

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Disability Related Derogatory Speech on Twitter

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Abstract

Disability-related derogatory speech on social media platforms actively perpetuates ableism and social inequality; however, while hate speech targeting race and gender is extensively studied, the intersection of online derogatory discourse and disability remains a significant gap in critical discourse analysis literature. Addressing this critical gap, this study systematically investigates and critiques the underlying power dynamics, stereotypes, and neoliberal ideologies fueling disability discrimination within online communications. The research employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, utilizing Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis—encompassing textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels—to analyze a purposive sample of derogatory tweets collected between 2017 and 2022. Analytical findings reveal that derogatory tweets frequently weaponize dehumanizing metaphors and exclusionary pronouns to marginalize disabled individuals, often leveraging online echo chambers to mask hate speech as humor or satire. These specific discursive practices effectively reinforce societal ideologies inextricably linking human worth to physical capability and economic productivity. Ultimately, exposing these discriminatory linguistic patterns is vital for comprehending the social construction of disability and actively combating systemic ableism. The study highlights the urgent necessity for policymakers, educational institutions, and social media platforms to collaborate effectively in mitigating harmful online speech, fostering social justice, and promoting equitable digital environments.

Keywords: Ableism, Critical-Discourse-Analysis, Derogatory-Speech, Disability, Twitter.

تحليل خطاب نقدي للخطاب الازدرائي المتعلق بالإعاقة على تويتر

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المستخلص

يؤدي الخطاب الازدرائي المتعلق بالإعاقة على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي إلى تكريس التمييز ضد ذوي الإعاقة وعدم المساواة الاجتماعية بشكل نشط؛ ومع ذلك، في حين يحظى خطاب الكراهية الذي يستهدف العرق والجنس بدراسة مستفيضة، يظل تقاطع الخطاب الازدرائي عبر الإنترنت مع الإعاقة فجوة كبيرة في أدبيات التحليل النقدي للخطاب. ولمعالجة هذه الفجوة الحرجة، تستقصى هذه الدراسة وتنتقد بشكل منهجي ديناميكيات السلطة الكامنة، والصور النمطية، والأيدولوجيات النيوليبرالية التي تغذي التمييز ضد الإعاقة ضمن الاتصالات الرقمية. يوظف البحث منهجية نوعية وصفية، معتمداً على نموذج نورمان فيركلاف ثلاثي الأبعاد للتحليل النقدي للخطاب - والذي يشمل المستويات النصية، والممارسة الخطابية، والممارسة الاجتماعية - لتحليل عينة قصدية من التغريدات الازدرائية التي جمعت بين عامي 2017 و2022. تكشف النتائج التحليلية أن التغريدات الازدرائية كثيراً ما تتخذ من الاستعارات المجردة من الإنسانية والضمائر الإقصائية سلاحاً لتهميش الأفراد ذوي الإعاقة، وغالباً ما تستغل غرف الصدى عبر الإنترنت لتمير خطاب الكراهية تحت غطاء الفكاهة أو السخرية. وتعزز هذه الممارسات الخطابية المحددة الأيدولوجيات المجتمعية التي تربط قيمة الإنسان بالقدرة البدنية والإنتاجية الاقتصادية ارتباطاً وثيقاً. وفي النهاية، يعد الكشف عن هذه الأنماط اللغوية التمييزية أمراً بالغ الأهمية لفهم البناء الاجتماعي للإعاقة ومكافحة التمييز المنهجي ضد ذوي الإعاقة بنشاط. وتبرز الدراسة الضرورة الملحة لتعاون صناع السياسات، والمؤسسات التعليمية، ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي بشكل فعال للحد من الخطاب الضار عبر الإنترنت، وتعزيز العدالة الاجتماعية، وبناء بيئات رقمية منصفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإعاقة، التحليل-النقدي-للخطاب، التمييز-ضد-الإعاقة، الخطاب-الازدرائي، تويتر.

1. Introduction

The advent of Web 2.0 and the exponential proliferation of digital communication platforms, most notably Twitter, have fundamentally transformed the architecture of public discourse. While these platforms democratize information, their inherent structural features—such as user anonymity, rapid information dissemination, and emotional detachment—frequently facilitate the unchecked proliferation of hate speech and the normalization of hostile rhetoric. Within this highly volatile digital ecosystem, disability-related derogatory speech has emerged as a pervasive mechanism through which entrenched ableist ideologies are continuously reproduced, normalized, and perpetuated. Such linguistic hostility actively cultivates an exclusionary online environment that systematically marginalizes disabled individuals, reinforcing deep-seated societal inequalities by weaponizing dehumanizing metaphors and exclusionary language to devalue those who fall outside normative paradigms of physical capability and economic productivity. Despite the severe social ramifications of this online ableism, a profound problem persists within contemporary linguistic scholarship: the current application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) exhibits substantial theoretical and methodological deficiencies regarding disability. Specifically, while hate speech targeting race, gender, and

