



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Unveiling Appearance and Ideology in the short story *Overcoat* by Ghulam Abbas: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This study employs Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the short story *Overcoat* by Pakistani writer Ghulam Abbas. The analysis penetrates into how language, social identity, power relations, and ideological structures intersect in the story's narrative to expose fundamental societal structures in Pakistani postcolonial society. By presenting a comprehensive textual, discursive, and social analysis of the narrative, this study unwraps how the elegant attire of the protagonist acts as a semiotic device to exhibit class identity, and how institutions like the hospital function serve as ideological disseminators. The findings reveal that the protagonist's identity in *Overcoat* is socially negotiated and fluctuating, constructed and reconstructed through discourse. The findings suggest that CDA turns out to be an insightful lens to reveal the socio-political functions of the narrative.

**KEYWORDS** Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, textual analysis, discursive analysis, social analysis, *Overcoat*

## Introduction

Ghulam Abbas (1909-1982), a prominent Urdu short story writer, was born in Amritsar, Pre-partition India, and migrated to Pakistan after independence where his significant works became a tool to represent the socio-political scenarios of Pakistan (Abbas et al., 2017). Abbas is famous among the literary figures for his exquisite social critique with skillful art of characterization and mastery of narrative economy (Farooq, 2004). His stories appear to be basic with an uncomplicated plot, but they usually include profound philosophical currents. Abbas raises in his works, a voice against social stratification, cultural replication and susceptibility of human identity and so on, the pervasive features of a postcolonial society.

Hussain et al. (2022) posit that Abbas's peculiar and differentiated writing style is evident in one of his famous short stories, *Overcoat*, which, despite being a straightforward narrative, presents highly penetrating critique and astute analysis of Pakistani postcolonial society. This astounded work revolves around the story of an apparently rich looking young man who seems to be a dignified person carrying himself with poise and composure and whose lavish clothing and external presentation indicate affluence whereas his real social being is revealed through his sudden meeting of an accident.

With great wit and expertise, Abbas critiques the element of class consciousness present in Pakistani society where consideration is shown to someone on the basis of their visually apparent disposition (Yasir et al., 2024). The superficiality of appearance-based reverence and adoration is made discernible by the writer by employing the tools of subtle irony and evocative imagery quite dexterously.

Owing to his nuanced and attentive depiction of language as a social instrument, Abbas' fiction evokes a response to contemporary discourse analysis approaches. More particularly, *Overcoat* presents itself for an in-depth analysis by applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines how contents are created, distributed and interpreted in their social, cultural and material circumstances (Fairclough, 1995).

As far as the textual level of the story is concerned, it communicates how the selection of particular diction, lexical choices and grammatical structures within the narrative constitute a particular class, society identity and agency (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993). The dimension of discursive practice indicates how the identity of the protagonist demanding deep respect and awe is formulated through socially approved and accepted visual indicators and how institutional discourse unveils the distinction between appearance and reality (Gee, 2014; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The third level, social practice, satirizes the dominant socioeconomic and cultural ideas associated with class hierarchies and shifting identities in Pakistani society, reflecting postcolonial critiques of imitation and ideological reproduction (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 2023).

By investigating the short story through Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA lenses of textual interpretation, discursive practice, and social practice, this study aims to highlight the linguistic and ideological processes that shape the manifestation of identity and power in a society in Ghulam Abbas' short story *Overcoat*.

## Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary method that examines the intricate relationship between language and power, emphasizing how social institutions shape and are shaped by discourse. CDA goes beyond word analysis to consider social concerns, emphasizing the evaluation of linguistic features in social and cultural contexts (Moghaddam, 2024). In this regard, Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model is one of the most influential frameworks, presenting a systematic method for examining texts at three interconnected levels: textual analysis (the formal organization of content), discursive practice (communication techniques), and social practice (how discourse is embedded in social fabric). This versatile and dynamic approach enables discourse analysts to uncover and examine the subtle ways in which discourse subverts or controls a society's beliefs or power structures (Fairclough, 2023).

