

**Dossier: "Knowledge Organization: multi and interdisciplinary dialogues"**

## **Knowledge Organization and Discourse Analysis**

**Organización del Conocimiento y Análisis del Discurso**

**Organização do Conhecimento e Análise do Discurso**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the intersections between discourse analysis (DA) and Knowledge Organization (KO), examining how Michel Pecheux's and Michel Foucault's discourse theories can contribute to knowledge organization systems and the analysis of communities. Discourse analysis emerged from social and scientific movements in France from the 1960s onward as a theoretical and methodological framework from the perspective we have been working on over the last 20 years. This study discusses key aspects of DA and its potential applications within the field of KO. Despite the terms "discourse" and "analysis" in the literature, they are rarely examined structurally and transversally. This is mainly because such studies are relatively recent and originate from disciplines historically distant from KO. Consequently, incorporating discourse analysis as a theoretical lens in KO requires reconfiguring analytical frameworks, particularly regarding the construction of systems, approaches, and studies. Unlike traditional KO methodologies that focus primarily on conceptual structures, discourse analysis considers terms and their meanings and, through the lens of ideology, recognizes the historical and social dimensions of meaning construction. Therefore, Pecheux's and Foucault's discourse theory significantly contributes to domain analysis in KO.

**Keywords:** KNOWLEDGE ORGANIZATION, DOMAIN ANALYSIS, DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

### **Resumen**

Este artículo explora las intersecciones entre el análisis del discurso (AD) y la Organización del Conocimiento (OC), examinando cómo las teorías del discurso

de Michel Pêcheux y Michel Foucault pueden contribuir a los sistemas de organización del conocimiento y a las teorías de análisis de comunidades. El análisis del discurso surgió a partir de los movimientos sociales y científicos en Francia desde la década de 1960 como un marco teórico y metodológico, en la perspectiva en la que hemos trabajado durante los últimos 20 años. Este estudio analiza aspectos clave del AD y sus posibles aplicaciones en el campo de la OC. A pesar de la presencia de los términos "discurso" y "análisis" en la literatura, rara vez se examinan de manera estructural y transversal. Esto se debe principalmente a que estos estudios son relativamente recientes y provienen de disciplinas históricamente distantes de la OC. En consecuencia, la incorporación del análisis del discurso como una lente teórica en la OC requiere la reconfiguración de marcos analíticos, especialmente en lo que respecta a la construcción de sistemas, enfoques y estudios. A diferencia de las metodologías tradicionales de la OC, que se centran principalmente en estructuras conceptuales, el análisis del discurso considera los términos no solo en relación con sus significados, sino también a través de la lente de la ideología, reconociendo las dimensiones históricas y sociales de la construcción del significado. Por lo tanto, las teorías del discurso de Pêcheux y Foucault aportan una contribución significativa al análisis de dominios en la OC.

Palabras clave: ORGANIZACIÓN DEL CONOCIMIENTO, ANÁLISIS DE DOMINIO, ANÁLISIS DEL DISCURSO

## Resumo

Este artigo explora as interseções entre a análise do discurso (AD) e a Organização do Conhecimento (OC), examinando como as teorias do discurso de Michel Pêcheux e Michel Foucault podem contribuir para os sistemas de organização do conhecimento e para as teorias de análise de comunidades. A análise do discurso surgiu a partir de movimentos sociais e científicos na França a partir da década de 1960 como um referencial teórico e metodológico, na perspectiva em que temos trabalhado nos últimos 20 anos. Este estudo discute aspectos-chave da AD e suas possíveis aplicações no campo da OC. Apesar da presença dos termos "discurso" e "análise" na literatura, eles raramente são examinados de maneira estrutural e transversal. Isso ocorre principalmente porque esses estudos são relativamente recentes e originários de disciplinas historicamente distantes da OC. Consequentemente, a incorporação da análise do discurso como uma lente teórica na OC requer a reconfiguração de referenciais analíticos, especialmente no que diz respeito à construção de sistemas, abordagens e estudos. Diferentemente das metodologias tradicionais da OC, que se concentram principalmente em estruturas conceituais, a análise do discurso considera os termos não apenas em relação aos seus significados, mas também através da lente da ideologia, reconhecendo as dimensões históricas e sociais da construção do significado. Portanto, as teorias do discurso de Pêcheux e Foucault oferecem uma contribuição significativa para a análise de domínios na OC.

Keywords: ORGANIZAÇÃO DO CONHECIMENTO; ANÁLISE DO DISCURSO; ANÁLISE DE DOMÍNIO.

Date received: 10/02/2025

Date accepted: 30/04/2025

## Introduction

Knowledge Organization (KO) is a specialized discipline committed to systematically developing methodologies to represent, structure, and facilitate access to information. This field is grounded in an interdisciplinary framework that integrates information science, library science, and linguistics, thereby addressing the complexities of increasingly intricate and expansive information environments. Researchers within KO endeavor to identify effective strategies for organizing, classifying, and encoding knowledge, ensuring it can be easily discovered and meaningfully interpreted across diverse contexts.

This text is based on two published works: an article in the Knowledge Organization Journal [\[1\]](#) and a book chapter initially published in Portuguese.[\[2\]](#)

Over the years, practitioners have proposed numerous theoretical and practical frameworks to advance the discipline. These initiatives include the creation of specialized languages for describing content, the development of hierarchical structures and taxonomies, the establishment of controlled vocabularies and classifications, and designing robust knowledge organization systems (KOS). By focusing on consistent representation and systematic retrieval, KO efforts play an important role in ensuring that a wide range of information sources is readily accessible, thereby supporting individual inquiry and collective learning.

Discourse Analysis (DA) emerged from a constellation of social and scientific movements that gained prominence in France during the 1960s. As an interdisciplinary field, DA examines how language and text—viewed as events and structures—are shaped by and reflect various historical and ideological contexts. Discourse must be understood based on the tension between structure (that which is logically stabilized) and event (that which disrupts and reconfigures meanings), with this very tension being the proper site of analysis. The articulation between structure and event is not resolved but is theoretically operated in the in-between space by discourse analysis.