political affiliation has received exhaustive scholarly attention, the intersection of derogatory online discourse and disability remains a glaringly neglected frontier. Furthermore, existing literature suffers from an insufficient exploration of the cognitive dimensions required to fully comprehend the mental processes involved in producing and interpreting ableist discourse, alongside a critical methodological failure to integrate quantitative metrics—such as the statistical frequency of specific derogatory terms—with qualitative critical frameworks. To rectify these interconnected theoretical and methodological shortcomings, this study aims to systematically deconstruct the specific linguistic structures, features, and discursive strategies deployed in disability-related insults on Twitter. By rigorously analyzing these digital texts through Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the research endeavors to uncover the hidden ideological underpinnings, biases, and prejudices that actively normalize negative stereotypes and stigmatization. Concurrently, the study aims to critically interrogate the underlying power dynamics to reveal exactly how digital language constructs, negotiates, and sustains unequal power relations between non-disabled and disabled populations. To achieve these overarching aims and comprehensively map this discursive landscape, the current investigation addresses the following central research questions: (1) How are neoliberal ideologies and unequal power dynamics discursively constructed and reinforced through this derogatory language? (2) In what ways do these discursive practices contribute to the normalization of ableism and symbolic violence against disabled individuals on digital platforms? And (3) What specific linguistic features are utilized on Twitter concerning disability-related derogatory speech? Ultimately, by answering these questions, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how online ableism operates discursively, contributing vital empirical data to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis while offering actionable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and platform administrators to foster more equitable and inclusive digital environments.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Discourse

A discourse refers to a specific way of speaking, writing, or communicating that is fundamentally guided by certain rules, conventions, and shared meanings within a particular context or community. It is not merely a neutral exchange of vocabulary, but rather an active social practice that frames how individuals perceive the world around them. Thus, discourse involves the strategic use of language to convey information, express complex ideas, construct social identities, and dynamically negotiate power dynamics between different groups and individuals. In essence, discourse acts as the primary vehicle through which language operates within specific societal and institutional contexts to shape meanings, convey ideological frameworks, and actively contribute to the ongoing construction of social realities (Wang, 2021).

2.2. Discourse Analysis

Building upon the concept of discourse, Discourse Analysis serves as a powerful analytical tool for unearthing the often subtle yet profound connections between everyday language use and the broader social, cultural, and power structures that govern human interaction (Watanabe, 2016). It moves beyond traditional linguistic studies of grammar and syntax to investigate texts in their real-world application. Consequently, discourse analysis deeply examines the complex relationship between language and its specific context of use, heavily emphasizing how meaning is continuously constructed, interpreted, and negotiated across various social environments and communicative landscapes (Gee, 2001).

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis

While traditional discourse analysis maps how language creates meaning, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) delves specifically into the entrenched power dynamics, dominant ideologies, and structural social inequalities that are implicitly embedded within language. As a transformative analytical framework, Critical Discourse Analysis actively seeks to unveil exactly how language can be utilized to either maintain, normalize, or challenge dominant societal narratives and existing power structures. It goes far beyond mere description; it focuses intensely on uncovering hidden agendas, institutional biases, and the precise ways in which language—both spoken and written—continuously contributes to maintaining, reproducing, or resisting established social hierarchies and discriminatory practices (Widdowson, 2008).

2.4. Disability: Definitions and Types

To properly analyze disability-related discourse, it is imperative to establish a foundational understanding of the term itself, recognizing it as both a physical reality and a socially constructed category. As defined comprehensively by the World Health Organization (2006), Disability “is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restriction. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives”. This definition is vital because it highlights the critical intersection between individual biological realities and societal barriers. Furthermore, the core types of disability are broadly categorized to include motor disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental disorders, and chronic illness (WHO, 2006).

2.5. Derogatory Speeches

Derogatory speech consists of deliberately chosen words, phrases, or slurs that express profound disrespect, intense contempt, or a significantly low opinion toward specific individuals or marginalized groups. These harmful linguistic terms, which often include racial slurs or targeted insults based on intrinsic physical or mental characteristics, are explicitly designed to belittle victims, show public hostility, or cause deep psychological and social harm. Such targeted speech routinely zeroes in on fundamental aspects of human identity, such as race, ethnicity, cultural background, or disability status. An explicit

example of this generalized derogatory speech is the statement: "Immigrants are a plague and should be expelled from the country".

However, the most comprehensive and widely accepted institutional definition of derogatory speech comes from the Council of Europe. In 1997, they defined it formally as: "All forms of expression which spread, incite, promote, or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance" (Michel, 2003, P.1523).

To illustrate how such rhetoric operates powerfully at the highest levels of political and social discourse, another stark example of targeted derogatory language is the quote: "The Palestinians are like crocodiles; the more you give them meat, they want more," stated by Ehud Barak, prime minister of Israel, on August 28, 2000.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research design of the present study is a descriptive qualitative. A qualitative approach is a research process that generates descriptive data in the form of spoken or written words from individuals and observed behavior (Blaxter et al, 2006). This study is called descriptive qualitative because the researcher wants to describe the phenomena of Disability-related derogatory speeches on Twitter.

3.2. Data sources

Yin (2016) p13, argues that the sources should be reliable and authentic. A data source is a source of acquired data, such as people, events, behavior, files, and other things. The data source of the current study is downloaded from Twitter.

The unit of analysis consists of words, phrases, a news article, a police document, a blog post which are often treated as the unit of analysis. The data were obtained through a screenshot over a period of five years (2017-2022).

