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# Discourse Analysis and International Relations: The Role of Critical Thinking in the Europe-Latin America Relationship in Times of Global Polarization

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# Discourse Analysis and International Relations: The Role of Critical Thinking in the Europe-Latin America Relationship in Times of Global Polarization

Análise do discurso e relações internacionais: o papel do pensamento crítico na relação Europa-América Latina em tempos de polarização global

Análisis del discurso y relaciones internacionales: el papel del pensamiento crítico en la relación Europa-América Latina en tiempos de polarización global

Natali Lourenço Nascimento<sup>1</sup>

**Resumo:** O objetivo do artigo é analisar criticamente os desafios e perspectivas da cooperação bi-regional entre a Europa e a América Latina, por meio da análise de discurso e do uso de competências do pensamento crítico. As ideias mais importantes para compreender a linha de raciocínio incluem a importância da diversificação da cooperação para além do comércio de commodities, os benefícios potenciais da colaboração em alta tecnologia e na proteção ambiental. Além disso, é imperativo considerar as dinâmicas de poder e os contextos históricos durante as negociações. Através desse contexto, é possível realizar a análise do discurso europeu sobre a credibilidade das fontes de informação sobre os acordos econômicos e não-econômicos, a relevância cultural, a identificação da audiência, o estilo persuasivo, a consistência interna e a coerência, a posição institucional, a plataforma de comunicação e, por fim, o "timing" e a relevância na atualidade para o desenvolvimento das nações. Conclui-se que é necessária uma visão holística para levar a uma compreensão mais completa das dinâmicas geopolíticas, fornecendo suporte para a visibilidade e criação de acordos mais eficazes para o desenvolvimento e a cooperação internacional.

**Palavras-chaves:** Cooperação bi-regional; Pensamento crítico; Análise de discurso; América Latina; Polarização Global.

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to critically analyze the challenges and prospects of bi-regional cooperation between Europe and Latin America through discourse analysis and the application of critical thinking skills. Key concepts to grasp the argumentation include the significance of diversifying cooperation beyond commodity trade, the potential benefits of collaboration in high technology and environmental protection. Furthermore, it is imperative to consider power dynamics and historical contexts during negotiations. Within this framework, it becomes feasible to conduct discourse analysis of European perspectives regarding the credibility of information sources on economic and non-economic agreements, cultural relevance, audience identification, persuasive style, internal consistency and coherence, institutional position, communication platform, and ultimately, timing and relevance in contemporary contexts for nation development. It is concluded that a holistic view is necessary to achieve a comprehensive understanding of geopolitical dynamics, providing support for the visibility and establishment of more effective agreements for international development and cooperation.

**Keywords:** Bi-regional cooperation; Critical thinking; Discourse analysis; Latin America; Global polarization.

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**Resumen:** El objetivo de este artículo es analizar críticamente los desafíos y perspectivas de la cooperación bi-regional entre Europa y América Latina a través del análisis del discurso y la aplicación de habilidades de pensamiento crítico. Conceptos clave para entender la argumentación incluyen la importancia de diversificar la cooperación más allá del comercio de materias primas, los beneficios potenciales de la colaboración en alta tecnología y la protección ambiental. Además, es imperativo considerar las dinámicas de poder y los contextos históricos durante las negociaciones. Dentro de este marco, se vuelve factible llevar a cabo un análisis del discurso sobre las perspectivas europeas respecto a la credibilidad de las fuentes de información sobre acuerdos económicos y no económicos, la relevancia cultural, la identificación de la audiencia, el estilo persuasivo, la consistencia interna y coherencia, la posición institucional, la plataforma de comunicación y, en última instancia, el momento y la relevancia en los contextos contemporáneos para el desarrollo de las naciones. Se concluye que es necesario tener una visión holística para lograr una comprensión completa de las dinámicas geopolíticas, proporcionando apoyo para la visibilidad y establecimiento de acuerdos más efectivos para el desarrollo y la cooperación internacional.

**Palabras clave:** Cooperación bi-regional; Pensamiento crítico; Análisis del discurso; América Latina; Polarización global.