According to Van Dijk (1993), CDA is a subset of discourse analysis study that focuses on how text and speech in social and political contexts are used to enact, reproduce, and oppose social power abuse, dominance, and inequality (Mariam et al., 2021). CDA has been used by numerous scholars in a variety of literary, social, and political contexts. For example, this complete paradigm was applied to the field of health communication by Mohr and Frederiksen (2020), who highlighted its cross-disciplinary and holistic application. Likewise, Rehman et al. (2024) conducted a critical discourse analysis of Pakistani TV drama *Ranjha Ranjha Kardi* to evaluate the need for such drama in Pakistani society to overcome the stereotypes and stigma, and power relations associated with societal attitudes towards individuals suffering from mental illness.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model was employed by Rafi et al., (2024) to examine Martin Luther King's speech "I Have a Dream" from a sociocultural perspective. Likewise, Manzar et al. (2025) applied CDA on former Prime Minister Imran Khan's interview with an aim to analyze his spoken discourse to convey crucial ideas through various persuasive techniques. Hussain et al. (2024) conducted a study to explore the politics of language in Pakistan by applying CDA on the country's language policy. The researchers indicated that, in national linguistic context, pre-dominance of Urdu language marginalizes regional languages like Punjabi (Hussain et al., 2024). Raza et al. (2025) also incorporated Fairclough's framework to critically evaluate Quaid-e- Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's speech made on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1947 with ultimate aim to bring into limelight the secret sociopolitical denotations of his words for a newly born democratic state, Pakistan.

A stylistic analysis of the story *Overcoat* was carried out by Hussain et al. (2022) by applying Leech and Short's model to demonstrate how the lexical and grammatical features of the story amplify the confrontation between material reality and moral judgment in a postcolonial society. Hussain et al. (2022) admired Abbas' writing style by appreciating the way he gives realistic details: "...he reflects the people's movements and description of details in a forceful manner" (Hussain et al., 2022, p. 96).

The aforementioned body of literature denotes that CDA is a versatile, accomplished and resourceful framework, but its application to analyze Pakistani fiction seems limited. By concentrating on Abbas's *Overcoat*, this study addresses this gap, ultimately providing new valuable knowledge to the existing body of literary criticism as well as discourse studies in the South Asian context.

## Material and Methods

The current study employed a qualitative approach since it facilitates the development of more profound understandings of the topic. In order to assess ideological foundations, to investigate conceptual framework, and to observe how language creates and destroys power dynamics in a social setup, this work uses Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA. It has the following characteristics:

1. **Textual analysis (description):** It involves evaluating Abbas' vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical strategies in *Overcoat*.
2. **Discursive practice (interpretation):** It implies a close examination of the ways in which meanings are created, encoded, and interpreted in the story's various settings, such as the market and the hospital.
3. **Social practice (explanation):** It entails placing the book in larger sociopolitical and cultural contexts that include institutional discourse, socioeconomic inequalities, and imperial legacies.

The data were obtained directly from the translated text of *Overcoat* found in the old first-year course book English Book 1 (2014, pp. 87-91). The text's linguistic properties were evaluated and related to discursive and social contexts using the selected CDA viewpoints (Fairclough's three-dimensional framework).

## Results and Discussion

This section applies Fairclough's three-dimensional model to conduct a CDA of Ghulam Abbas' short story *Overcoat*. The approach focuses on three dimensions: textual,

discursive, and social practice, revealing how language generates, negotiates, and absorbs class-based identities in the postcolonial Pakistani society. Each dimension provides profound insights into how the author employs narrative tactics to reveal the fragility of social position and the ideological dominance of material elements.

### Textual Analysis

The textual dimension of Fairclough's CDA framework focuses on specific linguistic elements, grammar, and rhetorical strategies that encode meaning. The analysis reveals that the author deftly creates two parallel versions of the protagonist's identity: the one, projected through his appealing apparel, portrays elegance, delicacy, and elite class; the second, concealed beneath the overcoat, displays inadequacy, deprivation, poverty, and marginalization.

### Diction/ Word Choices

Diction, or word choices, refers to the author's careful selection of relevant words to serve his specific goal. At the beginning of the story, the writer uses elaborative and detailed descriptions of the protagonist's attractive clothing, such as the "almond-colored overcoat", "with stiff lapels", "sleeves well-creased", "cream-colored half opened rose" in its button, adorning a "white silk scarf", "green felt hat", and holding a "short polished cane" in his hand (Abbas, 2014, p. 87). The image of clothes here is more than just fabric; it is an iconic language that conveys an enthusiastic sense of riches, power, and belonging to its readers. All of these images, which convey sophistication, refinement, originality, and modernism, are characteristic of European culture. The images actually serve as semiotic markers of class and reflect colonial mimicry in a society where local elites imitate Western clothing rules to signal status and demand respect from those around them. Here, the young man, an underprivileged person, tries to disguise his reality by dressing well and emulating the movements of elites in order to get the respect from those around him. So, in such societies, true western followers are highly valued since they represent modernity and wealth.