3.3. Research instrument

Researchers use a technique to make their work more organized and complicated.

There are two types of instruments:

- The main instrument and supporting instrument. Because this research employs a qualitative research design, the researcher himself serves as the primary instrument.
- Meanwhile, the supporting instruments in research include tools, documents, and technologies used to facilitate data collection, these instruments that are used in the current research paper are laptop, recorder, notebook, and pen.

3.4. Model of Analysis

The model of analysis that used in the current research paper is Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1995) - It analyzes discourse across three interconnected dimensions - text (Description) analyzes the formal linguistic features of a text, including vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure. Discourse practice (Interpretation) examines the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. Social practice (explanation) explores the broader social and cultural, and political context

to reveal how language shapes ideology, power relations and social change (Fairclough, 1995). See figure 3.4.1:

Norman Fairclough's • 3-D Model of Discourse

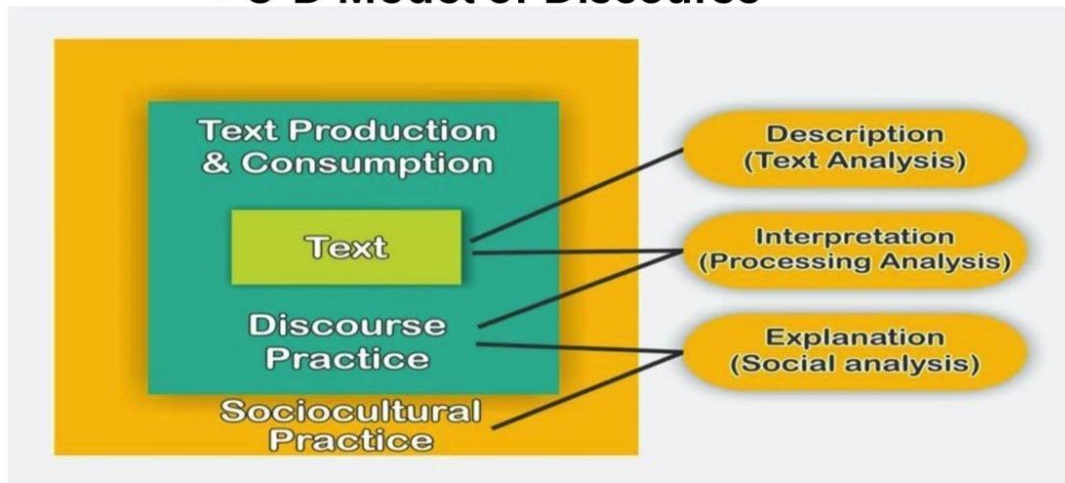


Figure 3.4.1.: Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

3.5. Data collection Techniques

The purpose of collecting data is to provide materials for analyzing the phenomenon that the study is about. Data were collected through documentation and purposive sampling. Documentation data collection includes written text, photographs, videos, audio recordings, and digital files. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information related to the phenomenon of interest. Purposive sampling keeps researchers explore complex issues by focusing on cases that provide detailed insights (Saunders 2023).

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

There were several steps in analyzing data. The researcher used Miles and Huberman's technique (1984, p88). According to Miles and Huberman, there are three steps in analyzing data which include:

- 1- Reducing data (i.e., a process of classifying the data which belong to the disability related derogatory speeches).
- 2- Presenting the data. The researcher described and explained about what, how, and why of the phenomenon related to the study.
- 3- Drawing conclusion and verification by interpreting the result from the main findings.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This section investigates and analyzes the collecting data including disability-related derogatory speech on Twitter according to Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional approach of critical discourse analysis.

Data 1: "Saw a guy in a wheelchair trying to get up a curb and failing. It was the funniest thing I've seen all week. Just a useless set of legs flailing around. Like a turtle on its back. Maybe if you spent less time feeling sorry for yourself and more time in the gym you could build some upper body strength, you cripple. Honestly, what's the point? We should just put you all on a nice island somewhere and let nature take its course. It's Darwinism. You're a drain on resources and you provide nothing but a pathetic spectacle for the rest of us."

Textual Analysis (Description): At the textual level, Hyde's language is overtly **derogatory and dehumanizing**. His vocabulary includes words such as "*useless*," "*cripple*," "*drain on resources*," and "*pathetic spectacle*," which strip the disabled person of individuality and humanity. The metaphor "*like a turtle on its back*" visually and emotionally degrades the subject, evoking helplessness and absurdity for comedic effect. Grammatically, the text employs **declarative and imperative structures** that assert dominance ("Maybe if you spent less time feeling sorry for yourself..."), attributing moral and physical failure to the disabled person. This framing individualizes disability as a personal flaw, aligning with a **neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility**. Cohesively, the text escalates from mockery to an exclusionary fantasy ("We should just put you all on a nice island"), constructing a pseudo-scientific rationale through the invocation of "Darwinism." This term functions ideologically to justify social exclusion as "natural."

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): At the level of discursive practice, Hyde's tweet emerges from a **media environment** shaped by social media's brevity, virality, and performative outrage. As a comedian associated with "shock humor," Hyde draws on the intertextual tradition of **internet edgelord discourse**, where offensive content is disguised as irony or satire. This duality allows hate speech to circulate while maintaining **plausible deniability**—a common discursive strategy in extremist online subcultures.