## Introduction

In recent years, cooperation between Europe and Latin America has been influenced by global events such as the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis in Venezuela, international fluctuations in commodity prices, and significant events like the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union (Brexit), among other cases (Nolte, 2023; Telò, 2020). Although Europe has lost some of its dominance as a trade partner to Latin America, recently supplanted by China, it still supports a significant presence in the region through investments by European companies (Silva & Ilikova, 2022). Additionally, Europe continues to exert considerable influence through "soft power," which refers to the ability to shape Latin America via non-coercive means such as culture, values, and political institutions (Nolte, 2023). Therefore, despite changes in trade dynamics, Europe stays an important player on the Latin American continent (Dávila et al., 2014, pp. 63-69).

The influence and impact of European discourse on commercial perception can vary and are mediated by several factors, such as source credibility, cultural relevance, audience identification, persuasive style, internal consistency and coherence, institutional position, communication platform, and, lastly, timing and current relevance (Leavy, 2014). In light of this, the European Union's efforts to maintain its relevance in Latin America are evident through trade agreements, diplomatic summits, and cultural exchanges, adapting to changes in global and regional circumstances (Nolte, 2023; Dávila et al., 2014, pp. 63-64; Telò, 2020).

Thus, through discourse analysis and critical thinking, we can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying ideology represented by European commercial discourse and its impact on investments and economic agreements in Latin America during times of global polarization, characterized by disputes between the global hegemony of the United States and the increasing commercial ties with China. In 2022, with the presidential victory of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, new possibilities for cooperation between Brazil and the European Union (EU) emerged, driven by a shared interest in addressing the climate crisis and protecting the environment, particularly focusing on the preservation of the Amazônia rainforest (Nolte, 2023).

Another avenue of cooperation, which remains a "perpetual engagement," is the Mercosul agreement, involving the economic bloc composed of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. This agreement emerges as a potential strategic maneuver for closer ties with the EU. However, a critical analysis of the possible implications for South Americans is necessary to ensure mutual benefits (Batista, 2023; Nolte, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to conduct a thorough examination of the issues addressed in the agreement, such as: How does the reduction of import/export tariffs influence the markets of South American countries? Is this reduction, even if proportional, fair in terms of fiscal impact for the governments of the involved regions? Are there any conflicts of interest within this proposal?

The structural position of a country, including its strong and weak ties, within the so-called "World-System" (a theoretical approach developed by Immanuel Wallerstein that analyzes the global economy as an interconnected system), significantly influences its economic and social trajectories (Arrighi, 1998; Kick & Davis, 2001). Therefore, it is imperative to adopt a holistic view of the non-economic connections between the EU and Mercosul to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of geopolitical dynamics. This approach supports the visibility and creation of more effective agreements for development and international cooperation (Kick & Davis, 2001).

### **Discourse Analysis: Concepts and Applications**

Through the lens of critical thinking, it becomes imperative to consider discursive semiotics. By examining the perspective a discourse adopts, identifying its actors, and analyzing the profiling of events used, we can assess power dynamics and potential

conflicts of interest (Leavy, 2014). Profiling is sensitive to context and communicative intent, with the choice to highlight certain events or actors varying based on the genre of discourse, the target audience, and the communicator's aims (Leavy, 2014). Understanding the context is essential for accurately interpreting the profiling, as a critical analysis of the profiling of events and actors questions the choices made in the discourse and seeks to understand how these choices reflect and reinforce social structures, ideologies, and power relations. This allows for a deeper interpretation of the underlying messages in the discourse (Leavy, 2014).

Here, we can illustrate an example of analysis. In the case of the Mercosul-EU agreement, it appears that the agreement may not be fair for the agribusiness sectors of South American regions, as the text includes provisions for the continued administration by quotas (Batista, 2023; Silva & Ilikova, 2022). The main question to identify would be: What is the impact of the agreement between Mercosul and the European Union on agribusiness? It is fundamental to identify the criteria for evaluating potential answers and to keep the question and context in mind when analyzing the agreement (Ennis, 1991).