For DA, knowledge represents a space of struggle rather than consensus as a structure and event; by focusing on how discourse mediates power relations, structures knowledge, and ultimately influences social practices(events), DA offers a critical lens through which researchers can interpret the nuanced interplay between text, context, and the broader cultural or institutional frameworks in which communication occurs.

At its core, DA sees discourse not just as a collection of words or statements but as a socially and historically situated practice that constructs meaning through prevailing values, norms, power dynamics, and bias. Consequently, DA scholars closely explore how discursive formations emerge, evolve, and intersect with specific ideological perspectives. In doing this, they aim to uncover the relationships between language, authority, and knowledge production, thereby shedding light on how certain voices are amplified while others are marginalized or silenced.

Michel Foucault's contributions stand out within this framework, although his role as a discourse theorist is often seen as peripheral to his broader intellectual pursuits. Foucault's insights into how systems of thought are formed and maintained—primarily through institutional practices and relationships of power and knowledge—have significantly influenced the humanities and social sciences. At the same time, his exploration of how discourse shapes subjectivity and societal structures encourages ongoing inquiry into the nature of epistemological boundaries. In his work *Mal d'Archive: Une Impression Freudienne*, scholars like Jacques Derrida further expand the discourse by probing the instability of meaning in language and examining how archival practices encode power. Both Foucault and Derrida, along with other theorists sometimes labeled as postmodernists, post-structuralists, or speculative structuralists (Dosse, 1993), enrich the theoretical landscape by emphasizing how discourse reflects and refracts complex networks of meaning. Rather than a consent-based system typically seen in KO, we can regard knowledge as a site of ideological struggle and a critical perspective on the landscape.

In this context, integrating DA perspectives into KO promotes a critical assessment of commonly used classification systems, indexing vocabularies, and metadata frameworks. Although often perceived as objective, these organizational

tools depend on linguistic and cultural assumptions that inevitably influence how information is interpreted and utilized. Researchers employing a discourse-analytic lens can uncover how certain concepts or communities become underrepresented, misrepresented, or excluded from mainstream knowledge systems. Such findings carry significant implications for creating more reflexive and inclusive strategies to manage information, especially in transnational or multilingual contexts where cultural and linguistic diversity demands nuanced approaches to classification and access alongside discussions about reparation or inclusive practices.

Numerous scholars in information science have begun to explore these implications, especially those aiming to move beyond traditional positivist paradigms that once dominated the field. In the context of French DA, Michel Foucault's analyses of power-knowledge relationships have sparked extensive debate, influencing scholars such as Frohmann (1992; 1994; 2001; 2004) and Campbell (2007). Their work adopts a Foucauldian perspective to question how information systems shape and are shaped by existing structures of authority, illustrating the subtle ways in which discourses legitimize or obscure various forms of knowledge. Meanwhile, Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction has informed the writings of Terry Cook (1997; 2001a; 2001b) and Tom Nesmith (2002; 2004), both of whom analyze archival practices to demonstrate how institutional definitions of evidence and memory can be destabilized to reveal underlying ideological commitments or their absence.

Despite these notable contributions, there is still a relative lack of systematic discourse analysis (DA) research specifically focused on knowledge organization (KO). While theorists like Foucault and Derrida are frequently referenced to challenge traditional views in information science, few publications prominently highlight "discourse" or "analysis" in their discussions, signaling a need for deeper engagement with the theory and methods of DA itself. In many cases, scholarship directly integrating these areas has emerged from North American views, different from those in France and Brazil—where discourse studies have a richer history. In contrast, North American contexts favor different linguistic and analytical frameworks, such as Chomsky's transformational grammar or various Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) forms. Marxist authors tend to be somewhat

toxic in a capitalist-centered region. Although these approaches address concerns about how power operates through language, they do not always align well with French DA's historical, sociopolitical, and enunciative emphases.

Nonetheless, the growing recognition of DA's potential encourages KO scholars to examine how discourse underlies even the most seemingly neutral systems of knowledge representation more closely. Today's interconnected information landscape demands responsiveness to global contexts, interdisciplinary perspectives, and diverse user needs. DA-based research can uncover how dominant discourses become embedded in algorithms, classification taxonomies, or metadata structures, sometimes perpetuating inequities in digital spaces. Such insights are crucial for developing better international standards, more inclusive terminologies, and adaptable data-sharing protocols that acknowledge linguistic, cultural, and ideological diversity. They also foster ongoing dialogue regarding the ethical dimensions of information organization. These insights challenge practitioners and researchers to reimagine KO as a dynamic, contested arena where values, identities, and worldviews collide in a continuous struggle for power and identity.

Looking ahead, scholars interested in forging stronger links between DA and KO can extend their inquiries to digital archives, online databases, and globally networked platforms. These increasingly prominent sites of knowledge exchange call for analyses that account for how discourse and power operate at scale. Researchers can highlight how user behaviors reflect and reshape discursive norms by applying DA to cataloging practices, software interfaces, and indexing protocols. Such work encourages iterative refinements to KO frameworks, ensuring they remain open to critique and capable of adapting to emergent discursive conditions. A DA-informed approach to KO enriches theoretical discussions about language, ideology, and representation. It offers practical guidance for developing more ethical, transparent, and equitable systems for organizing information worldwide.

Two influential figures and their corresponding theoretical frameworks—Jean Jaques Coutine and Michel Pêcheux, and the theory of enunciation and historical materialism—are frequently overlooked in discussions linking discourse, organization, and information science. In this context, it is crucial to emphasize

that Discourse Analysis (DA), drawing on enunciation and material history, investigates how ideology is formed. In other words, DA recognizes that every text emerges from a specific, situated point of view, entailing a particular ideological alignment that shapes its discursive position. Michel Pêcheux considered one of DA's founding thinkers, conceived discourse as an interdisciplinary object characterized by structure and occurrence. As a student of Louis Althusser, Pêcheux sought to adapt Althusserian Marxism to sociolinguistic theory, thereby underscoring the profound role of ideology in linguistic practices.