The platform context of **Twitter (now X)** reinforces this dynamic. Its algorithmic structure privileges engagement through provocation, amplifying emotionally charged or controversial content. The tweet's hyperbolic cruelty is not accidental but performative, aiming to attract attention, provoke backlash, and signal in-group belonging among followers who valorize transgressive speech. Consequently, Hyde's discourse operates at the intersection of **humor and hostility**, where "it's just a joke" becomes a defensive mechanism that masks ideological aggression.

Social Practice (Explanation): From a broader socio-cultural perspective, the tweet reproduces **ableist ideology** rooted in the historical association of disability with dependency, weakness, and social burden. By invoking “Darwinism,” Hyde draws upon a **Social Darwinist** narrative that conflates biological fitness with moral worth, implying that disabled people are naturally destined for exclusion or extinction. Such discourse legitimizes inequality under the pretense of scientific rationality.

In Fairclough’s terms, the tweet exemplifies how language both reflects and reinforces **relations of power**. Hyde’s social status as a public figure amplifies his discursive power, allowing his words to shape public attitudes and normalize mockery of marginalized groups. His message aligns with broader **neoliberal ideologies** that equate human value with productivity and independence, marginalizing those deemed “unproductive.” The humor’s cruelty thus performs ideological work—it masks systemic ableism by framing it as individual failure or as natural selection.

Socially, the consequences of such discourse are far-reaching. It perpetuates **symbolic violence** (Bourdieu, 1991), desensitizing audiences to discrimination and reinforcing structural hierarchies between the able-bodied majority and disabled minorities. The laughter elicited by the joke functions not merely as entertainment but as social regulation, policing the boundaries of “normality” through ridicule.

Data 2: “Every time I see one of those 'disability awareness' ads, I cringe. We are not 'aware'? We are painfully aware. We are aware that you are a burden. We are aware that you cost the system money. We are aware that you slow down lines and require special treatment. We don't need 'awareness,' we need you to be aware of how inconvenient you are. Your struggle is not inspiring; it's annoying. Your life is a lesson in what to avoid: weakness, defect, and dependency.”

Textual Analysis (Description): At the textual level, the post is characterized by **repetition, emphatic modality, and evaluative language**. The anaphoric repetition of “We are aware” builds a rhythm of accusation, transforming “awareness” from a call for inclusion into an indictment. The pronouns “we” and “you” construct a **binary opposition** between the able-bodied “majority” and the disabled “other,” reinforcing in-group superiority and out-group stigmatization.

Lexically, terms such as “burden,” “defect,” “dependency,” and “inconvenient” devalue disabled lives, reducing individuals to economic and functional liabilities. The dismissive tone—“Your struggle is not inspiring; it’s annoying”—invalidates empathy and positions disability as an aesthetic and social nuisance. The pseudo-logical tone (“You cost the system money”) lends the statement a veneer of rationality, masking discrimination behind utilitarian reasoning. Structurally, the text escalates from personal discomfort (“I cringe”) to systemic condemnation, concluding with a **didactic judgment**: disabled life as a “lesson

in what to avoid.” The moralization of bodily difference serves as a linguistic strategy of **othering** and **social control**.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): At the discursive level, the tweet participates in a recognizable **genre of reactionary online discourse**. It draws intertextually from neoliberal rhetoric about efficiency, productivity, and self-sufficiency, and from broader internet hostility toward identity- or awareness-based movements. By mocking “disability awareness,” the speaker implicitly rejects social solidarity and advocates an ideology of **individual meritocracy**, where only those deemed self-reliant deserve social legitimacy.

The production and circulation of such discourse on **Twitter (now X)** reflect how social media functions as a site of ideological reinforcement. The platform’s affordances—brevity, virality, and algorithmic amplification—encourage reductionist and polarizing statements that provoke engagement. This performative hostility not only reflects personal prejudice but also appeals to online communities that valorize “truth-telling” against perceived political correctness. The repetition of “We are aware” mirrors the **echo-chamber dynamics** of digital culture, where collective pronouns simulate group consensus, constructing an imagined community of like-minded “realists.”

In terms of consumption, the tweet invites readers to share in its frustration, positioning the audience as rational taxpayers burdened by inclusivity measures. Thus, the text’s meaning is co-constructed between the producer and receptive audiences who interpret disability not as a condition of human diversity but as inefficiency within a competitive capitalist order.

Social Practice (Explanation): Within the broader social context, the tweet exemplifies **ableist discourse** embedded in neoliberal ideology. It articulates a worldview where human value is equated with economic productivity and independence. Disabled individuals are portrayed as “*costly*” and “*dependent*,” reflecting the capitalist logic that commodifies human worth. This aligns with what Fairclough (1995) identifies as the **ideological embedding of discourse**, where linguistic practices sustain existing power hierarchies.

The invocation of systemic strain (“You cost the system money”) translates social prejudice into bureaucratic and economic terms, naturalizing discrimination as fiscal realism. This discursive strategy legitimizes exclusion under the guise of efficiency. By devaluing empathy and glorifying self-sufficiency, the tweet reproduces **neoliberal common sense**—the belief that social problems stem from individual weakness rather than structural inequality.

