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**Language, Discursive Self-Construction and Mobility: Identity Transformation Analysis Through Fairclough's 3D Model and Sociolinguistics Theories of Narrative Identity and Mobility in Coelho's *The Alchemist and Eleven Minutes***



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**Abstract**

This research examines how identity is discursively constructed in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and *Eleven Minutes* using an interdisciplinary approach that combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with sociolinguistic theory. The study engages with more than simplistic thematic interpretations of "journey" and "self-discovery" by emphasizing the constitutive power of language in the construction of identity in mobility. The study employs Fairclough's three-dimensional approach to discourse, as well as current sociolinguistic views on mobility, narrative and linguistic capital, to examine and analyze selected textual passages from each novel. It proposes that identity transformation is not an internal, pre-discursive transformation, but a shifting interaction between discourse, society and changing cultural contexts. Santiago and Maria, the main characters of the novels, are demonstrated to build their identities through different, yet interconnected, discursive regimes: spiritual, economic and embodied, all constrained by transnational circulation and ideological restrictions. This research confirms that Coelho's texts reproduce and reinforce larger sociolinguistic paradigms of individual agency and achievement within a neoliberal framework, but also highlight the inequalities of agency along gendered and socioeconomic lines. This research adds to the burgeoning field of interdisciplinary enquiry by showing that literary texts are sites of sociolinguistic encounter and ideological reproduction.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), discursive, mobility, sociolinguistics.

### **1. Introduction**

Over the past few decades, the field of identity studies has witnessed a paradigm shift from essentialist to relational, fluid and discursively constituted approaches. In this context, language is no longer seen as just a means of communicating pre-existing identities but as a key component of identity construction, negotiation and change (De Fina, 2021). This has provided a fertile ground for interdisciplinary research, especially from the perspectives of literary studies, sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis.

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Both the novels are by the same author – Paulo Coelho, which present a result-oriented research material for this study. Each novel features characters who undertake transformative journeys that include geographical, social and existential changes. The shepherd boy Santiago in *The Alchemist* crosses Spain to North Africa in a quest for his “Personal Legend” and Maria, the protagonist of *Eleven Minutes*, relocates from Brazil to Switzerland, where her experiences as a prostitute prompt a multifarious reflection on love, identity and autonomy. While the characters’ narrative journeys differ, they both undergo journeys of self-reinvention that are invariably enmeshed in discursive practices.

Much of the existing work on Coelho has tended to rely on philosophical, spiritual or psychological readings of these journeys, which often understand identity as an essence to be discovered. Yet, these kinds of interpretations often neglect the role of language in these processes. This research aims to redress this oversight by considering the discursive construction of identity in the context of mobility. Mobility just not refers to a physical dislocation but an ideological and sociolinguistic act which shows the positioning of oneself with others’ positioning (Blommaert, 2018).

This study seeks to accomplish this by bringing together Critical Discourse Analysis and sociolinguistic theory to offer a complex view of how identity is constructed at the intersection of language, power and context. It also reflects that there are ways in which literature not only mirrors the world to us but also provides us with a site where social change happens.

## **2. Scope**

The current research is limited to a qualitative discourse analysis of parts of *The Alchemist* and *Eleven Minutes* – by the same author, Paulo Coelho. Its main concern is with the construction of identity through language in relation to mobility, social positioning and ideology. The study does not aspire to provide a holistic analysis of the texts, opting instead for a purposive sampling approach in which pivotal passages in the narratives that explicitly address identity transformation are analyzed.

The scope of the analysis includes both macro and micro aspects. At the macro level, it draws upon CDA to examine how wider ideological domains - such as neoliberal individualism, spirituality and capitalism - are discursively represented. Sociolinguistic methods are at work in micro levels which explores identifiers such as

interactional positioning, narrative voice and language variation.

### **3. Literature Review**

The idea of identity as a discursive phenomenon has become prominent in recent sociolinguistic studies. De Fina (2021) suggests that identity is constantly in process in narrative practices, in which people negotiate their relationships with others and with society. Bucholtz and Hall (2016) put emphasis on the performative and relational quality of the identity.

One of the key focuses of sociolinguistics is the onset of mobility. Blommaert (2018) views mobility as a dynamic process that impacts on and transforms social meanings and linguistic repertoires, resulting in "polycentric" identities. In transnational spaces, people have to navigate competing norms and expectations, leading to hybrid discourses (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has offered a different and alternative perspective for the intersection of processes such as power and ideology. Fairclough (2015) views discourse as a multidimensional process of text, discursive practice and social practice. This approach allows for the connection of micro and macro levels of discourse analysis.

