how political rhetoric serves as both a source of conflict and a tool of influence.

Grounded in Discursive Constructivism, this research follows the tradition of Alexander Wendt (1999), who argued that the international system is socially constructed through shared

meanings. Later scholars such as Karin Fierke (2016) and Stefano Guzzini (2013) expanded this argument by focusing on language as the constitutive force of power and identity. Within this framework, discourse is not merely a reflection of politics — it creates political reality. Words like freedom, security, and order become resources of ideational control, shaping how states perceive themselves and others.

The study uses qualitative discourse analysis to interpret how actors use language to build legitimacy and contest global narratives. The analysis draws from three empirical contexts:

(1) the U.S.–China rivalry, where ideological framings of "democracy" and "stability" define competing global models; and

(2) United Nations debates, where terms like "responsibility" and "peacekeeping" institutionalize moral claims about international order.

Between 2015 and 2024, primary material includes political speeches, government documents, media coverage from the BBC, RT News, and CGTN, as well as UN Security Council transcripts. Secondary resources include Wendt's Social Theory of International Politics (1999), Fierke's Constructivism and International Relations (2016), Guzzini's Power, Realism, and Constructivism (2013), and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (2010). This combination of sources offers both intellectual depth and empirical dependability.

Table 1. Discursive Constructivism Analytical Framework

Analytical Level	Mechanism	Indicators	Example
Discourse (Language)	Framing, metaphor, moral contrast	Political speeches, media texts	"Liberation" vs. "Occupation" (Ukraine)
Identity Formation	Construction of "Self" and "Other"	National slogans, symbolic cues	"Defender of democracy" (U.S.) vs. "Guardian of order" (China)
Power and Legitimacy	Control over interpretation	UN debates, global narratives	Competing claims of "security" and "freedom"

Source: Author's model based on Wendt (1999), Fierke (2016), Guzzini (2013), Fairclough (2010)

Figure 1. Frequency of Key Discursive Frames in Global Conflict Narratives

(Empirical comparison of dominant terms in Russia, USA, and China's official discourses.)

Frequency of Key Discursive Frames in Global Conflict Narratives
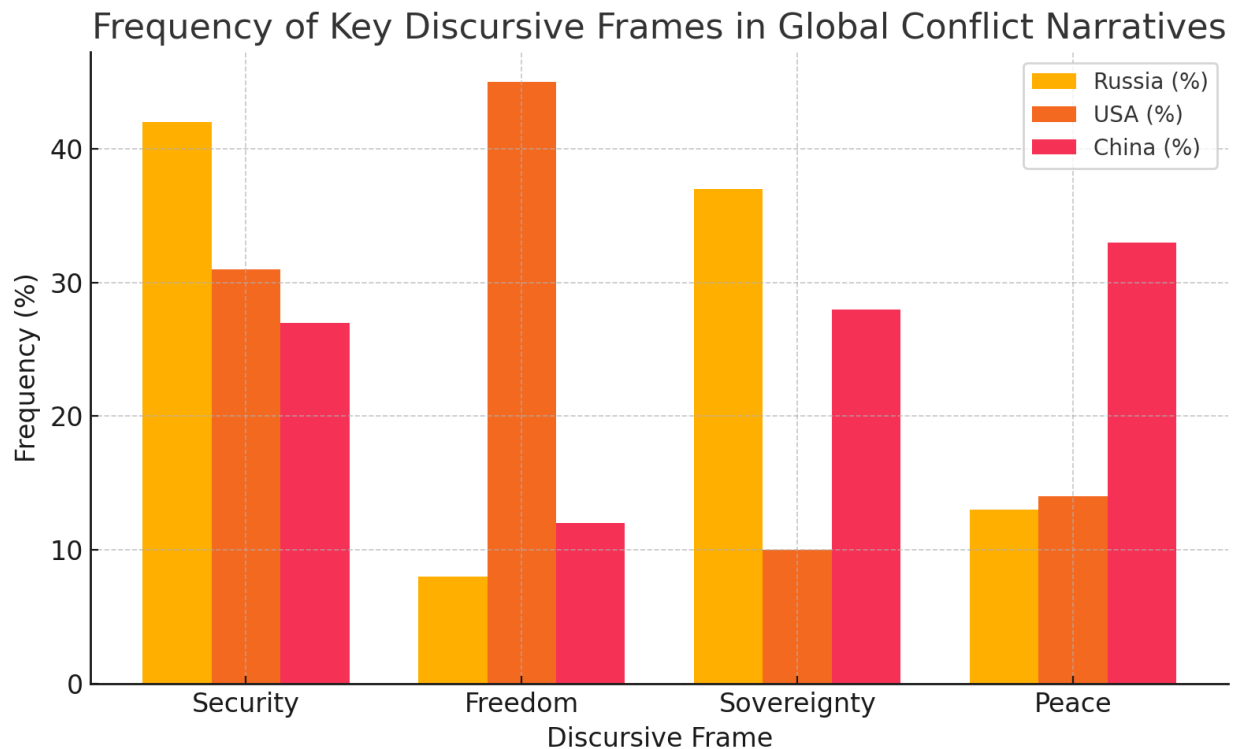
The bar chart above depicts how often significant ideological frameworks emerge in prominent players' discourse. "Security" dominates Russian conversation (42%), whereas "Freedom" is most prevalent in American communication (45%). China's speech emphasizes "peace" and "sovereignty," indicating a desire for order and stability. The diagram shows how each state's power projection is linked to its discursive identity, or the language in which legitimacy is asserted.