From a critical perspective, such discourse performs **symbolic violence** (Bourdieu, 1991), rendering disabled people invisible, shameful, or disposable within public life. The speaker’s collective “we” reproduces dominance by framing able-bodied identity as the societal norm. The text’s hostility to “awareness” campaigns undermines public efforts to cultivate understanding, substituting compassion with contempt. Consequently, the tweet

exemplifies how everyday language on social media participates in maintaining systems of **ideological control and marginalization**.

Data 3: “These 'service animals' are just a scam for weak people. Your 'anxiety' doesn't require a dog in the grocery store. You're not disabled, you're just mentally weak and looking for a crutch. And people in wheelchairs with their 'service dogs'—the dog is probably more useful than you are. The dog has all its limbs and a functioning brain. You're just a lump of flesh being carted around by a more capable creature. We should replace all disabled people with their own service animals; the world would be a more efficient place.”

Textual Analysis (Description): At the **lexical** level, the tweet employs **derogatory and dehumanizing expressions** such as “weak,” “lump of flesh,” and “more capable creature.” These lexical choices degrade disabled individuals by denying their humanity and agency. The sarcastic quotation marks around “service animals,” “anxiety,” and “disabled” indicate **discursive skepticism**—a strategy to delegitimize disability and mental illness by framing them as fraudulent or exaggerated.

The **grammar and structure** are characterized by a sequence of declarative statements and hyperbolic comparisons. The repeated structure (“The dog... You're just...”) creates a hierarchy that situates the animal as superior to the human, reversing natural roles to emphasize perceived uselessness. The final sentence— “We should replace all disabled people with their own service animals”—functions as a **satirical imperative**, concluding the text with a pseudo-logical appeal to “efficiency.” This rhetorical move masks cruelty under the guise of humor and rationality, converting violence into mockery.

Cohesively, the progression from ridicule (“scam for weak people”) to biological comparison (“more useful than you are”) constructs a narrative of **biological determinism**, implying that physical impairment equals inferiority. The invocation of “efficiency” introduces a neoliberal logic where human worth is measured by utility, aligning disability with inefficiency and redundancy.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): At the level of discursive practice, the tweet emerges from and contributes to a **digital culture of provocation**. On social media platforms such as Twitter (now X), communicative acts often prioritize virality and controversy. The tweet adopts the **genre of “edgelord” humor**—performative offensiveness meant to shock, amuse, and assert dominance. This discursive style draws from internet subcultures that conflate cruelty with wit, framing discrimination as free expression or truth-telling.

Intertextually, the post echoes broader societal narratives that question the legitimacy of invisible disabilities, such as anxiety and psychological disorders. By mocking service animals and their handlers, the text perpetuates a discourse of **suspicion toward**

accommodation, a common trope in neoliberal societies that valorize independence and stigmatize dependence.

In terms of **distribution and consumption**, such content operates through online echo chambers where like-minded users amplify discriminatory messages under the pretext of humor. Supportive audiences may interpret the tweet as “honest criticism” of social oversensitivity, while opposing readers perceive it as overt hate speech. This polarization exemplifies Fairclough’s notion that discourse is both **a site of ideological struggle** and a medium for reproducing social norms.

Social Practice (Explanation): From a broader socio-cultural perspective, the tweet reproduces **ableist ideology** grounded in the historical association of disability with deficiency, dependence, and inefficiency. By comparing disabled individuals unfavorably to animals, the speaker invokes a **dehumanizing discourse** that erases subjectivity and moral worth. The reference to “efficiency” situates the text within a **neoliberal capitalist framework**, where human value is assessed by productivity, autonomy, and cost-effectiveness. This aligns with Fairclough’s (1995) argument that modern discourse naturalizes capitalist hierarchies by embedding them within everyday language.

The tweet’s humor conceals its ideological function: to legitimize exclusion by portraying it as pragmatic truth. This rhetorical mechanism transforms systemic discrimination into common sense, desensitizing audiences to cruelty. The conflation of mental health conditions with weakness reinforces stigma and delegitimizes invisible disabilities, thereby maintaining social hierarchies between the “able” and the “dependent.”

From the perspective of **power relations**, the speaker assumes an authoritative stance that mirrors societal dominance of able-bodied individuals. The mockery of “service animals” and their users extends beyond individual insult—it serves to police the boundaries of normality and worthiness. Such discourse contributes to the **symbolic violence** (Bourdieu, 1991) that sustains inequality by embedding prejudice within the cultural logic of humor and reason.

Data 4: “The Paralympics is a pathetic joke. It's the 'everyone gets a trophy' mentality taken to its logical extreme. We're giving gold medals to people for being cripples? For rolling a ball while sitting down? It's not a sport; it's a pity party. It's celebrating failure and physical defect. Watching a bunch of people with missing limbs try to compete is just sad and embarrassing. They should call it what it is: The Special Olympics for people whose bodies are broken. It's an insult to real athletes.”

Textual Analysis (Description): At the textual level, the post employs **derogatory vocabulary**, **rhetorical contrast**, and **evaluative metaphors** to construct a narrative of contempt. The use of terms such as “*pathetic joke*,” “*cripples*,” “*broken bodies*,” and “*pity party*” enacts **lexical violence**, stripping Paralympic athletes of dignity and agency.