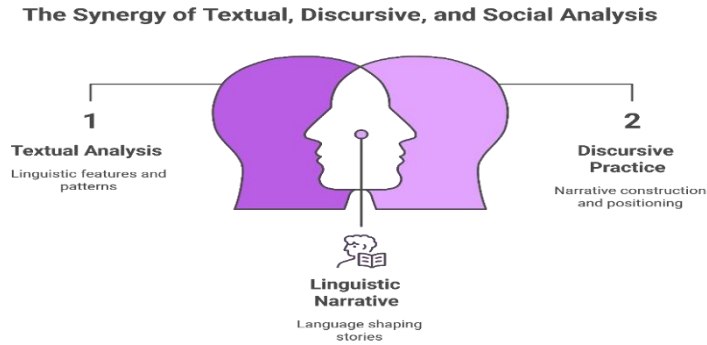
Recent CDA scholarship has focused on the need for cognitive and sociolinguistic analyses. Van Dijk (2018) emphasizes the role of discourse in forming mental models of identity and society, whereas Wodak and Meyer (2016) emphasize the importance of historical/social analyses.

However, there is still a lack of studies that apply these approaches to literature, especially popular fiction. This research aims to address this gap by showing how Coelho's novels can be understood as discursive spaces of identity, mobility and ideology.

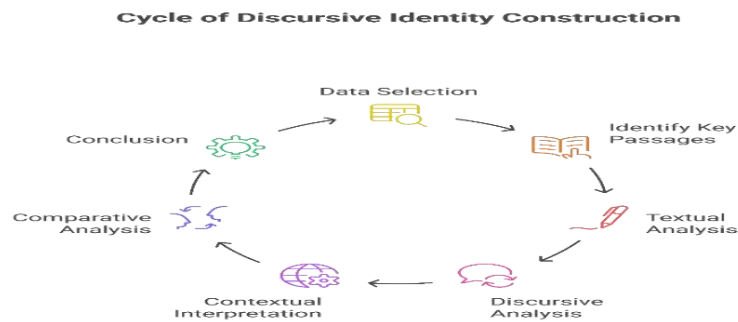
### **4. Methodology**

This study follows a qualitative interpretive approach with a focus on Critical Discourse Analysis and sociolinguistics. The analytical framework is an amalgamation of CDA and Sociolinguistic theories. For CDA, Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional model enables textual features analysis, social practices and discursive practices. Sociolinguistic theories complement Fairclough's three-dimensional model for the exploration of mobility and narrative identity as proposed

by De Fina (2021) and Blommaert (2018).

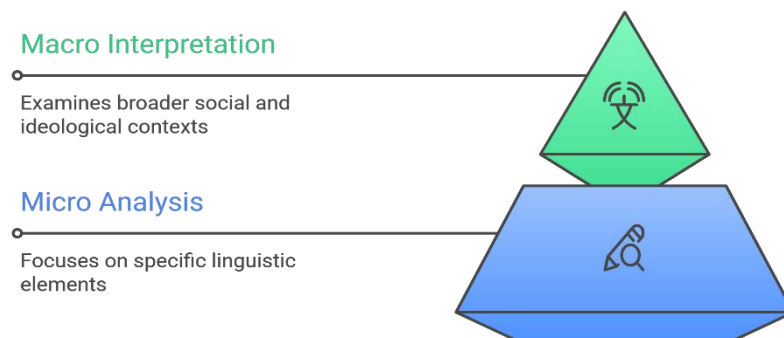


The data is selected using purposive sampling, and is limited to those passages that explicitly reference mobility, transitions and reflection. These include Santiago's encounters with significant metaphors including omens and the desert, Maria's diary entries and social interactions.



The analysis takes place in two stages. First, a textual analysis of key linguistic features such as modality, metaphor and evaluative language. Second, these are then examined within larger discursive and sociocultural contexts, connecting them to questions of power, ideology and identity.

### **Textual Analysis Hierarchy**



## **5. Discussion and Analysis**

This analysis shows that identity transformation in both novels is intricately linked to mobility, which serves not only as a means of physical relocation, but also as a resignification of discursive and social positioning. Santiago's desert journey is situated within a discourse of spirituality that evokes notions of fate, inner knowing, and unity. The descriptions of his journey are highly modeled and metaphorical, which works to naturalize the notion of a "Personal Legend". This discourse casts Santiago as an empowered and chosen subject, thereby promoting an ideology of spiritual individualism.

By contrast, Maria's narrative takes place in a different discursive context that is defined by economic and social marginalization. The capitalist economy is exposed when she travels to Switzerland with the objectification of her body. Her diary entries display a greater degree of reflexivity, as she negotiates her identity vis-à-vis social norms and her own wishes. Symbolic accreditations confirm Santiago's identity. The construction and justification of Maria's identity is deeply vested in marginalized social environment.

