A Study on the Discursive Construction of Economic Growth in World Economic Forum Discourse

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Abstract— *The World Economic Forum has compiled the content of global economic conferences as well as perspectives on various economic issues. Its focus spans multiple domains, including economics, technology, the environment, and society. This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and adopts a corpus-based linguistic methodology, selecting economic discourse from economic meetings centered on economic growth as the corpus, aiming to explore the discursive construction of economic growth in the World Economic Forum and its ideological implications. As an interdisciplinary and increasingly prominent subject in linguistic research, economic discourse has seen a growing body of studies in recent years. This paper summarizes the research background and content related to economic discourse, while also organizing theoretical and analytical frameworks along with research methodologies. The objective is to investigate how the World Economic Forum employs language to construct the concept of economic growth and to analyze the underlying ideologies and power dynamics within this discourse. This study offers valuable insights for policymakers into how discourse can be used to shape public expectations and enhance the legitimacy of economic policies.*

Keywords— *Economic discourse, Discourse analysis, Economic growth, Discursive construction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The World Economic Forum (WEF) is a globally influential international organization dedicated to promoting economic growth, global cooperation, and sustainable development. Among its various areas of focus, economic growth has emerged as a prominent topic. Economic growth generally refers to the increase in the total output of goods and services in a country or region over a certain period, typically measured by the growth rate of GDP or per capita GDP. In WEF reports and articles, discussions on economic growth go beyond traditional GDP metrics, incorporating perspectives such as sustainability, innovation, inclusiveness, and globalization.

As a discourse system that facilitates communication in the economic domain, economic discourse can be used to analyze economic theories, phenomena, and relevant policies. To a certain extent, it reflects the discursive power of both enterprises and nations. Compared with economic discourse, more academic attention has been paid to political discourse, cultural discourse, and corporate identity construction discourse both domestically and internationally. Economic discourse can be classified into macro, meso, and micro levels, corresponding respectively to national, corporate, and individual perspectives. The economic discourse on economic growth presented in the World Economic Forum primarily focuses on the national

level. This discourse not only reflects the international community's views on economic development but also involves issues of ideology, power relations, and global governance.

Deligiaouri, Anastasia (2019) studied the construction of economic crisis discourse and media narratives, revealing the key "nodal points" of the Greek crisis discourse[4]. She emphasized the crucial role of media discourse during times of crisis, where information dissemination and news framing can significantly influence citizens, policies, and society as a whole. This suggests that studying the construction of economic discourse and its underlying ideologies can help further explore how the World Economic Forum uses language to construct the concept of economic growth and analyze the associated ideological and discursive power structures.

Preis, Jiří and Klika, David (2024) conducted a study on WEF texts based on the themes of sustainability and social media[15]. They examined sustainability articles published between 2016 and 2020, analyzing how audiences perceive sustainability and how the concept is shaped through language in the public sphere. Similarly, analyzing the discursive construction and ideology behind the theme of economic growth can help us better understand the ideological implications and discursive power embedded in this topic. The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), proposed by Ruth Wodak and her team, is a research paradigm that integrates interdisciplinary theories and methods. It combines the social, political, and historical contexts of discourse with macro-level contextual analysis, discursive strategies, and micro-level linguistic realizations.

This study adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach to explore:

(1) The specific realizations and operational mechanisms of economic discourse;

(2) The underlying ideologies and power relations in economic discourse;

(3) The discursive strategies employed in economic discourse.

The study first reviews relevant literature on economic discourse, then outlines the theoretical foundations and analytical framework of the research, followed by a summary of the methodology. It aims to uncover the

identity construction and ideological expressions embedded in economic discourse.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, international researchers have been continuously exploring the study of economic discourse. Zelentsova (2018), based on the attribute of discourse characteristics, divides economic discourse into three types: (1) institution-based, such as discourse in areas like business activities, banking, insurance, marketing, auditing, accounting, and securities trading; (2) discourse on economic topics by non-specialists and company leaders; and (3) genre-based, such as newspaper articles, economics papers, and economics textbooks that focus on economic topics[25]. Research on economic discourse is often conducted from the intersection of linguistics and economics, with theoretical frameworks often combining linguistics, management studies, and economics. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an important research theory used in this analysis. Criticism aims to change or even eliminate the conditions that lead to false or distorted consciousness. Criticism brings to light what was previously hidden, starting a reflective process within individuals or groups, leading to liberation from past suppression and domination (Connerton, cited in Fowler, 1987:483)[6]. Among them, Critical Discourse Analysis is an important research perspective. Cummings, Seferiadis & Haan (2020) used CDA to analyze the discourse of the private sector, exploring the political stance reflected in private sector discourse[3]. Clearly, these studies not only reveal the ideologies and power relations behind economic discourse, but also demonstrate the practicality of CDA in understanding economic texts. Economic growth, as an important issue currently being addressed at the national level, reflects the national image and ideology constructed around it, showing the attention and attitudes of countries towards economic growth.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discourse Theory, as two closely related yet distinct theoretical frameworks, serve as important approaches to the study of discursive construction. Current research on discourse construction and ideology is primarily divided into two branches: Critical Discourse Analysis and Discourse Theory (Freeden, Michael, 2020)[7]. In studies of economic