The rhetorical question— “We’re giving gold medals to people for being cripples?”—implies absurdity and moral outrage, positioning the existence of the Paralympics as irrational.

The **binary opposition** between “real athletes” and disabled competitors creates a hierarchy where able-bodiedness signifies authenticity, strength, and value, while disability denotes deficiency. The sarcastic tone (“everyone gets a trophy”) invokes a familiar cultural discourse criticizing inclusivity as excessive or undeserved. Grammatically, the declarative statements (“It’s not a sport, it’s a pity party”) assert evaluative authority, presenting prejudice as fact.

Cohesively, the text progresses from mockery to outright **dehumanization**, culminating in the reduction of disabled athletes to “broken” bodies. The repetitive emphasis on physical imperfection and emotional disgust (“sad and embarrassing”) normalizes contempt as a legitimate response. Through this linguistic framing, the tweet constructs disability as antithetical to athleticism, conflating bodily integrity with moral and aesthetic worth.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): Discursively, this tweet participates in a broader **genre of digital reactionary discourse** that mocks inclusivity and diversity initiatives. It draws intertextually from neoliberal and meritocratic narratives that equate achievement solely with physical and economic productivity. By ridiculing the Paralympics—a global event celebrating resilience and human capability—the tweet positions equality itself as a cultural threat.

The **production** of this discourse within the social media context of Twitter (now X) reflects how online communication incentivizes **provocation and polarization**. The concise, aggressive structure and emotive vocabulary are tailored for virality, appealing to audiences that perceive offense as authenticity. The humor and outrage serve dual purposes: entertainment for the in-group and alienation of the marginalized out-group.

From a **consumption** standpoint, such messages resonate within communities that valorize “hard truth” and reject empathy as weakness. Supporters may interpret the tweet as satire exposing “political correctness,” while critics perceive it as hate speech. This interpretive duality aligns with Fairclough’s (1995) notion that discursive meaning is contextually negotiated; the text’s offensiveness functions as an ideological test of allegiance, separating those who share its worldview from those who reject it.

. **Social Practice (Explanation):** At the level of social practice, the tweet reproduces **ableist and neoliberal ideologies** that conflate human worth with physical ability and competitiveness. By dismissing disabled sports as “celebrating failure,” the speaker reinforces the capitalist ethos that values only productivity and perfection. This ideology erases the social and structural dimensions of disability, reframing it as an individual flaw or inefficiency.

The invocation of the “**real athlete**” dichotomy sustains a **hegemonic discourse of bodily normality**, where strength, symmetry, and independence are moralized as virtues. In Fairclough’s terms, the tweet exemplifies how **discourse naturalizes inequality**—in this case, by representing exclusion as meritocratic fairness. The moral indignation directed at “pity” reveals the neoliberal discomfort with vulnerability and interdependence, qualities incompatible with the ideal of self-reliant citizenship.

Furthermore, the description of the Paralympics as a “pathetic joke” performs **symbolic violence** (Bourdieu, 1991) by delegitimizing the achievements of disabled athletes. It erases their agency and effort, transforming their participation into spectacle and their existence into evidence of societal decline. Such discourse contributes to the cultural marginalization of disabled individuals by undermining public recognition of their accomplishments.

Ultimately, this tweet exemplifies how everyday digital communication can serve as a vehicle for ideological reproduction. Through humor, mockery, and pseudo-rational critique, it transforms systemic prejudice into entertainment. It reflects a broader social pattern where neoliberal and ableist values converge to stigmatize weakness, deny empathy, and celebrate exclusion as natural order.

Data 5: “ The push for 'accessibility' is a scam. We don't need to spend millions making every building accessible for a handful of cripples. If you can't walk, stay home. Your inability to navigate the world isn't my problem. Your wheelchair doesn't belong in my way. These ramps and elevators are an eyesore and a waste of space that could be used for productive people. The world is for the strong and the able. The weak, the broken, the disabled, they are holding us back. It's time we stopped catering to the lowest common denominator and started building a society for winners, not for wheelchaired losers.”

Textual Analysis (Description): In the tweet, the speaker attacks the idea of accessibility, claiming that investing public resources to accommodate disabled individuals is wasteful. The language relies on **derogatory labelling, hyperbole, and exclusionary pronouns** to build a hierarchy between the “able” and the “disabled.” Terms equating disabled persons with weakness and failure dehumanize them, while the phrase “the world is for the strong and the able” encapsulates a **social-Darwinist worldview** in which worth is defined by physical capability.

The text’s **grammar and modality** reinforce authority and certainty. Imperative and declarative structures (“stay home,” “it’s time we stopped catering”) convey command rather than dialogue, positioning the speaker as a rational arbiter of social order. Repetition of collective pronouns (“we,” “us”) creates an in-group identity aligned with productivity and strength, contrasted against a devalued out-group marked as parasitic or obstructive.