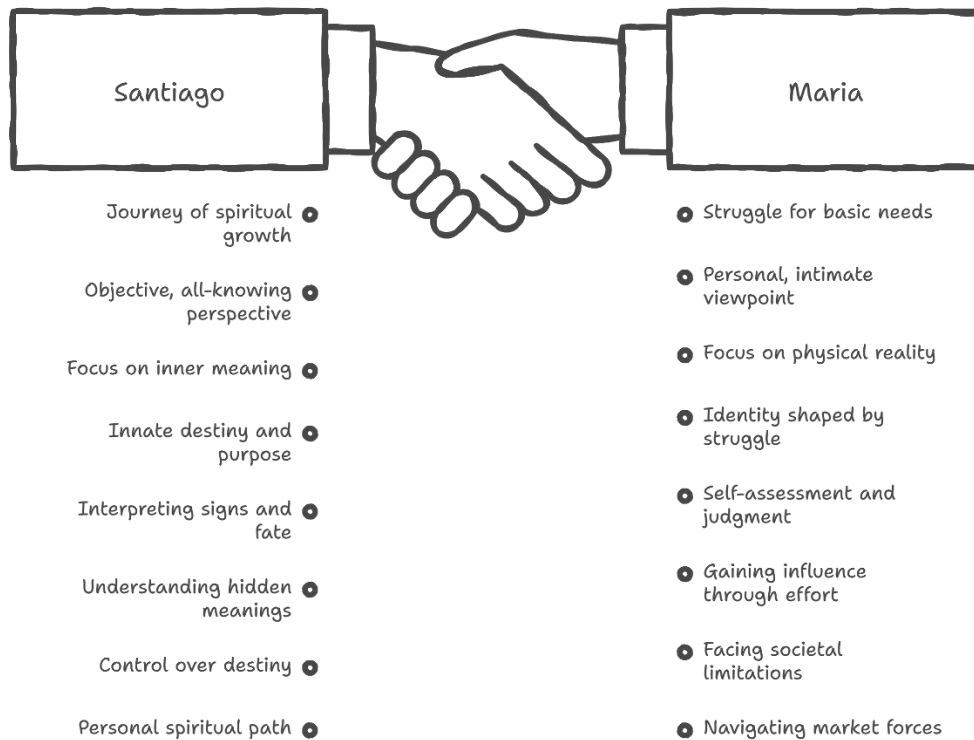
These nuances in sociolinguistic terms are visible in the interplay between narrative voice and positioning. Santiago's third-person narration invites readers to see his story as a universal one, elevating his experiences to a symbol of the human condition. In contrast, Maria's first-person narration emphasizes her positionality, and the limitations and contradictions associated with it.

The significance of linguistic capital cannot be overlooked in identity-making as reflected in the analysis. Santiago's proficiency in interpreting signs and tapping into symbolic language gives him a form of spiritual power, validating his quest. Maria moves across a discourse that at times undermines her and needs to find other forms of linguistic authority.

Both the narratives are a part of neoliberal course at an ideological level which prioritizes an individual's self-actualization and responsibility. There is a downplay in the structural obstacles, determination and individual effort which help in the achievement of the individual's positioning in the narrative. The use of modal verbs

and evaluative language manifest this ideology which takes self-discovery as an obligation – one’s duty.

### **Contrasting Journeys of Self-Discovery**



### **6. Findings**

Identity is not an essence but is discursively produced, as the analysis of *The Alchemist* and *Eleven Minutes* demonstrates. Different social and linguistic environments are exposed through mobility for both the leading characters – Santiago and Maria.

- Travel is a catalyst for change, but in different ways for Santiago and Maria: it affords Santiago power through spiritual discourse, while it limits Maria through economic and gendered discourses.
- Voice shapes identity, as Santiago’s narration is universal, while Maria’s is subjective.
- Language capital influences agency where Maria has to face painful discourse and Santiago acquires authority as a result of symbolic discourse.
- Finally, both narratives embody a neoliberal discourse of self-sufficiency, albeit unequally, showing social and gender power struggles.

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In conclusion, identity is an ever-changing, discursively constructed process that is affected by mobility, power, and differential access to language.

## **7. Conclusion**

It has been shown in *The Alchemist* and *Eleven Minutes* that identities are not static or inherent but are constructed through discourse, movement and social factors. The combination of CDA and sociolinguistic analysis offers insights into the role of language in facilitating processes of identity construction and change.

The study points to the need to consider literary works as a site of discourse and ideology production, where identities are constructed and produced. They have also highlighted the conduct of interdisciplinary studies and consider it important to intersect and bring together literary analysis and linguistic theory.

## **8. Future Research Recommendations**

This study could be built upon by using corpus-based approaches to include larger sets of data and strengthen the analysis. Further research could compare other authors or genres, offering insights into the transferability of the theoretical framework. Moreover, the impact of translation on discourse would provide insights into the globalization of literary works.

## **9. Delimitations**

This study seeks to offer a holistic analysis, but there are limitations. First, the study uses the English-translated versions of the novels, which might not entirely reflect the original Portuguese language. Translation is a process of homogenization and interpretation that can affect the discursive aspects being analyzed.

Second, this is a qualitative analysis, which while providing deep interpretation may be less applicable across a broader scope. Third, the choice of text fragments, while justified, is selective and might not capture all aspects of identity construction evident in the novels.

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