On the contrary, when the protagonist meets an unlucky accident and is stripped of his outer garment in the hospital, a new layer of diction emerges: "a moth-eaten sweater", "a filthy shirt", and "layers of dirt covered his body" (Abbas, 2014, p. 90). In contrast, the use of coarse language and filthy phrases places adjectives of decay and neglect in an appropriate context to illustrate the social degradation experienced by an ostensibly wealthy individual. He is reduced to an obscene, filthy, dead item lying on the table. This contrast between "almond-colored" and "moth-eaten" represents the linguistic change from respectability to marginalization, and from reverence to status degradation, as a result of which socially constructed identity (respectable) is deconstructed. The shift emphasizes how material symbols impact public recognition, whereas their absence discloses underlying realities.

### Grammatical Structures and Linguistic Agency

To signal at shifts in power dynamics, the writer also manipulates grammar. He makes apt use of grammatical structures to hint at significant alteration happening in the protagonist's life. When clothed in the western style overcoat, he is described through active constructions, for instance: "He twirled his stick", "walked briskly through the bazaar", and "smiled confidently" and "a peculiar smile of satisfaction" (Abbas, 2014, p. 88). The linguistic agency through the use of active verbs here constructs his character as an assertive, self-possessed, self-assured, and socially recognized person. It gives the

protagonist a very composed and poised look and makes him a worthy fellow of the society.

After the unfortunate accident happens, however, the narrative shifts towards passive verbs as: "He was loaded into the car", "carried to the hospital", "his clothes were removed," and "his body was examined" (Abbas, 2014, p. 91). Here, the young man loses linguistic agency and becomes a mere object acted upon rather than a subject in control. This striking alteration in grammatical structures reflects his social exclusion and powerlessness: being dispossessed of material markers, he is dispossessed of agency in discourse as well.

### *Irony and Contrast*

Irony is a rhetorical tactic used by writers in literary works to expose and condemn people's foolishness and vices. In the short story *Overcoat*, Abbas employs the crucial rhetorical element of irony to highlight the disparity between appearance and reality. Because of his Western appearance, the young man is treated with courtesy by strangers in the market. Vehicle drivers bow to him, shopkeepers greet him warmly, and pedestrians smile in recognition, viewing him as an affluent city citizen. This reverence and welcoming response, however, is shattered when his clothing is removed. The very physique that formerly commanded veneration, admiration, and respect is after the accident regarded as unworthy of attention.

Abbas' humorous reversal emphasizes the superficiality of social dignity, emphasizing that it is the overcoat, not the young man, that commands respect and admiration, and as a result, this poor man has been greeted warmly. The protagonist has worn the overcoat to fit in the society whereas from inside he is filthy and dirty. Covering his inner-self and true being with an ostentatious outlook, he feels contented and complacent. The idea of contrast between appearance and reality is very much evident from the conversation of the young man with Pan Wala as:

"Pan Walla" (said by the young man)

"Yes, sir"

"Have you change for a ten rupee note?"

"No, sir, but I'll get it for you".

"And what if you don't come back?"

"If you don't trust me sir, you can come with me..."

"Never mind ... Here I have found one anna. Now give me a good cigarette and be off with you". (Abbas, 2014, p. 88)

This conversation hints at the young man's effort to show off that he is a rich person with large amount of money whereas in reality he has just one anna in his possession. This fact is supported by the statement when he shows his fear that the "pan walla" would run away taking such a large amount. At another point in the story, the young man enters the shop of expensive carpets showing his great interest in them and giving an impression of being a wealthy person ready to buy an expensive article:

"I just wanted to see this carpet" the young man said to the carpet dealer.

“With pleasure, sir” “Oh don’t bother to take it down. I can see it quite well it is... I’ll come again some time” (Abbas, 2014, p. 89)

Although, being a poverty-stricken person, he does not afford to look at such high-priced items in the market but his pretentious nature compels him to show off himself as an elite class person. His effort to conceal his poverty is quite evident. At another point, his indifferent response to the shopkeeper of Western music shop as: “No thank you” indicates that apparently he is trying to give impression to the shopkeepers that he belongs to upper class community having great interest in “Spanish Guitar” or “German Piano” but since he does not possess a huge amount of money so he adopts the expressions of indifference. The willow stick, he carries, is used by British elites for support. He tries to spin it around his finger but fails and resultantly says: “Oh sorry”. This action and expression show that he is not habitual to perform such tasks and hints at his inability to fit into a new setting.