When discourse is introduced as a theoretical contribution to Knowledge Organization (KO), it creates a new dimension for analyzing how systems, methodologies, and research efforts are developed. This perspective extends beyond KO's traditional focus on terms and concepts by incorporating enunciation, ideology, and historical contexts as key factors in meaning-making. In this context, discourse reflects the world and actively generates meaning. According to Pêcheux's theoretical framework, every language system has intrinsic structures with ideological significance. Such an "omni-historical diligence," as Pêcheux describes it (1990, p. 8), indicates an unavoidable ideological tendency that points to origins, ultimate goals, the elsewhere, and the beyond, and that meaning and knowledge are more social-driven.

As a field of study, KO encompasses multiple analytical approaches outlined by Hjørland (2016), including practical and intuitive methods, consensus-based methods, facet analysis, cognitive and user-based approaches, domain analysis, and epistemological approaches. Against this backdrop, DA in the French tradition—mainly shaped by Pêcheux's—can serve as a valuable complement to domain analysis, epistemological perspectives, and ethical studies of KOS, as well as to explore how knowledge is used and interpreted beyond purely terminological or conceptual dimensions. By integrating enunciation and material history into KO research, scholars may better understand how ideologies operate within knowledge systems, revealing the broader social and historical currents that inform our interactions with organized information.

As a scientific field, Knowledge Organization (KO) is underpinned by multiple research axes, as identified by Hjørland (2016):

- (1) practical and intuitive approaches;
- (2) consensus-based approaches;
- (3) approaches grounded in facet analysis;
- (4) cognitive and user-based perspectives; and
- (5) domain analysis and epistemological investigations.

In this context, the French discourse analysis tradition—exceptionally as conceptualized by Michel Pêcheux—may serve as a valuable complement to domain analysis, epistemological approaches, and explorations of knowledge use that extend beyond purely terminological or conceptual concerns. By incorporating Pecheux’s focus on enunciation and historical materialism, discourse analysis illuminates the ideological dimensions of knowledge production and dissemination, thereby broadening KO’s analytical scope and fostering more critical, context-sensitive examinations of how knowledge is organized, interpreted, and employed across diverse domains.

## Objectives

The general objective of this work is to explore the intersection between KO and discourse analysis and identify the theoretical and methodological elements that DA can use in KO.

1. To demonstrate how Michel Pêcheux’s theory of discourse—grounded in enunciation and historical materialism—can enrich domain analysis and epistemological approaches within Knowledge Organization, thereby revealing the ideological underpinnings of how knowledge is represented and accessed.
2. To illustrate the broader significance of discourse analysis in expanding traditional KO frameworks beyond terminological or conceptual perspectives, emphasizing the role of language, culture, and ideology in shaping the organization, dissemination, and reception of information.



## Methodology

This qualitative research establishes the conceptual, methodological, and practical intersection between Knowledge Organization (KO) and Discourse Analysis (DA), explicitly highlighting the theoretical contributions of Michel Pêcheux and Michel Foucault.

The aim is to explore how enunciation and historical materialism reveal ideological dimensions within knowledge production. Five variables guided the investigation: the authors' recognition of the intersection space; the identification of common or similar foundations; the identification of theories or theoretical currents; the identification of methodologies; and the direction of theoretical or methodological influence between the two fields. A corpus was assembled in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, comprising key KO sources—such as articles from International Classification, Knowledge Organization, and the Advances in Knowledge Organization series; proceedings of ISKO international congresses and regional chapters; and foundational texts by noted KO authors. Relevant DA material included seminal works by Michel Pêcheux/Michel Pecheux and scholars applying Althusserian Marxism in sociolinguistics, along with discourse-studies texts and publications on critical linguistics or enunciation theory.

Shared epistemological, theoretical, or methodological frameworks were noted to identify common or similar foundations. For theories or theoretical currents, references to Pêcheux, Althusserian Marxism, or established KO models (domain analysis) were singled out. Under methodologies, both text-analytical techniques from DA and KO approaches for domain construction or term representation were assessed.

Finally, the direction of theoretical or methodological influence examined whether concepts from DA informed KO practices or vice versa, highlighting any instances of mutual enrichment. The data were systematically read and coded, emphasizing how discursive, enunciative, and ideological factors shape classification, indexing, and epistemic frameworks within KO.

Results were then compared across the corpus. In synthesizing these findings, the study illustrated how Pecheux's/Foucault's focus on ideology, history, and enunciation can broaden understanding of KO structures and classification

processes. This thereby uncovers current discursive engagements in KO and prospective research avenues that further integrate DA into the field.

## Results

Below are the results for each indicator related to the variables established in this research. All transcriptions and references originate from the sources of the selected corpus.

### Discourse Analysis for Knowledge Organization

In its Francophone context, Discourse Analysis (DA) is a theoretical product of the philosophical, scientific, political, and social movements that characterized France in the late 1960s, with Michel Pêcheux as one of its leading figures. Along with a group of collaborators, Pêcheux developed a theory of the materiality of discourse, building on the philosophical work of Louis Althusser. He conceptualized discourse as a distinct form of materiality—historical and linguistic—directly intertwined with ideological materiality, proposing a "semantics of discourse." The theories of Pêcheux and Althusser marked a shift from.

Instead, ideology is seen as a productive force with specific operations, and language is theorized to contain ideological meaning inherently. For Pêcheux, discourse analysis is a foundational method for examining the production of meaning in discourse, recognizing that these texts—even those that seem neutral or purely rational—are profoundly influenced by history and ideology. This shift established the groundwork for a new field within linguistics based on materialist principles. Rather than viewing ideology as just a misrepresentation of the economy, Pêcheux (2014) argued that it operates independently and has a concrete mechanism that requires a sophisticated analytical approach. This materialist semantics treated discourse as both an event (momentary utterances or statements) and a structure (a set of rules or norms governed by ideological forces).

Pêcheux's discourse analysis approach distinguished itself from structural linguistics, notably rejecting Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of language as self-contained. Discourse analysis, especially as influenced by Pêcheux's framework, scrutinizes how acts within ideological structures, positioning discourse as something more than a linguistic phenomenon—it is inherently ideological and historical.

DA's connection to Marxism and linguistics enhances its interdisciplinary nature in the study of meaning formation. From the perspective of linguistic sciences, discourse analysis offers an alternative approach to understanding semantic phenomena, employing Pêcheux's materialist framework to examine language and its political and ideological impacts. Viewed through this lens, DA evolves, enriched by continuous refinements, adjustments, and reassertions, creating a framework where language, meaning, and ideology are inseparable. Therefore, when considering controlled vocabularies, taxonomies, or ontologies, we perceive perspectives on knowledge. However, since knowledge is interwoven with its political, ideological, social, and semantic dimensions, it establishes a limited view of meaning.