The claim that agribusiness does not significantly benefit from the agreement due to the administration of quotas in the agricultural sector raises questions about whether the reasons or premises are insufficient, fictitious, or harmless. This question is important because it helps evaluate the irrelevance of certain information to the main issue under analysis (Ennis, 1991). What data and sources are being provided to demonstrate the positive and negative impacts of the agreement between Mercosul and the European Union on agribusiness?

With the use of logic, deductions drawn from arguments and provided data can offer argumentative support for a more suitable negotiation of the terms of the agreement (Ennis, 1991). This contributes to a clear explanation of the position of South American countries regarding European interests, aiding the EU in understanding the reasons for the South American countries' retreat in negotiations, assessing their plausibility based on specific criteria of analysis, considering relevant facts, the consequences of decisions, and the ethical principles at stake.

Ethics, in this case, collide with the neoliberal ideologies underlying some European discourses that appear to contradict development policies in Latin America,

even for government leaders with liberal inclinations (Batista, 2023; Silva, 2015). This is evidenced by the non-conclusion of the agreement, which has been under negotiation for over 20 years. In addition to ideology, which may reveal a conflict of interests, European communication and persuasion strategies must be evaluated. These strategies emphasize how the agreement can drive economic growth through other partnerships, creating jobs and increasing market access for producers and consumers in both regions (Nolte, 2023).

However, what evidence is presented to support the assertion that the agreement will drive economic growth through other partnerships, create jobs, and increase market access? The conclusion drawn is that the formulated agreement, thus far, will bring positive impacts to both regions (Nolte, 2023). The reasons for accepting this include the premise that trade agreements tend to increase trade, which, in turn, can drive economic growth and create jobs. In this case, besides identifying the discourse of the main issue and the reasons on which the premises stand, it becomes necessary to evaluate the relevance of the information justifying the positive impact for South American countries, examining whether the provided information is directly related to the economic impacts of the agreement.

How will economic growth be achieved? In negotiations, it's essential to detail these issues, along with assessing the credibility of the source and the plausibility of the evidence. What are the potential side effects of decisions or non-compliance with the rules of the agreement for both parties? Are the demands equitable? Is the source of economic data for growth forecasts impartial? Thus, it is necessary to evaluate whether the potential economic benefits of the agreement justify any commitments or concessions that may be made during negotiations, as what would be the interest of European companies in establishing themselves in South American countries if their products already reach these markets via importation?

Through discursive semiotics, we understand that the dynamics of the multilateral system, a global governance system where multiple countries cooperate to make decisions, directly affects emerging powers, as they utilize multilateralism, allowing smaller countries to have a voice in global decisions (Silva, 2015). Here, we must note that smaller powers within this system are often influenced by larger powers. Therefore, there is consideration of how different political actors perceive and use multilateralism to serve their interests, thus affecting negotiations and terms of cooperation (Silva, 2015).

## **Bi-regional Cooperation: Challenges and Perspectives**

The assessment of obstacles to cooperation between Europe and Latin America, through discourse analysis and the exercise of critical thinking, encounters limitations imposed during trade negotiations. These limitations threaten economic development and the protection of South American strategic interests, which is primarily viewed as disadvantageous for the Brazilian scenario (Nolte, 2023). The skepticism of some Brazilian economists is justified by the claim that many of Brazil's main exports, such as coffee, soybeans, and oil, already face no barriers in the European Union (Batista, 2023; Nolte, 2023). Additionally, the quotas offered for other competitive agricultural products, such as beef, sugar, and rice, are considered meager, as they are inferior or similar to current exports. Furthermore, the view is emphasized that European competitiveness would hardly allow room for Brazilian industry production in other products (Batista, 2023).

In light of the above, exploring possible cooperation strategies may involve mutual interest not only in environmental protection but also in the import and export of critical minerals for the development of more advanced technologies (Dávila et al., 2014, pp. 65-67). Additionally, intellectual collaboration with South American universities to seek technological solutions for climate crises and other issues, such as the development of industry in both regions, could be considered (Dávila et al., 2014, pp. 63-69). In this regard, it is equally important to identify and analyze the underlying assumptions of the proposed agreement, especially those that are not explicitly stated, to ensure they are plausible and align with the available information for the maintenance and monitoring of what has been negotiated (Ennis, 1991).