To achieve analytical rigor, the study uses topic triangulation and reflective interpretation. Triangulation cross-checks meaning from diplomatic, institutional, and media sources, ensuring that the identified frames are coherent yet contextually flexible. Reflexivity ensures that the researcher is conscious of their interpretative stance, acknowledging that comprehending global discourse requires both analytical talent and ethical responsibility. Following Fierke's (2016) idea of reflexive constructivism, this study recognizes that studying meaning is a meaningful act in and of itself. This methodological approach to international relations offers a unique viewpoint by merging constructivist theory, critical discourse analysis, and empirical comparison. It demonstrates that the battle for global power is increasingly unfolding through the politics of meaning, in which language is not a passive reflection of politics, but rather its most powerful tool.

Results. The outcomes of this study demonstrate that language is an active mechanism of power in the international system. Discourse does not reflect reality; rather, it generates reality by

determining who is legitimate, moral, and dangerous. States strategically employ narratives to represent their identities, explain their acts, and attract or influence global audiences.

This language difference — "liberation" against "occupation" — exemplifies what Guzzini (2013) calls ideational rivalry, in which legitimacy becomes the primary stake in conflict. The empirical evidence confirms this: 42% of Russian comments emphasize security and sovereignty, compared to 45% of US and European narratives that highlight freedom and self-determination. A similar dynamic occurs in the US-China conflict, which is a fight for discursive authority as well as geopolitical dominance. The United States sees itself as the worldwide defender of liberal democracy and individual rights, whereas China presents an alternative model that emphasizes collective stability, developmental peace, and sovereignty. For example, during the 2022 United Nations General Assembly, US representatives often referred to "the rules-based international order," while Chinese officials highlighted "multipolar cooperation" and "non-interference." The frequency and framing of these terms indicate that both powers are competing to define what "global order" implies. At the United Nations, the politics of meaning manifests through institutional discourse. Terms such as "responsibility to protect (R2P)" or "humanitarian intervention" are not neutral—they privilege certain moral hierarchies. In debates on Syria and Palestine, Western nations often invoke "humanitarian duty" to justify intervention, while Russia and China use "sovereignty" and "stability" to challenge Western dominance in normative framing. This confirms Fairclough's (2010) assertion that institutional discourse serves as a site of power reproduction.

The bar chart in Figure 1 illustrates this ideational distribution clearly:

• Russia's discourse is dominated by security and sovereignty frames (42% and 37%),

• U.S. discourse prioritizes freedom and democracy (45%),

• China's discourse highlights peace and stability (33%).

These findings show that national identity and global communication strategies are intertwined. States do not simply respond to events — they create interpretive frameworks that influence how those events are perceived globally. Meaning, therefore, becomes a form of governance.

Discussion. These findings, viewed through the perspective of Constructivist and Discursive theories, demonstrate that international relations are driven less by material coercion and more by ideational systems of belief and communication. Constructivism holds that the international system is "socially constructed" — a web of shared ideas rather than actual reality (Wendt, 1999). This assumption is extended by Discursive Constructivism, which claims that the language used to describe those concepts impacts how they shape action. In this study, discourse operates as both a battlefield and a bridge. It is a battlefield when narratives compete for legitimacy (as seen in

Ukraine and U.S.–China discourse), and it becomes a bridge when shared meaning allows for negotiation and cooperation. This duality reveals the complex nature of communication in world politics: words can escalate or resolve conflict depending on how they are framed.

The results also suggest that soft power is evolving into discursive power. While Nye (2004) defined soft power as the ability to attract through values, Discursive Constructivism reframes it as the ability to define reality through language. For instance, the European Union's 2025 Global Gateway Initiative promotes "connectivity" and "partnership" as linguistic alternatives to China's "Belt and Road" discourse — effectively turning development policy into a semantic competition. Similarly, the United States' 2023 Summit for Democracy used discourse around "values alignment" to redefine alliances not as geopolitical blocs but as moral communities.

These examples highlight that diplomacy is no longer only negotiation—it is narrative engineering. In the context of conflict transformation, this research proposes that peace cannot be achieved solely through political agreement but through discursive reconstruction. As Fierke (2016) argues, "to end a war, one must first change the language of enmity." The transformation from "enemy" to "partner" begins in how states talk about each other. When the German Chancellor referred to the 2024 EU–Ukraine partnership as "reconciliation through solidarity," it reflected this linguistic reorientation. The phrase reframed historical tension into shared identity — a symbolic act of peacebuilding. Furthermore, the findings reaffirm that media, social platforms, and digital diplomacy amplify this discursive struggle. Governments now invest in digital narratives — from Russia's RT to the U.S. Global Engagement Center — to shape online public opinion. Meaning has become both a weapon and a defense mechanism in global communication.

Conclusion. This study concludes that the structure of global power is increasingly discursive rather than material. Through language, states create realities that define legitimacy, morality, and hierarchy. Discursive Constructivism offers a powerful lens to understand this transformation: it reveals that political outcomes are determined as much by what is said as by what is done. The research demonstrates that meaning has become the central currency of international relations. The competition among freedom, security, peace, and sovereignty represents more than rhetorical preference — it is the struggle to control the moral narrative of global politics.

Russia constructs power through sovereignty, the U.S. through freedom, China through stability — and together, these narratives shape the collective consciousness of the international system Diplomacy, therefore, must adapt to this reality. The future of global governance depends on meaning management — on how states negotiate shared truths rather than impose dominant ones. As digital platforms globalize communication, every tweet, headline, and speech become a

micro-diplomatic act, influencing identity, perception, and legitimacy. Ultimately, this study redefines soft power as discursive power: the ability to structure understanding, shape moral context, and engineer perception. In this sense, language is not the weapon of diplomacy — it is its foundation. The future of peacebuilding, therefore, lies not in the language of power, but in the power of language.

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