This perspective transformed the earlier theoretical fields, providing what some call a radical departure and academic revitalization of language and ideology studies. Texts were seen not just as isolated linguistic structures but as embedded in vast ideological networks regarding social, political, or historic forces. For Pêcheux's discourse, the concept of "event" anchors the theory since texts originate in events fraught with power struggles and ideological tensions, reflecting broader societal forces. This distinction allows DA to go beyond mere discourse description to uncover its systemic imbalances and its role in reproducing social and ideological dominance. Pêcheux's radical transformation of DA goes beyond a critique of structural linguistics; it is an inherently interactive, dynamically positioned theory of social and ideological struggle.

DA does not address a homogeneous linguistic system but one prompted by events—signifiers that circulate within ideological formations, constantly shaped by the ever-evolving discursive environment. Such an understanding clearly establishes the foundation for integrating DA into Knowledge Organization (KO) by recognizing that texts, terms, and concepts associated with knowledge are

rooted in their ideological, social, and historical context. Discourse analysis and its materialist approach then deliberately critique knowledge systems by identifying not only the conceptual but also the ideological and social mechanisms underpinning them.

By employing metaphors and imagery, such as a “network of meanings,” DA theorists like Barros (2015) and others illustrate the subtle tensions between a “structured whole” and its contradictions. A discourse operates like a complex, porous network that allows for non-representations and deconstructed meanings, which do not adhere to linear paths. These insights are vital in both KO and domain analysis, enabling researchers to move beyond merely conceptual frameworks and toward an understanding of knowledge organization influenced by social and political forces.

Viewing KO as discourse implies that KO structures themselves are influenced by ideological discursive fields—not politically neutral but instead layered in meanings determined by who is disseminating the knowledge and why. For instance, in the construction of knowledge ontologies in KO, DA challenges the linguistic assumptions by injecting a social, ideological, and historical critique of the terms used for knowledge representation. Traditional approaches to ontology construction that treat concepts and terms as fixed entities run counter to an understanding of them as malleable and historically grounded.

DA's contribution in this context is crucial, particularly in situations where ideologies are likely to form and affect these constructed domains, seen, for example, through the political lens of an autocratic or democratic state, directly influencing semantic relations within a hierarchical ontology. Furthermore, DA's analysis identifies the ideological positions within texts and the discursive formations that allow knowledge representation.

The application of DA to KO is an essential epistemological and methodological shift that complements traditional domain analysis. Discourse analysis delivers interpretations based on a broader scale that challenges conceptual terms and offers new theoretical concepts, such as ideological and social formations, which direct the overall configuration of the domain under study. It allows for a critical examination of knowledge organization systems, providing a deconstruction of

their internal structures that highlights power dynamics, subordination, and ideological imbalances present in knowledge representation.

Lastly, discourse analysis provides a framework for KO research that does not take the text, concept, or ontology at face value. Discourse analysis requires a “critical distance,” as theorized by Pêcheux, where the analyst recognizes the duality of being both a subject of study and a participant in the interpretative process. Through an active role in analyzing discursive formations, the researcher recognizes that discourse systems cannot be objectively separated from their social and ideological contexts. When applied to KO, discourse analysis offers groundbreaking potential not merely in technical theory but in human-centered reflections of power, knowledge, and ideology embedded in the systems that govern our access to information.

Viewed through this lens, discourse moves beyond simply representing the world to actively producing meaning within it, so that a text serves as an object in which discourse and ideology intersect, defined by its own historicity and the recognition that such intersections shape meaning at once collectively and individually. This conceptual stance is often conveyed through the metaphor of discourse as a network or fabric, replete with “holes” through which new or alternative meanings can pass, emphasizing that words do not hold meaning in isolation but rather in the ideological, social, and historical contexts in which they appear.

The notion of a discursive formation thus designates a space larger than the text itself, demarcating the range of what can be said and implying that the significance of words is never intrinsic but is determined by shifting configurations of ideology, power, and social positioning. Such formations are fluid, heterogeneous, and continuously reconfigured, introducing internal contradictions and enabling fresh avenues for interpretation.

When applied to Knowledge Organization (KO), discourse analysis frames KO as a form of discourse, one that is molded by significant imperatives such as technological advancement and the imperative to systematically organize scientific knowledge. Adopting a discourse analysis perspective on KO extends beyond traditional conceptual or terminological challenges; it actively engages with the ideological, social, and political dimensions that underlie the frameworks

we create for the classification and retrieval of information. For example, when utilizing concept theory and terminology, the development of a hierarchical ontology in a conventional manner effectively aligns terms with their corresponding concepts. Conversely, an approach informed by discourse analysis would integrate the influences of discursive formations and ideologies, acknowledging that meaning cannot be detached from its social, historical, and political contexts. Constructing an ontology within an authoritarian regime, for instance, would significantly shape the representation of democracy and dictate how particular theories or perspectives are presented. Knowledge, therefore, cannot be considered *neutral*, as language itself is not neutral.

Accordingly, discourse analysis contributes layers of social and historical context to semantic relationships, thus denaturalizing and fragmenting the processes through which KO systems are constructed, and encouraging richer theoretical, epistemological, and methodological discussions.

Practically speaking, discourse analysis requires defining a specific textual or institutional object for investigation, assembling a corpus that the researcher then scrutinizes through a critical lens—an “observatory”—because no analyst is neutral. Pêcheux and Fuchs, in their 1975 discussion of automatic discourse analysis, distinguish linguistic surface, discursive object, and discursive process, emphasizing that textual meaning emerges from both conscious and unconscious “forgettings” (No. 1 and No. 2). These illusions reflect the dual ways in which ideology and enunciation obscure the fact that meaning is a reactivation of historically constituted, socially embedded sense, rather than the original creation of an autonomous subject. Barros (among others) has demonstrated the utility of this approach for interrogating a wide range of KO-related discourses, from archival ethics to indexing policies and conceptions of traditional knowledge, thus reinforcing how discourse analysis reveals historical, ideological, and social threads in seemingly technical or scientific content.