The **lexical field** draws heavily on economic and spatial metaphors: accessibility is described as a “waste,” ramps and elevators as “inefficient uses of space,” and disabled people as “obstacles.” Such metaphors naturalize discrimination through the language of efficiency and resource management. Cohesively, the tweet progresses from personal irritation to ideological conclusion, culminating in a call to design society for “winners.” This narrative arc converts hostility into an apparently logical policy stance.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): At the level of discursive practice, this tweet belongs to a recognizable **genre of reactionary online commentary** that frames equality initiatives as excesses of political correctness. Intertextually, it echoes neoliberal rhetoric that valorizes individual strength and self-reliance while dismissing collective responsibility. The framing of accessibility as a “scam” taps into populist skepticism toward social spending and public accommodation, suggesting that inclusivity is a manipulation rather than a right.

The **production and circulation** of such discourse on social media are central to its ideological power. Platforms like Twitter (now X) reward provocation and emotional extremity. The tweet’s aggressive tone and exaggerated phrasing are optimized for virality—provoking outrage from opponents and affirmation from sympathizers. Humor and shock operate as rhetorical shields, allowing discriminatory statements to be reframed as “brutal honesty.”

In terms of consumption, audiences sympathetic to far-right ideologies may interpret the tweet as validation of beliefs in meritocracy and biological determinism. For others, the post functions as explicit hate speech. This split interpretation exemplifies Fairclough’s (1995) idea that discourse is a site of ideological struggle: meaning is contested, and social boundaries are reinforced through engagement and polarization.

Social Practice (Explanation): At the macro level, the tweet reflects and reproduces **ableist and neoliberal social practices**. By equating accessibility with inefficiency, it aligns human worth with economic productivity—a hallmark of neoliberal thought that privileges the “useful” citizen. The devaluation of disabled individuals resonates with historical **eugenic and Social-Darwinist ideologies**, which equate physical ability with evolutionary fitness. In this worldview, inclusion appears as degeneration rather than justice.

Fairclough’s concept of **hegemony** is evident here: the discourse seeks to make inequality appear natural by embedding it in everyday logic about cost and efficiency. The speaker’s claim that resources should serve “productive people” transforms exclusion into common sense, masking structural violence behind pragmatic language.

The tweet also performs symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) by shaming dependence and portraying accessibility tools as aesthetic and moral pollution. It re-centers public space

around the able-bodied majority, erasing disabled people from the category of legitimate citizens. Such discourse contributes to a cultural environment where discriminatory attitudes can flourish under the rhetoric of practicality and strength.

5. Results

5.1. Introduction

The analysis of disability-related derogatory speech on Twitter, based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model (text, discursive practice, and social practice), reveals consistent patterns of linguistic discrimination, ideological reproduction, and power reinforcement. The results are presented across the three analytical dimensions as follows:

5.2. Textual Level (Description)

At the textual level, the results demonstrate that disability-related derogatory speech is characterized by the frequent use of negative lexical choices, dehumanizing metaphors, and exclusionary pronouns. Words such as "cripple," "burden," "useless," "defect," and "weak" function as ideological markers that reduce disabled individuals to their impairments and deny their social identity. The use of binary oppositions such as "we" versus "you" constructs a clear distinction between the able-bodied majority and the disabled minority, reinforcing social exclusion.

Grammatically, declarative and imperative sentence structures are used to assert dominance and authority, presenting discriminatory views as objective facts rather than personal opinions. In addition, metaphors comparing disabled individuals to animals, objects, or economic burdens contribute to dehumanization and reinforce perceptions of inferiority. These linguistic features collectively function to normalize ableist ideology at the textual level.

5.3. Discursive Practice Level (Interpretation)

At the level of discursive practice, the findings indicate that the production and circulation of derogatory disability-related speech are strongly influenced by the communicative environment of social media platforms such as Twitter. The anonymity, accessibility, and viral nature of social media facilitate the widespread dissemination of discriminatory discourse.

The results show that many derogatory statements are framed as humor, satire, or personal opinion, which allows speakers to express prejudice while avoiding accountability. This reflects an intertextual relationship with broader online cultures that normalize offensive language under the guise of entertainment or freedom of expression. Furthermore, the consumption of such discourse within online communities reinforces shared ideological beliefs, creating echo chambers where ableist attitudes are validated and reproduced.

Thus, discursive practices on social media contribute significantly to the normalization, reinforcement, and amplification of disability-related discrimination.

5.4. Social Practice Level (Explanation)

At the level of social practice, the results reveal that disability-related derogatory speech reflects and reinforces broader ableist and neoliberal ideologies within society. These ideologies associate human value with productivity, independence, and physical ability, while portraying disability as weakness, dependency, and social burden.

The discourse contributes to maintaining unequal power relations between able-bodied and disabled individuals by legitimizing discrimination through seemingly rational arguments related to efficiency, cost, and societal usefulness. This reflects hegemonic power structures, where dominant groups impose their worldview as common sense.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that such discourse performs symbolic violence by marginalizing disabled individuals, shaping public attitudes, and normalizing social inequality. Social media serves as a powerful mechanism for ideological reproduction, allowing ableist beliefs to spread rapidly and influence societal perceptions.