The challenges regarding commodities must be critically analyzed, and the criteria assessed by comparing short-term and long-term advantages and disadvantages, taking into consideration European power dynamics and the sanctions established in the cooperation agreement (Batista, 2023). However, solely focusing on this issue will not provide concrete reasons for potential bi-regional cooperation that will likely be procrastinated for another two decades (Nolte, 2023). Thus, one avenue to consider would be to highlight issues involving the Amazônia through Association Agreements (AAs), evaluating the contribution of the bi-regional partnership to advancing science and clean

entrepreneurship in the region, as well as promoting investments for intellectual development in the production of high-tech products (Feldmann et al., 2019). Concerning agribusiness, an alliance would be to find points of intersection between the regions so that similarities in commercial interests are maximized.

It is essential to consider the Amazônia from various perspectives, avoiding limiting its importance to just one viewpoint. The most commonly associated boundaries of the region include: the hydrographic (related to the Amazônia basin), the ecological (referring to the extent covered by the tropical forest), and the political-administrative (as defined by law) (Amorim et al., 2021, p. 267). Emphasizing the importance of establishing priorities in the agreement, as when everything is a priority, nothing is truly prioritized, also underscores Brazilian leadership in agreements between Europe and Latin America, particularly characterized by its "diplomatic activism" during the Lula government's tenure (Silva, 2015). This is evidenced by the increase in diplomatic trips, the establishment of new embassies, and a stronger presence in global forums. These actions have resulted in strengthening Brazil's multilateral relations (with various nations) and regional relations (with nearby countries). Furthermore, bilateral relations (between two nations) have also been intensified, with many of them achieving the status of a "strategic partnership" with Brazil (Silva, 2015).

In such cases, critical thinking becomes an ally by generating questions about the causal inference of a phenomenon, aiding in finding the obstacles preventing the adherence of some Latin American countries to commercial association with European countries, influencing judgment, decisions, and choices in such agreements (Dewey, 1910). According to John Stuart Mill, there are four effective approaches to scientific research for determining the causes of observed phenomena: the Method of Agreement (which examines multiple cases where a specific effect occurs and seeks to identify if there is a single cause present in all cases where the effect is observed), the Method of Difference (which seeks to determine causes and effects by comparing situations where a phenomenon occurs with situations where it does not), the Method of Residues (involving the subtraction of a known part of a phenomenon that is the effect of some previous causes), and the Method of Concomitant Variations (where one phenomenon varies in a specific way, another phenomenon varies in a corresponding manner, indicating a correlation between them) (Macleod, 2020).

Thus, these methods, applied to economic development through commercial cooperation between Latin America and Europe, can serve as a basis for future agreement negotiations. Taking into account the investigation of successful cases in past agreements, a common cause is observed in most cases (Method of Agreement). Causes and effects are identified by comparing situations where a commercial partnership was successful with those where it was not. However, we must avoid reductionist explanations, as negotiations, despite their differences, share certain common structures. This can help understand which factors contribute to the success or failure of such partnerships (Method of Difference). Regarding error estimates or implications of decisions, the impact of specific trade policies or economic factors can be isolated by subtracting their known effects from an economic phenomenon concerning a predicted event (Method of Residues). Finally, to understand how different economic and commercial variables interact with each other, for example, if the exchange rate varies in a particular way, exports and imports may vary in a specific corresponding manner, indicating a correlation relationship between them (Method of Concomitant Variations) (Feldmann et al., 2019).

According to Silva (2015), during the Lula government (2003-2010), Brazil achieved vertical articulation (a bargaining position, negotiating with other nations in terms of trade, diplomatic agreements, etc.) and horizontal articulation (forming alliances with nations that share similar interests or common objectives). This strategy was linked to the transition from a unipolar system to a multipolar system. In other words, global power was shifting away from being dominated by a single superpower (the United States) to being shared among various emerging and developed powers. Therefore, the focus of potential cooperation between Europe and Latin America should take into account the agenda of South American countries with other nations and recognize the importance of South American countries as partners that can bring potential benefits in the economic, strategic, and political spheres (Silva, 2015).