Ultimately, Pêcheux’s concept of a “non-subjective theory of the subject” highlights the interconnected nature of ideology, institutions, and texts, revealing that meaning is influenced as significantly by historical and material conditions as by linguistic frameworks. Consequently, discourse analysis can serve as a potent instrument in knowledge organization (KO), fostering a profound understanding

of how socio-ideological factors shape domain analyses, classification systems, and various knowledge structures. Instead of perceiving language or metadata as merely transparent conduits of meaning, discourse analysis emphasizes the fundamental discursive processes that facilitate interpretation. By prioritizing history, ideology, and social context, it enhances the analytical capacity of KO, stimulating considerations on the optimal design of knowledge organization systems that recognize and navigate the intricate interplay of language, power, and context-specific human comprehension.

## **Discourse Analysis as an Approach to Knowledge Organization**

KO occupies a position within information science, embodying a dual objective: to refine the systematic and replicable organization of knowledge domains while simultaneously recognizing the broader contexts—cultural, ideological, and historical—in which classification practices are situated. As Hjørland (2016) observes, domain analysis has emerged as a fundamental methodology for comprehending the formation and evolution of knowledge structures, providing a systematic framework that identifies essential concepts, stakeholders, and publications pertinent to a specific intellectual or professional domain. However, a tension remains within Knowledge Organization: the discipline's focus on replicable techniques, including controlled vocabularies, classification schemes, and indexing protocols, at times risks neglecting the ideological and discursive frameworks that fundamentally influence these very techniques.

Discourse analysis (DA), mainly as developed within the French tradition by Michel Pêcheux and his collaborators, powerfully addresses this oversight by revealing how no knowledge system is ever free of social and historical influences, and by showing that language serves not merely as a transparent medium for communicating meaning but also as a material site where ideology is enacted and contested.

From its inception, discourse analysis in France set out to rethink the role of language in shaping consciousness, social relations, and institutional structures

(Pêcheux, 1969). In contrast to structural linguistics, which often treated language as a self-contained system governed by stable syntactic and semantic rules, Pêcheux insisted that discourse should be seen in its “double materiality,” combining linguistic form with ideological and historical content (Pêcheux, 1990). By extension, any field that organizes knowledge—such as library or information science—cannot escape the fact that its domain-defining vocabularies and ontologies encode worldviews. Hence, KO systems are never purely functional or technical. Instead, they are imbued with social power, cultural norms, and rhetorical conventions that subtly guide how specific ideas gain traction, while others might be marginalized or excluded.

One of the core contributions of Pêcheux’s DA lies in the concept of “discursive formation.” This concept highlights how discrete texts or utterances belong to broader networks of meaning, shaped by ideological forces and recurrent patterns of enunciation (Pêcheux & Fuchs, 1975). In Knowledge Organization, we might see these networks manifest in classification hierarchies: certain categories, subject headings, or terminologies are sanctioned because they align with the prevailing assumptions of an epistemic community or a social group. Likewise, certain narratives, conceptual frameworks, or user perspectives may be omitted or remain underrepresented because they stand outside the dominant “discursive formation” that underlies a classification scheme (Barros, 2015). In this light, domain analysis ceases to be merely a matter of collating the key references, journals, and concepts in a particular area. Instead, it involves examining the social and political processes by which a group’s knowledge claims become standardized. This observation resonates with critical studies in library and information science emphasizing that indexing and retrieval practices can embed hegemonic viewpoints (Frohmann, 1994).

Consider, for instance, how Orlandi (2007) describes meaning as the continuous interplay of overlapping or “transferring” expressions. According to this perspective, we should not expect to find stable, context-free definitions for specialized concepts. Rather, each term or concept emerges at the intersection of language, ideology, and history, implying that the definitions themselves are variable depending on the user’s or institution’s vantage point (Orlandi, 2009). This insight is especially crucial in Knowledge Organization, where building a



shared vocabulary for indexing is often seen as the foundation for efficient retrieval. Even the move toward standardization—like adopting a single authoritative word or phrase to capture a concept—reflects an ideological choice, one that might alienate voices or viewpoints that do not adhere to the dominant discourse.

When we talk about DA in the context of KO, methodological reflexivity is one of the most important practical consequences. Domain analysis has long been presented as a sequence of steps: defining the domain, identifying the key actors, analyzing the literature, discerning the conceptual frameworks in use, and so forth (Hjørland, 2016). A Pêcheux-inspired discourse analytic approach, however, raises deeper questions at each step. First, who decides what a domain is? This question points us to the ideological impetus behind domain boundaries. Are these boundaries historically contingent, formed by powerful institutions, or do they arise through a consensus-based process involving multiple actors and perspectives? Second, which sources are included or excluded in analyzing the domain? Inclusion and exclusion criteria are never neutral: they reflect assumptions about validity, relevance, and legitimacy, all of which tie back to historically emergent ideological formations. Third, which theoretical frameworks are privileged? Some theories—and, by extension, some conceptual vocabularies—garner acceptance precisely because they align with hegemonic thinking, while competing paradigms may be sidelined.

Such inquiries point to the significance of discursive communities, a concept that merges domain analysis with discourse analysis. In addition to identifying an “epistemic community” through references, research areas, or specialized journals, a discourse analytic lens suggests that communities are forged around rhetorical conventions, shared ideological standpoints, and a cluster of repeated textual moves that collectively define who “belongs” to the community and who does not (Barros, 2017). On this view, membership in a domain cannot be reduced to mastery of technical knowledge; it also entails adopting a particular discursive identity—speaking in a way that resonates with community norms.

Conversely, individuals who challenge or subvert these established norms may find themselves marginalized or excluded from prevailing discourses. In the context of Knowledge Organization, the imperative lies in developing

classification systems and indexing vocabularies that not only reflect dominant voices but also recognize, or at minimum, accommodate alternative discursive formations.