discourse, the CDA perspective tends to explore features such as ideology and power rather than focusing on explanatory frameworks, whereas Discourse Theory emphasizes specific interpretive frameworks for economic issues. In recent years, economic discourse research has become increasingly diversified, with scholars examining it from various contextual perspectives. However, three main limitations persist: (1) Research corpora remain relatively homogeneous, with most studies relying on news journals and reports while overlooking representative texts such as those from the World Economic Forum; (2) Research perspectives are relatively narrow, predominantly concentrating on national and corporate levels, with insufficient attention paid to the micro-level (individual level); (3) Ideological analysis of discourse remains largely descriptive, making it difficult to uncover the underlying power structures and broader social implications. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by adopting a discourse-analytic perspective to investigate how the World Economic Forum constructs the concept of economic growth through language and to analyze the ideologies and power relations embedded within its discourse.

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

3.1 Discourse-Historical Approach

Since the early 1990s, scholars such as Stubbs and Gerbig (1993)[21], and Hardt-Mautner (1995) have attempted to apply corpus methods to CDA[8]. At present, corpus-based CDA research paradigms have begun to attract widespread attention in academic circles in China. Through discourse analysis, researchers can further uncover the relationship between language, power, and ideology. As a research methodology, CDA comprises three analytical dimensions: discourse events (micro-level), discourse practices (meso-level), and social structures (macro-level), aiming to reveal how social ideologies operate and how social power changes (Van Dijk, 1993)[23]. As one of the major approaches within CDA, the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) focuses on social issues, emphasizes the exploration of discourse strategies, and highlights the importance of situating texts within their socio-political context. It is shown in Table1 that Reisigl and Wodak (2001) systematically reviewed the DHA research paradigm and summarized five types of discourse strategies involved in language analysis: referential strategies, predicative strategies, argumentative strategies, perspectivization strategies, intensification and mitigation strategies[16].

Table 1: A selection of discursive strategies (adapted from Reisigl & Wodak)

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
referential/ nomination	discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events, and processes/actions	. membership categorization devices, deictics, . tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches . verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions
predication	discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena/events/processes, and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	. stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or posit (e.g., in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional relative clauses, conjunctional clauses, infinitive clauses a participial clauses or groups) □ . explicit predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/ pronouns □ . collocations □ . explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms) □ . allusions, evocations, and presuppositions/ implicatures . other

argumentation	justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness	. topoi (formal or more content-related) . fallacies
Perspectivization/ framing or discourse representation	positioning speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance	. ☐deictics ☐ . ☐direct, indirect or free indirect speech ☐ . quotation marks, discourse markers/particles ☐ . metaphors ☐ . animating prosody ☐ . other
intensification, mitigation	Modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances	. diminutives or augmentatives . (modal) particles, tag questions, use of the subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, etc. . hyperboles, litotes, ☐ indirect speech acts (e.g., question instead of assertion) . verbs of saying, feeling, thinking . other

This paper focuses on how the World Economic Forum uses discourse strategies in texts on economic growth to construct identity and to uncover the underlying ideologies. Therefore, the framework of discourse strategies within the DHA approach in CDA provides an appropriate research foundation for this study.

3.2 Analytical Framework

Given the inherent subjectivity in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study also incorporates the method of corpus analysis. As Nartey (2019) points out, corpus linguistics can be applied to CDA, and Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis (CBCDA) provides a powerful methodological tool for discourse analysts and corpus linguists alike to address research questions related to discourse representation[13].

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) features a three-dimensional analytical structure:

(1) identifying the specific content or topics of a discourse;

(2) analyzing the discursive strategies; and

(3) examining the linguistic means, including both types of linguistic devices and their context-dependent realizations (tokens).

In addition, DHA involves four contextual layers:

(1) Immediate Co-text, referring to the linguistic environment within the discourse itself;

(2) Intertextual and Interdiscursive Relations, concerning references, responses, or imitations among different discourses;

(3) Situational Context, which includes social variables and institutional frameworks, such as the time, place, audience, and speaker identity;

(4) Broader Sociopolitical and Historical Context, encompassing wider social, political, and historical backgrounds.

