

Abstract

This master's thesis investigates the discourses surrounding Indigenous identity in the context of Australia's 2023 referendum on the "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice." The study aims to explore how the "Yes" and "No" campaigns in the referendum shaped representations of Indigenous identity, employing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). Australia's colonial past and ongoing discrimination and marginalisation against its Indigenous communities underline the importance of this research. The 2023 referendum aimed to establish an advisory body to give Indigenous communities a Voice in governmental decisions affecting them and shape more effective policies to combat institutional discrimination. However, the referendum was rejected, with a 60.06% majority voting "No", remaining the only Western country that does not recognise its First People in the constitution. This study examines how each campaign used language to influence public perception and perpetuate power structures. Utilizing the DHA framework composed of five sections of analysis, this research focuses on the narratives and strategies employed in the "Yes" and "No" campaign materials that were created to be presented in the referendum booklet, which was widely distributed nationwide. These materials reflect the public information landscape and serve as primary data sources for this thesis. The research draws on critical theories, such as Postcolonial Theory and Critical Race Theory, and applies insights from discourse analysis theorists such as Michel Foucault, Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl to understand how colonial legacies continue to shape discourse and identity in Australia. The findings aim to contribute to broader discussions on reconciliation, recognition, and the role of discourse in shaping societal attitudes towards Indigenous peoples in Australia. This thesis also aims to highlight the ongoing impact of colonialism on modern Australian society and emphasizes the need for meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities to foster genuine reconciliation.