Michel Pêcheux's methodology further illuminates the interpretive facet of Knowledge Organization (KO). As Orlandi (2007, p. 44) posits, meaning manifests through a dynamic interrelationship: "the signified is always a word, an expression, or a proposition for another word, another expression, or proposition; and it is in this relationship—this overlapping, this transfer (metaphor)—that signifier elements come to confront one another." When we apply this principle to domain analysis, it becomes evident that the conceptual architecture of each domain is not immutable. Instead, it is perpetually in flux, shaped by various historical and social processes converging within discursive enactments. A classification system that regards concepts as neatly delineated or as stable "mental objects" risks overlooking these dynamic transitions of meaning. Consequently, domain analysis (DA) necessitates the examination of discursive shifts, revealing how specific categories or conceptual labels evolve, respond to external pressures, or become subject to ideological tensions.

An especially telling example arises when Knowledge Organization systems have to represent contested political or ethical concepts. Imagine constructing an ontology of governance terms under an autocratic regime, where official discourse might define "democracy" in highly constrained ways or even limit usage of the term altogether, we cited this example before, but let us work with it more.

A conventional domain analysis might take such definitions and descriptors at face value, particularly if it seeks to remain "neutral." However, a DA perspective would illuminate that no truly neutral stance is possible: adopting the state-sanctioned definitions effectively endorses the ideological framework of the autocracy (Barros, 2015). Conversely, to represent diverse or dissenting definitions might incur political risk or violate official policies—again illustrating how classification decisions are far from purely technical. This tension underscores how discourse analysis reveals the ethical stakes of knowledge organization, obliging practitioners to decide how to navigate conflicts between institutional norms and broader commitments to intellectual freedom or social justice (Orlandi, 2009).

Such conflicts connect to a theme introduced by Pêcheux regarding “forgetting,” particularly the illusions that cause subjects to imagine themselves as the source of meaning, rather than as reactivating historically sedimented discourses (Pêcheux & Fuchs, 1975, pp. 180–182). In KO, an analogous forgetting occurs whenever professionals fail to recognize the historical and ideological baggage that underwrites their classification frameworks. For instance, a domain-analytic approach might emphasize robust referencing or data reliability but may not question the assumptions that have shaped the domain’s recognized canons. Discourse analysis thus invites a more profound reflexivity: classification becomes not just an act of enumerating categories but also a praxis that can either reify or challenge existing power structures.

Moreover, the methodological implications of DA for KO can be far-reaching. While domain analysis has frequently been characterized by systematic literature reviews, citation analyses, or the ethnographic study of professional communities, a discourse analytic angle encourages additional methods such as close textual reading, rhetorical analysis, and genealogical tracing of how specific terms have shifted across time and usage contexts. These tools can identify discursive rupture or ideological dispute points in ways that standard domain-analytic protocols might overlook. They can also highlight how an organization’s internal documents—cataloging manuals, indexing guidelines, or usage policies—reveal latent ideologies shaping knowledge. For example, indexing guidelines might systematically marginalize specific user populations or cultural expressions by labeling them with terms that carry a derogatory historical charge. A discourse analytic approach would examine how these labeling practices came about, which authorities codified, and how they continue influencing users’ navigation of information resources.

Seen in this light, discourse analysis not only adds nuance to KO but may also instigate more democratic and inclusive practices of knowledge representation. By demonstrating how ideologies become embedded in language, DA highlights the possibility of alternative discursive formations that can disrupt or expand the field’s conceptual terrain. Far from merely diagnosing ideological bias, it provides conceptual tools—such as discursive formation, the tension between event and structure, the illusions of forgetting—that can help practitioners critique existing

structures and propose more contextually sensitive or participatory classification approaches. These new practices could involve user communities in designing vocabularies or explore multi-vocal strategies that allow for contradictory, contested, and evolving definitions of concepts within the same classification scheme (Barros, 2017).

The implications of such reflexivity are, in fact, deeply aligned with the fundamental motivations of domain analysis. While Hjørland (2016) initially proposed domain analysis as a systematic approach for discovering how knowledge fields are cognitively and socially organized, discourse analysis amplifies this perspective, reminding us that political, historical, and ideological factors shape each domain's organization. Recognizing these factors is key to capturing the domain's full complexity and ensuring that the classification system we build is ethically and epistemically sound. This alignment between DA and domain analysis thus marks a significant step forward in theoretical sophistication, bridging the seemingly pragmatic goals of KO—reliability, efficiency, replicability—with the more profound recognition that classification systems are interpretive frameworks steeped in power relations.

In conclusion, integrating discourse analysis into Knowledge Organization reorients the field, compelling it to confront the ideological, rhetorical, and historical dimensions that underwrite any act of classification. Michel Pêcheux's vision of discourse as a material practice underscores that KO cannot treat language merely as a vehicle for stable concepts; meaning is always dynamic, context-specific, and entwined with power structures. DA enriches and challenges the domain-analytic tradition by encouraging critical reflection on how domain boundaries are drawn, how terms acquire their significance, and how certain voices get amplified while others are omitted. This approach unveils the often-invisible discursive formations that guide classification and opens pathways for more inclusive, context-responsive, and ethically informed knowledge organization. Adopting a discourse analytic lens may help KO practitioners move beyond technical efficiency alone, spurring them to design and maintain information systems that address users' diverse needs and conscientiously acknowledge the social contexts in which knowledge is produced, contested, and shared.

## **Applications of Discourse Analysis in Knowledge Organization Systems: an example “democracy.”**

Based on our discussions, we constructed a taxonomy to capture how “democracy” is conceptualized, practiced, and contested in an autocratic state. It adopts a straightforward hierarchical structure, reflecting official narratives and alternative or critical viewpoints that challenge the dominant discourse. The primary aim is to offer a coherent system for classifying materials—texts, documents, and digital resources—that discuss the complexities of democracy under authoritarian governance. By dissecting the notion of democracy into logical categories and subcategories, the taxonomy highlights the ideological tensions, social dynamics, and external influences shaping its meaning and application.