Thus, at the textual level, the word selection/vocabulary, grammatical structures, linguistic agency, and the use of irony show that *Overcoat* clearly demonstrates how language encodes the performative nature of identity, with clothing serving as a semiotic resource that constructs and deconstructs class while also conferring identity and social legitimacy to individuals. It also expresses the heartbreaking reality of Pakistani culture: upper-class aristocrats look down upon destitute individuals from the lower strata of society, who strive to cover their inadequacy and hardship by presenting themselves as elites. The narrative effectively illustrates how the impoverished young man’s life appears to be different from what it actually is, and how this discrepancy might have disastrous consequences, such as bodily or psychological death.

### **Discursive Practice**

Discursive practice, the second CDA dimension, shows how meanings are created, transmitted, and interpreted differently in various circumstances. The market (bazar) and the hospital are two different discursive contexts in which the author places the young man. These environments truly create an identity, influencing not just how he sees himself but also how others see him.

#### ***Market Discourse***

Based on the young man’s western appearance, social actors in the market environment start a discourse of reverence. He is treated with great hospitality and friendliness by store owners, carriage drivers, fruit vendors, and bystanders. The general public in the market views clothing as a significant indication of class identity, hence such encounters are not critical. The young man’s assimilation of this market discourse is demonstrated by his self-assurance and independent mindset in “twirling the walking stick jauntily” and “smiling at strangers”.

The market thus appears to be a place where discourse is performative and mutually reinforcing. Identity is co-constructed by both the protagonist and the public: he projects wealth through his dress, while the broader public supports it through social cues, since adoration and deference are awarded through symbolic markers such as attire rather than individual merit. This reciprocal construction is consistent with Fairclough’s (1995) claim that discourse both forms and is shaped by social connections because it is both constitutive and constituted.

#### ***Institutional Discourse in the Hospital***

The institutional setting, on the other hand, promotes a distinct sort of conversation. The institutional authority re-contextualizes the young man's identity by deconstructing the semiotics of clothes. Attendants here regard him as an underprivileged and poverty-stricken person with "old cotton sweater all in holes" and "dirty vest", "flesh grimed with dirt" (Abbas, 2014, p. 90). In contrast to the market's performative speech, theirs is factual and authentic, and grounded on truth.

This demonstrates how institutions serve as gatekeepers of meaning. In the market, speech conveys incorrect assumptions; in the hospital, discourse disassembles them. The medical team at the hospital is not impressed by the young man's manufactured identity and instead reveals his material realities. The author emphasizes the fact that the identity of the same young man is created differently in different circumstances, highlighting the instability of identity and the context-sensitive character of discourse.

### *Intermingling of Discourses*

The story also describes the intersection of discourses from many contexts. The young man's ambition to establish an elite identity by donning Western dress is rooted in colonial rhetoric, yet the market supports local cultural discourse that equates fashion with reverence. However, the hospital classifies his identity using scientific and bureaucratic nomenclature. This intermixing of discourses reveals the various interpretive frameworks used in Pakistani postcolonial society to construct an identity.

### **Social Practice**

At the broadest level of social practice, Abbas sharply criticizes Pakistani society's ideological structures and belief systems, which normalize bias and elevate appearances above reality. He situates the young man's dilemma within the socio-historical backdrop of postcolonial Pakistan, where material symbols are important for social recognition.

### *Imperial Heritage and act of Mimicry*

The writer emphasizes that the young man's symbolic attire, which represents European fashion, notably the green felt hat and silk scarf, serves as agents of colonial elite mimicry. This brings up Bhabha's (1997) concept of mimicry, in which colonized subjects adopt the colonizers' symbols in order to gain social legitimacy and make their lives worthwhile. Western attire is regarded as a symbol of power and respectability in Pakistani metropolitan areas. Abbas is strongly critical of this Imperial inheritance, demonstrating that mimicking others is a tendency that results in weak identities maintained by false appearances rather than reality.

### *Social Stratification and Marginality*

The systematic inequality that exists in Pakistani culture is shown when the young man's "dirty vest" and "sweater with holes" are revealed beneath the fashionable overcoat. Abbas recognizes the tragic truth of the culture in which those without material possessions are viewed as unimportant or peripheral, remain invisible, and are not allowed to get social respect. Abbas depicts a world in which opportunity, wealth, and power are unequally distributed according to the social class. The young man's fate shows that while marginalized people may appear to be elites for a short time, institutions eventually serve to further entrench their marginalization and disempowerment.

