

Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough explains that Critical discourse analysis (CDA) brings the critical tradition of social analysis into language studies and contributes to critical social analysis a particular focus on discourse and on relations between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth). Critical social analysis can be understood as normative and explanatory critique. It is normative critique in that it does not simply describe existing realities but also evaluates them, assesses the extent to which they match up to various values, which are taken (more or less contentiously) to be fundamental for just or decent societies (e.g. certain standards – material but also political and cultural – of human well-being). It is explanatory critique in that it does not simply describe existing realities but seeks to explain them, for instance by showing them to be effects of structures or mechanisms or forces that the analyst postulates and whose reality s/he seeks to test out (e.g. inequalities in wealth, income and access to various social goods might be explained as an effect of mechanisms and forces associated with ‘capitalism’).

CL (critical linguistics) and CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse). Most critical discourse analysts would thus endorse Habermas's claim that 'language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. In so far as the legitimations of power relations, . . . are not articulated,... language is also ideological' One of the founders of critical discourse analysis (CDA), Norman Fairclough, has described it as aiming to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power.

The word *constituting* in Fairclough's definition as in the expression 'constituting the world in meaning' needs explaining. Fairclough here is drawing on a key insight of Foucault's that 'discourse is in an active relation to reality, that language signifies reality in the sense of constructing meanings for it, rather than that discourse is in a passive relation to reality, with language merely referring to objects which are taken to be given in reality'.

The dictionary meaning of 'constitute' is 'to be; to go together to make'. Utilizing this definition, Fairclough's words might be rewritten: 'Discourse(s) make the world meaningful.' Or more strongly: 'Only in discourse is the world made

meaningful.' There are clearly epistemological questions here, which I will simply raise. Questions such as: 'Is the world knowable outside of discourse?' and 'Can meaning making take place outside of socially constructed signifying systems?'

Summed up in a number of bullet points, CDA:

- views a prevailing social order as historically situated and therefore relative, socially constructed and changeable.
- views a prevailing social order and social processes as constituted and sustained less by the will of individuals than by the pervasiveness of particular constructions or versions of reality - often referred to as discourses.
- views discourse as coloured by and productive of ideology (however 'ideology' is conceptualized).
- views power in society not so much as imposed on individual subjects as an inevitable *effect* of a way particular discursive configurations or arrangements privilege the status and positions of some people over others.
- views human subjectivity as at least in part constructed or inscribed by discourse, and discourse as manifested in the various ways people *are* and *enact* the sorts of people they are.
- views reality as textually and intertextually mediated via verbal and non-verbal language systems, and texts as sites for both the inculcation and the contestation of discourses.
- views the systematic analysis and interpretation of texts as potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonize human subjects through often covert position calls.

An act can be characterised as CDA:

- *analytical* because we have conducted a detailed systematic examination of a particular object with a view to arriving at one or more underlying principles.
- *discourse* oriented in that this analysis has been concerned with language in use (one sense of the word 'discourse') and with the way in which patterns of meaning (as in stories that make the world meaningful) are socially constructed (the other sense of the word 'discourse').
- *critical* because a central outcome of the act of analysis is to enable consideration of the social effects of the meanings a reader is being positioned or called upon to subscribe to in the act of reading, and the contestation of these meanings.

History of CDA

CDA as a network of scholars emerged in the early 1990s, following a small symposium in Amsterdam, in January 1991. By chance and through the support of the University of Amsterdam, Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak spent two days together, and had the wonderful opportunity to discuss theories and methods of discourse analysis and

specifically CDA. The meeting made it possible for everyone to confront each other with the very distinct and different approaches, which still mark the different approaches today. In this process of group formation, differences and sameness were exposed; differences towards other theories and methodologies in discourse analysis, and sameness in a programmatic way which could frame the differing theoretical approaches of the various biographies and schools of the respective scholars.

Of course, the start of this CDA network is also marked by the launch of van Dijk's journal *Discourse and Society* (1990) as well as through several books, like *Language and Power* by Norman Fairclough (1989), *Language, Power and Ideology* by Ruth Wodak (1989) or Teun van Dijk's first book on racism, *Prejudice in Discourse* (1984).

The 1970s saw the emergence of a form of discourse and text analysis that recognized the role of language in structuring power relations in society. At that time, much linguistic research elsewhere was focused on formal aspects of language which constituted the linguistic competence of speakers and which could theoretically be isolated from specific instances of language use (Chomsky, 1957). Where the relation between language and context was considered, as in pragmatics (Levinson, 1983), with a focus on speakers' pragmatic/sociolinguistic competence, sentences and components of sentences were still regarded as the basic units. Much sociolinguistic research at the time was aimed at describing and explaining language variation, language change and the structures of communicative interaction, with limited attention to issues of social hierarchy and power (Labov, 1972; Hymes, 1972). In such a context, attention to texts, their production and interpretation and their relation to societal impulses and structures, signalled a very different kind of interest.