At the apex lies the concept of “Democracy in an Autocratic State,” an umbrella category encompassing everything from official political rhetoric to clandestine activism. Subsumed under this main heading are four principal branches, each illustrating a unique dimension of how democracy is claimed, exercised, or restricted. The first major branch, “Officially Sanctioned Democracy,” focuses on the state’s presentation of democracy through recognized institutions and authorized practices. Within this category, one finds “State-Defined Principles,” which serve as the ideological anchors or slogans legitimizing the regime’s curated form of democracy (e.g., “guided democracy,” “cultural suitability”). Another sub-level is “State Institutions,” referring to the advisory parliaments, unity councils, or ministries tasked with creating a facade of representation, often lacking absolute autonomy or checks on power. “Permitted Civil Participation” covers the controlled forms of citizen engagement—like supervised local elections or authorized civil groups—that simulate popular consent while maintaining autocratic control.

A second major branch, “Restricted or Criminalized Discourses,” details how critical or dissenting perspectives on democracy are suppressed. “Opposition Views” addresses overt demands for multiparty elections or transparent governance, which the regime typically deems “subversive.” “Underground Mobilizations” describes covert activism, from local clandestine networks to

encrypted social-media channels, seeking to evade state surveillance. Critical Media captures the role of independent journalists or bloggers who face censorship for publishing unauthorized accounts or critiques.

The third branch, “External or Global Conceptions,” highlights international or exile-based perspectives that either inspire local reformers or threaten the regime’s legitimacy. This includes “International Organizations,” with standards for free and fair elections; “Foreign Democratic Models,” which serve as reference points for those seeking alternatives; and “Exile-Based Narratives,” representing dissident communities abroad who maintain contact with domestic audiences.

Finally, “Mechanisms of Control & Adaptation” encompasses the apparatus by which the state enforces, revises, and protects its authoritarian approach to democracy. Under “Propaganda Apparatus,” government bodies and officially owned media outlets frame the regime’s narrative, asserting that centralized authority best serves national interests. “Censorship & Surveillance” deals with active monitoring, from internet firewalls to security crackdowns, ensuring that critical voices remain stifled. Meanwhile, “Legal-Institutional Enforcement” pinpoints the concrete legislation and judicial mechanisms—anti-subversion laws, loyalty oaths, security courts—that criminalize alternative discourses.

This straightforward, enumerative classification offers a valuable framework for librarians, researchers, or archivists who aim to index or organize democracy-related content in authoritarian contexts. By incorporating both government-sanctioned categories and marginalized viewpoints, the taxonomy illustrates that “democracy” is not monolithic or ideologically neutral but is continuously shaped and reshaped by competing forces. Moreover, it highlights how official doctrines, domestic opposition, and global influences intersect within a broader sociopolitical tapestry. Ultimately, taxonomy is a comprehensive tool for systematically categorizing and analyzing evolution.

# **1. DEMOCRACY IN AN AUTOCRATIC STATE**

Definition:

An overarching concept describing how “democracy” is defined, practiced, contested, or suppressed under an authoritarian regime. This class serves as the root for all subordinate categories.

## **1.1 OFFICIALLY SANCTIONED DEMOCRACY**

Definition:

The version of democracy formally endorsed by the ruling government, emphasizing controlled participation, top-down authority, and rhetorical alignment with regime interests.

### **1.1.1 STATE-DEFINED PRINCIPLES**

Examples: “Guided Democracy,” “National Harmony,” “Cultural Suitability”

Description: Authorities use core ideological pillars or slogans to legitimize and define their brand of democracy.

### **1.1.2 STATE INSTITUTIONS**

Examples: Advisory Parliaments, Ministries Overseeing “Democratic” Processes, Councils for National Unity

Description: Bodies that project an image of citizen representation but often lack absolute autonomy or checks on executive power.

### **1.1.3 PERMITTED CIVIL PARTICIPATION**

Examples: Heavily Supervised Local Elections, Controlled Public Forums, Approved Civil Groups

Description: Limited forms of citizen engagement sanctioned by the state to present an appearance of popular involvement while maintaining autocratic control.

## **1.2 RESTRICTED OR CRIMINALIZED DISCOURSES**

Definition:

Alternative or oppositional understandings of democracy that conflict with the official narrative and are suppressed, censored, or delegitimized by the autocratic regime.

### **1.2.1 OPPOSITION VIEWS**

Examples: Political parties advocating competitive multiparty systems, critics demanding transparency, advocates for free press

Description: Ideological stances that challenge regime orthodoxy, typically labeled “subversive” or “destabilizing.”

### **1.2.2 UNDERGROUND MOBILIZATIONS**

Examples: Clandestine activist networks, encrypted social-media groups, secret pamphleteering

Description: Covert efforts to promote democratic ideals or protest government control, operating below the regime’s radar.

### **1.2.3 CRITICAL MEDIA**

Examples: Independent journalists, citizen reporters, dissident bloggers

Description: Outlets providing counter-narratives to state propaganda; often face censorship, harassment, or exile.



## **1.3 EXTERNAL OR GLOBAL CONCEPTIONS**

Definition:

Perspectives on democracy that originate outside or beyond the regime's control, posing potential challenges to the official narrative.

### **1.3.1 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Examples: United Nations agencies, regional human-rights bodies, international NGOs

Description: Publish standards (e.g., free elections, civil liberties) contrasting with the autocratic state's claims, thus threatening its legitimacy.

### **1.3.2 FOREIGN DEMOCRATIC MODELS**

Examples: Neighboring countries or global powers with recognized democratic practices

Description: Serve as real-life or theoretical examples that inform domestic reformers or, conversely, become targets of regime propaganda.

### **1.3.3 EXILE-BASED NARRATIVES**

Examples: Dissident communities abroad, digital platforms managed by political refugees

Description: Maintain alternative conceptions of democracy, share suppressed information, and galvanize international support against the regime.

## **1.4 MECHANISMS OF CONTROL & ADAPTATION**

### **Definition:**

The regime uses structures, processes, and strategies to control, shape, or neutralize any discourse on democracy that deviates from the official line.

### **1.4.1 PROPAGANDA APPARATUS**

Examples: Ministries of Information, State Media Conglomerates, National Education Syllabi

Description: Channels through which the regime disseminates and normalizes its vision of democracy, often presenting itself as the sole guarantor of stability.

### **1.4.2 CENSORSHIP & SURVEILLANCE**

Examples: Internet firewalls, media blackouts, intelligence agencies

Description: Suppresses and monitors speech or publication that contradicts official ideology; fosters self-censorship via fear of repercussions.