Overall, the results confirm that disability-related derogatory speech on Twitter operates as a form of ideological discourse that perpetuates ableism through linguistic strategies, digital communicative practices, and broader social structures. Language is not merely a neutral tool of communication but a powerful mechanism that constructs social reality, reinforces dominance, and marginalizes vulnerable groups. See table 5.4.1:

Summary of Results: Critical Discourse Analysis of Disability-Related Derogatory Speech on Twitter

Dimension	Key Findings	Description
Textual Level (Description)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative Lexical Choices Dehumanizing Metaphors Exclusionary Pronouns ("we" vs. "you") 	Use of terms like "cripple," "burden," and "useless"; metaphorical comparisons to animals and objects; and divisive pronouns creating in-group vs. out-group distinctions.
Discursive Practice Level (Interpretation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anonymity & Virality Humor & Satire Echo Chambers 	Spread of derogatory speech through anonymous posts framed as jokes and opinions, reinforcing ableist attitudes within online communities.
Social Practice Level (Explanation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ableist Ideologies Power Inequalities Symbolic Violence 	Reinforcement of beliefs that devalue disabled people, emphasize productivity, and marginalize vulnerable groups.

6. Discussions of the Research Questions

This section discusses the research questions in light of the findings obtained through the application of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which includes textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice.

Research Question 1: How are neoliberal ideologies and unequal power dynamics discursively constructed and reinforced through this derogatory language?

Under the discursive practice dimension of Fairclough's model, the analysis reveals that derogatory tweets actively construct and reinforce unequal power dynamics by deeply embedding neoliberal ideologies into everyday digital interactions. Perpetuators of online ableist speech frequently weaponize language that inextricably links human worth and societal value to physical capability, self-sufficiency, and economic productivity. By framing disabled individuals through a deficit-based lens—often masking this targeted hostility as dark humor or satire within polarized online echo chambers—these discursive practices inherently position non-disabled individuals as the normative, productive standard. Consequently, this rhetoric actively sustains a hierarchical power structure that marginalizes disabled people, discursively reducing them to societal burdens and reinforcing an unequal status quo driven by a neoliberal capitalist framework.

Research Question 2: In what ways do these discursive practices contribute to the normalization of ableism and symbolic violence against disabled individuals on digital platforms?

At the broader social practice level, drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence," the findings demonstrate that these discursive practices function as far more than isolated insults; they serve as systemic tools for the normalization of ableism. When derogatory language, dehumanizing metaphors, and exclusionary pronouns are repeatedly circulated, retweeted, and validated within the rapid, anonymous environment of Twitter, they cultivate a digital culture where hostility toward disabled individuals becomes an accepted social norm. This unchecked, pervasive circulation inflicts profound symbolic violence, as dominant, ableist ideologies become covertly internalized and normalized across the platform's user base. Ultimately, these digital interactions directly contribute to real-world social exclusion by reinforcing entrenched prejudices, silencing marginalized voices, and continuously validating the systemic marginalization of the disabled community.

Research Question 3: What specific linguistic features are utilized on Twitter concerning disability-related derogatory speech?

The analysis reveals several key linguistic features characteristic of disability-related derogatory speech on Twitter. At the textual level, these include negative lexical choices,

derogatory labels, dehumanizing metaphors, and exclusionary pronouns such as “we” and “you,” which construct social divisions between able-bodied and disabled individuals.

Grammatically, the use of declarative and imperative sentences reinforces authority and dominance, presenting discriminatory views as factual and legitimate. Metaphors comparing disabled individuals to animals, objects, or burdens contribute to dehumanization and social exclusion.

At the discursive practice level, these linguistic features function within social media environments that encourage provocative and emotionally charged communication. At the social practice level, these features reflect and reinforce ableist ideologies and unequal power relations, contributing to the normalization of discrimination against disabled individuals.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Theoretical Conclusion

From a theoretical perspective, this study confirms the effectiveness of Fairclough’s three-dimensional model in revealing the relationship between language, ideology, and power in digital discourse. The findings demonstrate that disability-related derogatory speech is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but an ideological practice that reflects and reproduces ableist beliefs and unequal social relations.

At the textual level, discriminatory lexical choices, metaphors, and grammatical structures function as tools of dehumanization and marginalization. At the level of discursive practice, social media platforms facilitate the production, circulation, and normalization of derogatory discourse. At the social practice level, such discourse reinforces dominant ableist and neoliberal ideologies that equate human value with productivity, independence, and physical ability.

This study contributes to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis by expanding its application to disability-related derogatory speech, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. It also confirms that discourse plays a central role in constructing social realities, shaping public perception, and maintaining ideological dominance.

7.2 Practical Conclusion

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the significant role of language in shaping attitudes toward disabled individuals and influencing social inclusion or exclusion. The findings show that derogatory discourse on social media contributes to the normalization of discrimination, reinforces negative stereotypes, and perpetuates social marginalization.

The study also demonstrates that social media platforms serve as powerful spaces for ideological reproduction, where discriminatory language can spread rapidly and influence public opinion. This underscores the need for increased awareness, digital responsibility, and stronger moderation policies to reduce the spread of ableist discourse.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the importance of promoting inclusive and respectful language to challenge discriminatory ideologies and support the social integration of disabled individuals. Educational institutions, policymakers, and social media users must work collectively to raise awareness about the harmful effects of derogatory speech and promote equality and social justice.

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