Kress (1990: 84-97) gives an account of the theoretical foundations and sources of critical linguistics. He indicates that the term CL was 'quite self-consciously adapted' (1990: 88) from its social-philosophical counterpart, as a label by the group of scholars working at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s.

Five Common Features

1 . The character of social and cultural processes and structures are partly linguistic-discursive:

Discursive practices – through which texts are *produced* (created) and *consumed* (received and interpreted) – are viewed as an important form of social practice which contributes to the *constitution* of the social world including social identities and social relations. It is partly through discursive practices in everyday life (processes of text production and consumption) that social and cultural reproduction and change take place. It follows that some societal phenomena are not of a linguistic discursive character.

The aim of critical discourse analysis is to shed light on the linguistic discursive dimension of social and cultural phenomena and processes of change in late modernity. Research in critical discourse analysis has covered areas such as organisational analysis (e.g. Mumby and Clair 1997), pedagogy (Chouliaraki 1998), mass communication and racism, nationalism and identity (e.g. Chouliaraki 1999; van Dijk 1991; Wodak et al.1999), mass communication and economy (Richardson 1998), the spread of market practices (Fairclough 1993) and mass communication, democracy and politics.

2 . Discourse is both constitutive and constituted:

For critical discourse analysts, discourse is a form of social practice which both *constitutes* the social world and is *constituted* by other social practices. As social practice, discourse is in a *dialectical* relationship with other social dimensions. It does not just contribute to the shaping and reshaping of social structures but also reflects them.

3 . Language use should be empirically analysed within social context:

Critical discourse analysis engages in concrete, linguistic textual analysis of language use in social interaction. This distinguishes it from both Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory which does not carry out systematic, empirical studies of language use, and from discursive psychology which carries out rhetorical but not linguistic studies of language use.

4 . Discourse functions ideologically:

In critical discourse analysis, it is claimed that discursive practices contribute to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups – for example, between social classes, women and men, ethnic minorities and the majority. These effects are understood as *ideological* effects. In contrast to discourse theorists, including Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe, critical discourse analysis does not diverge completely from the Marxist tradition on this point. Some critical discourse analytical approaches do ascribe to a Foucauldian view of power as a force which creates subjects and agents – that is, as a *productive* force – rather than as a property possessed by individuals, which they exert over others. But, at the same time, they diverge from Foucault in that they enlist the concept of ideology to theorise the subjugation of one social group to other social groups. The research focus of critical discourse analysis is accordingly *both* the discursive practices which construct representations of the world, social subjects and social relations, including power relations, *and* the role that these discursive practices play in furthering the interests of particular social groups.

5 . Critical Research:

Critical discourse analysis does not, therefore, understand itself as politically neutral (as objectivist social science does), but as a critical approach which is

politically committed to social change. In the name of emancipation, critical discourse analytical approaches take the side of oppressed social groups. Critique aims to uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal power relations, with the overall goal of harnessing the results of critical discourse analysis to the struggle for radical social change. Fairclough's interest in 'explanatory critique' and 'critical language awareness', to which we will return, is directed towards the achievement of this goal.

Scope & Principles of CDA

Critical discourse analysis examines the use of discourse in relation to social and cultural issues such as race, politics, gender and identity and asks why the discourse is used in a particular way and what the implications are of this kind of use. *Critical discourse analysis* explores the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs. It explores issues such as gender, ethnicity, cultural difference, ideology and identity and how these are both constructed and reflected in texts. It also investigates ways in which language constructs and is constructed by social relationships. A critical analysis may include a detailed textual analysis and move from there to an explanation and interpretation of the analysis. It might proceed from there to deconstruct and challenge the text(s) being examined. This may include tracing underlying ideologies from the linguistic features of a text, unpacking particular biases and ideological presuppositions underlying the text, and relating the text to other texts and to people's experiences and beliefs.

Social and political issues are constructed and reflected in discourse

The first of Fairclough and Wodak's principles is that critical discourse analysis addresses social and political issues and examines ways in which these are constructed and reflected in the use of certain discourse strategies and choices.

Power relations are negotiated and performed through discourse

The next principle of critical discourse analysis is that power relations are both negotiated and performed through discourse. One way in which this can be looked at is through an analysis of who controls conversational interactions, who allows a person to speak and how they do this.

Hutchby (1996) examined issues of power in his study of arguments in British radio talk shows. As Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) point out, the person who speaks first in an argument is often in a weaker position than the person who speaks next. The first person has to set their opinion on the line whereas the second speaker merely has to challenge the opponent to expand on, or account for the claims. In a radio talk-back programme it is normally the host that comes in the second position and has the power to challenge the caller's claim, or to ask them to justify what they have just said.