Meanwhile, the DHA proceeds recursively through a series of analytical steps. In order to examine how the World Economic Forum (WEF) constructs discourse and ideology surrounding economic growth, the following eight steps are typically involved:

(1)Literature Review and Theoretical Preparation: reviewing studies related to "economic growth discourse" and the connection between growth and ideology;

(2)Systematic Collection of Corpus and Contextual Information: selecting recent articles from the WEF website related to "economic growth";

(3)Corpus Selection and Preparation: choosing representative texts for in-depth analysis;

(4)Formulating Research Questions and Hypotheses: e.g., How does the WEF discursively construct "economic growth"? What ideological tendencies are embedded?

(5)Preliminary Qualitative Analysis: tagging keywords and identifying initial discursive strategies;

(6)In-depth Case Analysis: conducting close readings of one or more texts, combined with keyword distribution and corpus statistics (with the help of corpus   tools);

(7)Critical Interpretation and Explanation: analyzing the underlying power relations and ideological constructions;

(8)Applying the Results to Real-world Contexts: using the findings to discuss the   ideological mechanisms of international organizational discourse and to provide critical suggestions or reflections.

According to different purposes, texts employ different discursive strategies and linguistic means. By applying DHA, this study investigates how the WEF constructs the concept of economic growth through discourse, what ideologies are reflected or implied, and what identities and roles are constructed. DHA emphasizes multidimensionality, interdisciplinarity, and a combination of critical and empirical approaches. Through this systematic methodology, it is possible not only to reveal how discourse exerts power, produces inequality, and constructs identity in social contexts, but also to offer researchers a potential pathway to link language studies with social transformation. At the same time, Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework also serves as a crucial theoretical foundation for this study. Building upon prior research, Fairclough redefined discourse by arguing that it not only reflects social reality but also actively constructs it. He advocated examining discourse through the lens of historical transformation, integrating linguistic analysis with social theory.

Fairclough (1989), based on systemic functional linguistics, pointed out that CDA can be divided into three steps: (1)Description of Linguistic Features: The first step involves describing the linguistic form characteristics of the text and revealing how the speaker uses language to achieve their communicative goals through these features. This includes examining the specific words, phrases, and grammatical structures chosen by the speaker. (2)Interpretation of Ideological Meanings: The second step entails explaining the ideological meanings represented by the specific context in which the text is produced and understood. This can be seen as the practical level of the discourse, where the conveyed meaning can vary depending on the context. It indicates that economists may use euphemisms or indirect language during conferences to express their true intentions based on different contexts. (3)Explanation of Ideological Intervention: The third step involves explaining how different contexts may have an intervening or influencing role on ideology. For instance, sentences with different structures may highlight different emphases, leading to variations in meaning. This suggests that the way information is structured can subtly influence how it is perceived and interpreted. Based on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study first conducts an analysis of the discourse features of economic growth discourse, focusing on the collocations and semantic prosody of keywords such as "economic growth." It then moves to the level of discourse practice to interpret the ideological orientations behind specific discourses, such as neoliberalism, state interventionism, and the concept of sustainable development. Finally, from the perspective of social practice, the study examines how these discourses exert influence in policy-making, media representation, and public discussion.Therefore, analyzing the discourse at economics academic conferences from the perspective of critical discourse analysis theory allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the true intentions behind the speakers' words.

IV.   METHODOLOGY

4.1 Corpus Data

The research corpus was derived from economic growth-themed articles published by the World Economic Forum. Following a chronological selection approach, we collected thirty articles archived in 2025 as the raw corpus. These texts cover diverse national contexts of economic growth, ensuring representational diversity in the research materials.The textual data underwent preprocessing using EditPad Lite8 as a cleaning tool, resulting in refined corpora for final analysis. The collected materials were subsequently compiled into a specialized Economic Growth Discourse Corpus , comprising approximately 49,000 words.