### **1.4.3 LEGAL-INSTITUTIONAL ENFORCEMENT**

Examples: Anti-Subversion Laws, Security Courts, Mandatory Political Loyalty Oaths

Description: Formal codes and judicial mechanisms criminalizing “subversive” acts or rhetoric, ensuring that alternative discourses remain marginalized.

## CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

### 1. Democracy in an Autocratic State

#### 1.1 Officially Sanctioned Democracy

##### 1.1.1 State-Defined Principles

##### 1.1.2 State Institutions

##### 1.1.3 Permitted Civil Participation

#### 1.2 Restricted or Criminalized Discourses

##### 1.2.1 Opposition Views

##### 1.2.2 Underground Mobilizations

##### 1.2.3 Critical Media

#### 1.3 External or Global Conceptions

##### 1.3.1 International Organizations

##### 1.3.2 Foreign Democratic Models

##### 1.3.3 Exile-Based Narratives

#### 1.4 Mechanisms of Control & Adaptation

##### 1.4.1 Propaganda Apparatus

##### 1.4.2 Censorship & Surveillance

##### 1.4.3 Legal-Institutional Enforcement

## Final Remarks

Reflecting on the preceding discussion about democracy in an autocratic context—from the initial theoretical groundwork in discourse analysis and knowledge organization, to the construction of a taxonomy—it becomes clear that knowledge organization (KO) must confront ideology, power relations, and historical context in a much more direct manner than is often assumed. We began by noting how democracy, seemingly a universal concept, takes on multiple, frequently contradictory meanings when viewed through authoritarian

governance. Rather than seeing democracy as a stable, universally accepted notion, we observed that regimes strategically appropriate democratic language—using terms like “participation” or “national unity”—to enhance their legitimacy, while simultaneously branding alternative or critical interpretations as subversive or criminal.

From a knowledge organization perspective, this highlights Michel Pêcheux’s premise that language is not a neutral carrier of facts but a material space where ideology is enacted and contested. Even seemingly technical processes, such as defining domain boundaries or indexing documents, are influenced by the discursive formations under which these documents are produced and interpreted. For example, an autocratic government might establish official classification systems or propaganda-based ontologies to present its vision of “guided democracy” as the only logical path, portraying all other perspectives as deviant. However, simultaneously, various restricted or underground discourses—advocated by activists, journalists, and external observers—continue to exist, even though they are often forced underground, censored, or closely monitored.

In constructing a taxonomy for “Democracy in an Autocratic State,” we aimed to reflect these tensions in a structured manner. The taxonomy offers an enumerative classification scheme that systematically outlines how the regime manages democratic rhetoric, how critical voices respond or resist, and how international or exile-based perspectives challenge the official narrative. By highlighting these dual structures, we capture the discrete relationships and the broader hierarchical categories that shape the contested landscape of democracy under authoritarian rule.

This process draws attention to the inherent politicization of any attempt to organize knowledge within such a fraught environment. Suppose libraries, researchers, or human rights organizations adopt these schemas. In that case, they must be keenly aware that naming “Opposition Views,” “Critical Media,” or “Exile-Based Narratives” is not merely descriptive but can be interpreted as taking a stance. In autocratic settings, classification can become an act of dissent, rendering visible discourses that the state aims to suppress or deny. Consequently, safeguarding contributors’ anonymity and ensuring secure, ethical data storage and dissemination methods become paramount concerns. Knowledge organization

professionals, therefore, occupy a precarious space between documenting objective realities and acknowledging that their systems—ontologies, taxonomies, catalogs—actively shape the discourse of what is deemed legitimate knowledge.

Furthermore, our domain and discourse analysis exploration has shown how focusing on discursive formations unlocks deeper insights into how sociopolitical power structures shape classification at every step. Hjørland’s domain analysis, for instance, traditionally directs us to investigate how a field conceptualizes and prioritizes its knowledge. Combined with Pêcheux’s insistence on the ideological nature of language, it reveals a more complex terrain: official documents, historical records, or digital archives do not simply “reflect” reality but enact a form of rhetorical power. This synergy illuminates how classification schemas—like our proposed—require constant revision and reflexivity, significantly as regimes may alter or refine their strategies for controlling public discourse.

Finally, the entire effort underscores a fundamental lesson for information science more broadly: that neutrality in representation is rarely attainable when the subject matter is deeply politicized. The case of democracy in an autocratic setting crystallizes how strategies of classification or indexing can reinforce hegemonic structures or, conversely, empower marginalized voices. Scholars, librarians, archivists, and policy makers must recognize that knowledge organization is never merely technical or managerial; it is a cultural, moral, and often political endeavor. By incorporating discourse-analytic insights into classification design, practitioners can strive toward greater transparency about the ideological stakes at hand, balancing the need for consistency in retrieval with the moral imperative of acknowledging suppressed or at-risk perspectives.

In conclusion, the taxonomy and ontology we constructed illustrate a practical application of discourse analysis in knowledge organization—demonstrating how conceptual frameworks, index terms, and hierarchical structures can capture the fluid, contested nature of democracy under autocratic rule. More broadly, these final reflections remind us that the act of organizing knowledge itself is socially and historically situated, always raising questions about inclusion, exclusion, and power. Thus, whether in an autocratic context or elsewhere, KO professionals must adopt a reflexive stance, continually probing how their representational choices align with or challenge the interests of those in power. By doing so, they

can help safeguard critical voices, preserve historical truths, and contribute to a more nuanced, equitable understanding of political realities—fulfilling the deeper promise of knowledge organization as a transformative and ethically conscious field.

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## Notes

The entire work (100%) oversaw Thiago Henrique Bragato Barros

This work as funded by Cnpq its Productivity Grant and Universal 2021

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## Notes

[1] Barros, T. H. B. (2023). Michel Pêcheux's discourse analysis: An approach to domain analyses. *Knowledge Organization*, 50(1), 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2023-1-3>

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## Editor's note

The editor responsible for the publication of this work is José Augusto Chaves Guimarães

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## Author's contribution note

The author is 100% responsible for Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision.

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## Data availability note

This study is theoretical-methodological in nature and does not involve or generate empirical data. Therefore, no datasets were produced or analyzed.