Discourse both reflects and reproduces social relations

A further principle of critical discourse analysis is that discourse not only reflects social relations but is also part of, and reproduces, social relations. That is, social relations are both established and maintained through the use of discourse. Page's (2003) study of representations in the media of Cherie Blair, wife of the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, illustrates this further. Page shows how representations of Cherie Blair in the media as a lawyer, a wife and, especially, a working mother aim to establish a certain relationship between her and the public and, in particular, other working mothers. While Cherie Blair is largely presented by the media as a success story for managing her role as a working mother, as Page points out, working mothers are more typically presented in negative terms in everyday discourse in a way that produces quite different readings of the term and, in turn, different views of working women who have children.

Ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse

Another key principle of critical discourse analysis is that ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse. This includes ways of representing and constructing society such as relations of power, and relations based on gender, class and ethnicity.

Mallinson and Brewster's (2005) study of how stereotypes are formed in everyday spoken discourse is a further illustration of the ways in which ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse. As Mallinson and Brewster point out, negative attitudes towards non-standard social dialects of English are often transferred to negative views of the people who speak these dialects. A job applicant who speaks a non-standard dialect, for example, may not be hired when an employer sees this use of discourse as a way of predicting the applicant's future occupational performance; that is, the view that 'good workers' speak standard English and 'bad workers' do not.

Critical discourse studies, then, aim to make connections between social and cultural practices and the values and assumptions that underlie the discourse. That is, it aims to unpack what people say and do in their use of discourse in relation to their views of the world, themselves and their relationships with each other. Critical discourse analysis takes the view that the relationship between language and meaning is never arbitrary in that the choice of a particular genre or rhetorical strategy brings with it particular presuppositions, meanings, ideologies and intentions (Kress 1991).

if we wish to complain about a neighbour we may choose a genre such as a neighbour mediation session, or we may decide to air our complaint in a television chat show, as some of the speakers did in Stokoe's (2003) study of neighbour complaints.

Doing critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis 'includes not only a description and interpretation of discourse in context, but also offers an explanation of why and how discourses

work' (Rogers 2004 : 2). A critical analysis, then, might commence by deciding what discourse type, or genre, the text represents and to what extent and in what way the text conforms to it (or not). It may also consider to what extent the producer of the text has gone beyond the normal boundaries for the genre to create a particular effect.

The analysis may consider the *framing* of the text; that is, how the content of the text is presented, and the sort of angle or perspective the writer or speaker is taking. Closely related to framing is the notion of *foregrounding* ; that is, what concepts and issues are emphasized, as well as what concepts and issues are played down or *backgrounded* in the text. Equally important to the analysis are the background knowledge, assumptions, attitudes and points of view that the text presupposes.

At the sentence level, the analyst might consider what has been *topicalized* in each of the sentences in the text; that is, what has been put at the front of each sentence to indicate what it is 'about'. The analysis may also consider who is doing what to whom; that is, *agent-patient relations* in the discourse, and who has the most authority and power in the discourse. It may also consider what agents have been left out of sentences such as when the passive voice is used, and why this has been done.

At the word and phrase level, connotations of particular words and phrases might be considered as well as the text's degree of formality or informality, degree of technicality and what this means for other participants in the text. The choice of words which express degrees of certainty and attitude may also be considered and whether the intended audience of the text might be expected to share the views expressed in the text, or not.

Critical discourse analysis and framing

A further way of doing a critical analysis is to examine the way in which the content of a text is used; that is, the way in which the content of the text is presented to its audience, and the sort of perspective, angle and slant the writer or speaker is taking. Related to this is what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded in the text; that is, what the author has chosen to emphasize, de-emphasize or, indeed, leave out of the text.

Criticisms of critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis has not been without its critics, however. One argument against critical discourse analysis has been that it is very similar to earlier stylistic analyses that took place in the area of literary criticism. Widdowson (1998 , 2004) for example, argues that a critical analysis should include discussions with the producers and consumers of texts, and not just rest on the analyst's view of what a text might mean alone. Others have suggested that critical discourse analysis does not always consider the role of the reader in the consumption and interpretation of a text, sometimes mistaking themselves

for a member of the audience the text is aimed at (van Noppen 2004). Critical discourse analysis has also been criticized for not always providing sufficiently detailed, and systematic, analyses of the texts that it examines (Schegloff 1997).

There have been calls for critical discourse analysts to be more critical and demanding of their tools of analysis, as well as aim for more thoroughness and strength of evidence for the claims that they make (Toolan 1997). Others, however, have come to the defence of critical discourse analysis arguing that its agenda is important and of considerable social significance but that there are important details and arguments that still need to be carefully worked out.

Writers such as Cameron (2001) discuss textual interpretation in critical discourse analysis saying it is an exaggeration to say that any reading of a text is a possible or valid one. She does, however, agree with the view that a weakness in critical discourse analysis is its reliance on just the analyst's interpretation of the texts.

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