4.2 Research Method

This study adopts a corpus-based research method and has constructed a corpus of economic growth discourse by collecting thirty economic texts published in 2025 that focus on the theme of economic growth. This study, based

on discourse-historical analysis as the research framework, uses two research tools: WordSmith Tools 6.0 and UAM Corpus Tool 3.3. WordSmith Tools 6.0, developed by British linguist Mike Scott, is a classic corpus analysis software. Using WordSmith Tools 6.0, the established corpus undergoes thematic word analysis, collocation analysis, index analysis, and retrieval statistics. The UAM Corpus Tool, designed by Mick O'Donnell, is a powerful software for annotating and analyzing text and image languages. It allows for detailed linguistic annotation, analysis, and statistics. This corpus tool offers two methods for annotating text corpora: text coding and paragraph coding. Text coding is primarily used to define characteristics such as language type, text type, and register, while paragraph coding allows users to segment text into several paragraphs and assign features, such as emotional attributes, to each paragraph. Nurlela et al. (2025) used the UAM Corpus Tool to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the attitudes expressed in 10 international news articles reporting on the Kanjuruhan tragedy[14]. Using the UAM Corpus Tool to study the construction of economic discourse and ideology allows for a deeper understanding of how language shapes economic realities and conveys power relations, offering significant value in critical discourse analysis (CDA) and systemic functional linguistics (SFL). In summary, using corpus tools in academic research can greatly enhance our ability to efficiently analyze the structure of discourse.

V.   RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Economic Discourse Construction

Several scholars proposed that the first focus of economic discourse research is the study of discourse characteristics. International scholars have also shown a strong interest in the study of economic discourse characteristics. Victoria V. Sibul et al. (2019) selected 100 articles from popular economic media as the subject of discourse analysis, exploring the function of economic discourse in modern economic problem communication[19]. Roca (2015) studied the discourse characteristics in the "Development Issues" section of the Spanish NGO 2012–2013 Annual Report, and concluded that the discourse characteristics reflected a trend of weakening non-official cooperation in the context of the economic crisis[18].

Regarding the study of economic discourse construction with the theme of economic growth, it not only indicates that economic growth discourse construction can be an academic product, but also suggests that through specific discourse frameworks, particular forms of economic growth can be promoted. Using WordSmith's Concord function to retrieve discourse on the theme of economic growth, a total of 2,400 results containing "economic growth" were retrieved. Among these, the most frequent collocations with "economic growth" were "job" in first place and "strategies" in second place. This suggests that the issues emphasized in the economic growth discourse mainly focus on employment. Therefore, in constructing the concept of economic growth, job creation is regarded as an important goal of economic growth. In this context, discussions about economic growth often combine how to create more job opportunities to improve people's living standards, reduce poverty, and alleviate social inequality. In terms of policy, this may encourage governments to stimulate investment, provide subsidies, and implement incentive measures to promote employment growth, thereby reinforcing a market-oriented economic growth model.

The combination of "strategies" and "economic growth" reflects, to some extent, the strategic construction of economic growth discourse, thus promoting certain strategic components such as technological innovation and market opening. In summary, from the common collocations of "job" and "strategies," it is evident that the construction of economic growth discourse is highly focused on "employment" and "strategic planning," reflecting a close connection between economic growth and a market-oriented approach. Economic growth is viewed not only as a means to increase employment opportunities but also as a strategically planned objective, typically intertwined with issues such as technological innovation, market openness, and international competition.

5.2 Ideology

Linguistic ideology is a relatively new research field. It originated in the 1960s and 1970s with the spoken ethnography school, which emphasized the cultural concepts of language as these concepts were reflected in culturally distinctive speech patterns. Meanwhile, influential linguistic editors Joseph and Taylor (1990)

raised the question of the ideological foundations of "linguistic science" itself[9]. Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) demonstrated how much the field had developed by the mid-1990s. Woolard (1998) provided a broader historical review of it[24]. Also, in later years, scholars like Kroskrity (2004) and Keane (2007) introduced "semiotic ideology" as a related but broader concept[10][11]. Silverstein (1979) offered an influential formulation of "linguistic ideologies" as "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use"[20]. Scholars have also produced substantial research on the ideological construction of images of enterprises, states, leaders, and so on. Lomeu Gomes, R. (2020) conducted research on multilingual families, pointing out that strategies for citing named languages can be linked to ideologies of one person, one language, one country, and also demonstrated how these strategies help us understand how family members navigate their complex national affiliations and persuade their multilingual selves to exist[12]. Vallada, A. D. (2020) discussed the theoretical connection between gender stylization and linguistic ideology, attempting to understand how linguistic ideology operates on gender stylization to produce and legitimize gender differences[22]. Therefore, through discourse analysis, researchers can further reveal the relationship between language, power, and ideology.