The mainstay of Latin America lies in the commodities market, and although it holds significant commercial value, it limits countries when it comes to economic contracts with other European nations regarding other products (Batista, 2023). Thus, with the advancement of global technology and the focus on clean entrepreneurship, a potential analysis of cooperation between Europe and South American countries would involve negotiating investment guarantees in technical capacity for the development of intellectual capital in these Latin American countries in high-tech production. This aims

to equalize bargaining power in agreements, enabling flexibility in free trade agreements. If countries do not stand on equal footing with European nations, there is no logical advantage to such a partnership, as it would not be strategically beneficial, further fueling the ongoing and current increase in deindustrialization of South American countries (Silva, 2015; Amorim et al., 2021, p. 267; Dávila et al., 2014, pp. 65-67).

Considering past agreements, in relation to Brazil in 2008, the Russian company Rosatom offered high technology for uranium exploration and production for new nuclear plants and for superconductors in energy transmission, along with discussions on cooperation in nanotechnology (Silva & Ilikova, 2022). In commercial terms, we can take such agreements as an example to illustrate the potential of South American countries in producing modern technology and list more issues for critical analysis of cooperative pathways with Europe, through the previously mentioned method called the "method of agreement."

Silicon and germanium, used in semiconductor production, are primarily produced in larger quantities in European Union countries and overwhelmingly in China (Rocio et al., 2012). A semiconductor is a device used to amplify or smooth the intensity of electric current in electronic circuits (Rocio et al., 2012). An approach of interest to countries that are major producers of high technology would be cooperation in research on resources used for the development of the aerospace industry, semiconductor technology, biotechnology (medical, agricultural, and environmental), renewable technology, and medical technology, while adhering to environmental conservation guidelines (SENADO FEDERAL, 2013).

Due to global warming, average temperatures are reaching unprecedented levels, especially in countries in Latin America (Amorim et al., 2021). One strategic solution to harness this trend, which is expected to intensify in the coming years, would be to convert solar energy through photovoltaic panels into electricity for use in facilities that require high energy consumption to power servers, cooling systems, and other equipment, such as Data Centers (Rocio et al., 2012). By utilizing solar energy, these data centers can become more self-sufficient in energy, reducing their dependence on the conventional electrical grid and increasing their resilience in case of power supply interruptions (Rocio et al., 2012).

Antennas, electronics (microprocessors, integrated circuits, transistors, resistors, and capacitors, which are made of semiconductor materials such as silicon, and other conductive materials), and solar panels are some of the components used in satellite productions that require, in addition to engineering technical capability, raw materials (Rocio et al., 2012). Similarly, Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) or graphics processors, responsible for specialized processing of graphic operations such as video rendering, image rendering, execution of 3D games, and other computational tasks dependent on graphic elements processing (SENADO FEDERAL, 2013; Rocio et al., 2012).

According to the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MCTI), France has historically been one of Brazil's main partners in space programs, also being one of the countries "threatened" by Chinese dominance in high technology production, which may be advantageous regarding the negotiation of investment agreements in Latin America involving rare earth elements exploration, due to their high demand as a consequence of the continuous increase in applications in the technology market (SENADO FEDERAL, 2013; Rocio et al., 2012).

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Brazil ranks among the top three iron producers in the world (Rocio et al., 2012; Dávila et al., 2014; München et al., 2016). One of the high technologies produced with iron is the manufacturing of neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB) magnets (München et al., 2016). These magnets are widely used in a variety of applications, including electric vehicle motors, wind turbines, medical equipment, audio devices, computers, and many other electronic and industrial devices (München et al., 2016). Although they have abundant natural resources, South American countries, such as Brazil, face challenges in transforming the exploration and sale of raw materials into sustainable economic growth over time, as well as in maintaining the technological cost of separation, extraction, and production chain management of such ores (Rocio et al., 2012; Amorim et al., 2021).

In 1915, Brazil gained worldwide prominence in the export of monazite. The items derived from this mineral are employed in the manufacturing of catalysts, special-purpose glasses, and distinct metal alloys, such as neodymium crystal that produces the laser used in ocular surgical procedures, as well as the Random laser, which is a laser device utilizing scattering particles to provide optical feedback. This highlights once again the unexplored potential in medical technology development research present in Latin America (Rocio et al., 2012).