In the narrative, the hospital serves as a center of ideological authority. The institution here reasserts the dominant social notion that social standing must correspond

with tangible reality, not illusion, by stripping the young man naked and exposing his true state. The discourse of the hospital dispels pretense and upholds social order. In this way, the writer criticizes not only individual pretension but also institutional conspiracy in promoting social hierarchy.

### *Fragility of Identity*

The wider social implication of the short story *Overcoat* is the vulnerability of identity in a post-colonial society which focuses on keeping up appearances. The protagonist's thorough transformation, from a reverend young man in the market to a destitute body in the hospital, indicates how identity is unsteady, performative, and governed by institutional policing. The writer forewarns of a society where veracity is trivial and where importance is given only to those who display material symbols of affluence and power.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that *Overcoat* operates as a layered narrative that critiques the performative nature of identity in postcolonial Pakistani society. Through Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, the story emerges not merely as a tale of irony but as a discursive site where language, power, and ideology intersect (Fairclough, 1995). The protagonist's transition from an apparently wealthy person to a body in need shows how identity is contextually created and dismantled through discourse rather than being fixed.

Abbas's deliberate use of language and grammatical constructions highlights the brittleness of social recognition at the textual level. Language encodes societal norms by giving preference to appearance over essence, as evidenced by the disparity between refined and degraded terminology. The idea that language may both empower and marginalize is reinforced by this linguistic shift, which reflects the protagonist's loss of agency (Gee, 2014; Van Dijk, 1993).

The discursive practice dimension underscores the role of context in shaping meaning. The market and hospital function as contrasting discursive arenas: one validates identity through visual cues, while the other dismantles illusion through institutional authority. This duality reflects Fairclough's assertion that discourse is both constitutive and constituted—shaping social relations while being shaped by them (Fairclough, 2013). The protagonist's identity is thus a product of shifting discursive forces, revealing the fragility of selfhood in a society governed by material symbols.

At the level of social practice, Abbas critiques the ideological underpinnings of class stratification and colonial mimicry. The protagonist's adoption of Western attire reflects Bhabha's notion of mimicry, where colonized subjects internalize the aesthetics of the colonizer to gain legitimacy (Bhabha, 1994). Yet this mimicry is exposed as hollow, reinforcing systemic exclusion rather than subverting it. The hospital's role in stripping away illusion further illustrates how institutions perpetuate dominant ideologies, reinforcing class hierarchies and denying the subaltern's humanity (Spivak, 2023; Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Ultimately, *Overcoat* serves as a powerful indictment of a society that equates worth with appearance. Through CDA, the story reveals how discourse operates as a tool of both deception and revelation, constructing identities that are as fragile as the fabric that cloaks them.



## Conclusion

By implementing Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, this study exhibits how the short story *Overcoat* by Ghulam Abbas establishes, disrupts, and critiques social identity in Pakistani postcolonial society. In addition to being a tale of tragic irony, *Overcoat* is a forceful critique of discursive hegemony. Initially, the textual analysis first reveals the contrastive use of syntax and vocabulary to emphasize the protagonist's change in integrity and agency. The discursive practice analysis then highlights the ways in which various contexts give rise to disparate understandings of identity. Finally, social practice analysis places these findings into the framework of imperial heritage, ingrained inequity, and institutionalized prejudice that pervade Pakistani society and cause the protagonist's emotional and physical demise.

## Recommendations

Overall, this work highlights the importance of applying CDA to South Asian literature by illustrating how discourse reflects the social environment and discloses broader social truths. *Overcoat* can be used in English language education to teach discourse and identity building, as well as a postcolonial critique in which discourse works as a mirror, reflecting what is going on in the larger social realm. Future research could apply Fairclough's three-dimensional model to other Urdu short stories that critique social stratification, such as *Anandi* by Ismat Chughtai or *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hasan Manto, to explore how different authors use discourse to challenge postcolonial ideologies.

Future studies can also consider extending the CDA framework to visual or cinematic adaptations of *Overcoat*, if available, to analyze how costume, setting, and camera angles reinforce or subvert textual meanings. The story can be used in ESL and TESOL contexts to teach critical literacy. Students can analyze how language constructs identity and power, encouraging them to reflect on societal norms and their own positionality. A comparative study between *Overcoat* and Western short stories (e.g., *The Overcoat* by Nikolai Gogol) could reveal how shifts discourse around clothing, class, and identity across cultures and historical contexts. Future studies might explore how gender intersects with class and identity in Abbas's work. Although *Overcoat* centers on a male protagonist, a gendered lens could uncover deeper layers of societal expectation and marginalization.

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