The discourse of economic growth emphasizes the relationship between economic growth and social employment. The close connection between "economic growth" and "job" highlights the causal chain of "growth-employment," which may reflect a strong focus on market freedom, competition, and labor participation. Economic growth, as an important means of improving social welfare, also reflects concerns about the quality of life and social stability. Therefore, such a discourse could lead to the result of promoting social progress through the creation of employment opportunities. The association between economic growth and "strategies" suggests that economic growth always requires clear strategies to achieve stable growth within the global economic system. These strategies may involve free trade, investment incentives, and other mechanisms, revealing the discourse's focus on global markets, innovation-driven growth, and capital flow. This type of discourse typically views economic growth as an achievable goal through proper planning and strategies, reflecting trust in macroeconomic regulation, market mechanisms, and technological innovation. However, an overemphasis on strategy might overlook some of the negative effects such strategies could bring, such as environmental issues or widening wealth gaps.

Thus, the high-frequency co-occurrence of "economic growth," "job," and "strategies" reveals a dual focus within the discourse of economic growth on both "employment opportunities" and "paths to achieve growth." This combination likely conveys an ideological balance between market mechanisms and government intervention. On one hand, it emphasizes how market freedom and innovative strategies can promote job creation; on the other hand, it may involve certain government regulation and policy interventions to ensure that the benefits of growth reach the broader population.

VI.   CONCLUSION

All speakers use language in different contexts, under different circumstances, for different purposes (Biber, 2009: 9)[1]. The economic discourse in the World Economic Forum is precisely the discourse used for different purposes in different situations. As a popular topic in the field of economics, economic growth has attracted the attention of leaders from various countries. Therefore, studying economic growth discourse helps us understand the theoretical foundation behind economic policies and reveals the true motives of these policies, such as their policy direction and institutional intentions. In fact, under the context of globalization, different countries formulate relevant economic policies (such as stimulating consumption, encouraging investment, reducing taxes, etc.) based on their own economic growth concepts, which in turn affect the actual performance of economic growth.

From the perspectives of discourse construction and ideology, the study of economic growth discourse, from the viewpoint of discourse theory, focuses on the construction and representation of discourse, specifically how language is constructed in the social and cultural context and how its use influences individuals and groups' understanding of a certain economic event. For example, how do economists or leaders use specific terms to express positive or negative

meanings? In the construction of economic growth discourse, different social actors play different roles, and the discourse theory perspective focuses on how these social actors, playing different roles, use language to build consensus and, in turn, influence the formation of social realities. Fowler argues that linguistics, as a descriptive discipline, has no right to comment on the materials it analyzes; it neither prescribes usage nor evaluates the things it investigates. The purpose of critical linguistics is to practice an understanding of the value of language use.

From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, the study of economic growth discourse focuses on how language interacts with power, social structures, ideologies, and inequality. For example, how does economic growth discourse support existing power relations? Through critical discourse analysis, the ideological components embedded in economic growth discourse can be revealed, and its social and political intentions can be analyzed. In the context of globalization, economic growth discourse involves political struggles between countries, the interests of multinational corporations, and inequalities between social classes. Critical discourse analysis can help scholars understand how discourse works in different social groups and how language is used to suppress negative voices. At the same time, by analyzing the implicit values in economic growth discourse, it can be revealed whether these discourses conceal issues such as unemployment and poverty, thus exacerbating social inequality.

Regarding the research methods of economic growth discourse, this study first adopts the corpus-based method as the research method with discourse-historical approach as the conceptual framework. Based on the establishment of a corpus, the study then uses Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to analyze economic growth discourse, aiming to explore how discourse reflects social reality and how it constructs social reality. Corpus linguistics offers a new approach to linguistic research by using authentic language data as the object of study. From a macro perspective, it analyzes a large amount of linguistic data to identify patterns of language use. Therefore, it is evident that this method enables us to understand the language surrounding economic growth in a more systematic and comprehensive manner.

Rivera, M., & Zucher, F. (2019) suggest that growth discourse is primarily governmental, yet paradoxically marginalized (decorative), without argumentative reasoning (dogmatic)[17]. These findings cannot be fully explained by communicative strategies or positions; instead, they point to the effects of non-historicized integrative discourse. Discourse, as a powerful tool for constructing ideology, influences policy-making, public opinion, and global economic dynamics. By analyzing how economic growth is framed through discourse, we can uncover the hidden power structures, political motivations, and social values, thus gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying factors behind economic decision-making.

With the widespread adoption of digital technology, the way discourse is constructed and its influence are also changing. The spread of economic discourse on social media platforms has not only accelerated the flow of information but also allowed more social groups to participate in economic discussions, fostering the emergence of diverse voices and dialogues. How to identify and deconstruct the ideologies hidden behind economic growth discourse has become an urgent issue in today's society. The study of economic growth discourse construction and ideology in the context of the global economy makes us realize that discourse not only shapes certain economic behaviors but also, to some extent, shapes our understanding and perception of the global economy. It reveals the complex role of language in reflecting and shaping social and economic realities.

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