Clarifying the strategic points of interest in negotiations becomes imperative because the South American countries are rich in raw materials and technical capacity for the production of such technologies (Rocio et al., 2012). However, there is not enough focus on these issues, putting Latin America in a position of underutilization of its potential resources and dependence on external technologies and investments, creating a scenario of disadvantage at the negotiating table in international agreements (SENADO FEDERAL, 2013). In this context, it would be valid not only to consider the exploitation of rare earths elements in Latin America but also a partnership with European countries on the use of advanced techniques for the recycling of such materials, preventing them from becoming pollutants with the growing production of technology like neodymium magnets, for example, keeping in mind the shared discourse from Europe regarding concerns about climate issues and their pollutants (Dávila et al., 2014). Additionally, it is necessary to emphasize the concern about the surplus of waste already produced by such countries, which have significantly contributed to the increase in global pollution (UNITED NATIONS, 2015).

Thinking critically about this issue takes into consideration that in commercial agreements with Europe and other countries interested in Latin America, there is the idea that it is more worthwhile to import a product than to invest in the local production chain when it comes to South American countries (Dávila et al., 2014; Amorim et al., 2021). This perspective, although it may provide immediate advantages in terms of costs and access to finished products, can result in a lack of sustainable long-term economic development for South American countries, fueling the continuous dependence on imports that may weaken the countries' ability to compete internationally, develop their own industries, and create autonomy, keeping Mercosul countries as semi-peripheral in the global scenario of the trading network (Kick & Davis, 2001; Dávila et al., 2014; Amorim et al., 2021; Teló, 2020).

A challenge still faced by countries in Latin America relates to the question of what kind of industrialization is necessary to promote true development in Mercosul, considering its potential and regional differences. Industrialization is a prerequisite for economic development, and for this, access to advanced technologies is needed, taking into account regional disparities in industrial policies among nations to ensure that the benefits of development are distributed more equitably (Furtado, 2004).

In this context, it is imperative to advocate for policies that address systemic issues rather than solely focusing on internal reforms within individual nations, both for advancing science and for mitigating global warming through potential collaborations with countries in the European Union (EU). Additionally, exercising critical thinking to avoid simplistic generalizations of understanding economic development of nations, and thus, also through discourse analysis, assisting in negotiations (Dewey, 1910; Chirot & Hall, 1982).

## **Conclusions**

Therefore, cooperation policies must be based on solid and unbiased evidence regarding the needs, challenges, and opportunities of both regions, seeking to promote results that mutually benefit countries and communities. It's crucial to recognize that the global interdependence among countries, influence, and power are exercised in ways that are not merely reflected in direct economic transactions. Concrete and measurable cooperation objectives should be defined, such as knowledge and technology exchange for environmental protection and sustainable development, promotion of trade in critical minerals for technology production, and collaboration in scientific and technological research among universities with scientists already residing in South American countries. The establishment of strategic partnerships between companies and institutions from both continents is imperative, aiming at the joint development of green technologies, sustainable management of natural resources, and promotion of cleaner industrial practices.

Initiatives based on principles of critical thinking, such as analysis of mutual interests, formulation of clear objectives, development of strategic partnerships, environmental and technological cooperation, enhancement of professional capacity among university students (through education and exchange programs), promotion of fair and sustainable trade with monitoring and continuous evaluation, are actions that can help strengthen bi-regional relations between Latin America and Europe, contributing to the economic, social, and environmental development of both regions.

From an economic standpoint, the development of a region is heavily influenced by factors of production such as labor force, abundant raw materials, availability of capital for investment, and technical ability for innovation (Feldmann et al., 2019). Thus, Latin America, as a whole, possesses these requirements to become a global powerhouse, along

with the collaboration of allied countries (Feldmann et al., 2019). To overcome the crisis affecting the multilateral system, a new model is needed that considers the various currents and demands for a more robust governance, utilizing the different forms and levels of multilateral institutionalization already in place (Arrighi, 1998; Telò, 2020).

## Ethical Statement

Ethics Committee approval was not required as the research did not involve human participants or animals.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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