A Faircloughian approach to CDA: Principled eclecticism or a method searching for a theory?

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Abstract

For researchers wanting to take up critical discourse analysis as an analytical tool, Norman Fairclough's (1989) early work provided a step-by-step approach that he called 'a guide not a blueprint.' In response to calls for a more explicit theoretical justification, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) attempted to theoretically 'ground' CDA and to spell out its underpinning theories 'explicitly and systematically'. Their recommendation for a 'shifting synthesis' of theoretical sources, however, has been criticised, raising significant questions about the extent to which this work is method-driven and theoretically-framed. This paper explores some of the issues, considerations and advantages that surfaced as the author drew on a Faircloughian approach to CDA, its theory and method in researching literacy learning.

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Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) has offered educational researchers ways of investigating language use within social contexts. By questioning the taken-for-grantedness of language and enabling explorations of how texts represent the world in particular ways according to particular interests, CDA provides opportunities to consider the relationships between discourse and society, between text and context, and between language and power (Fairclough, 2001b, Luke, 1995/1996, 2002). Nevertheless, according to Luke (2002, p.99), CDA is still considered 'a fringe dweller in mainstream analysis'. Some scepticism about its place as a theoretically-grounded analytical and methodological approach for the social sciences remains, even though it appears to be showing 'some signs of maturity, if not late adolescence' (Luke, 2002, p.100).

In examining the types of stories that teachers use to explain children's successes and failures in literacy learning, I have drawn on a Faircloughian version of CDA, based on the work of Norman Fairclough (e.g. 1989, 1992, 1995c, 2001a, 2001b) and his writing with Chouliaraki (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) and others (e.g. Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Although my initial interest was in Fairclough's (1989) framework for analysing discourse, I am now using CDA to provide a theorisation of the social world. In accepting that the social and textual world is constantly changing, I have been cognisant of the need for theory to also be able to bend, flex and work with those changes, and CDA has been particularly useful in this regard. However, I continue to be intrigued by the theoretical and analytical challenges that have arisen.

This paper is my 'take' on some of the challenges of using CDA. It discusses some of the issues I have considered, particularly in relation to the notion of a 'shifting synthesis of theories' as recommended by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, p.16), tensions between critical and poststructuralist theories, and the resultant and varied understandings of power and ideology. I begin the paper with a brief overview of the approach to CDA advocated by Fairclough and others (e.g. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, Fairclough, 1989, 2001b, 2002), before considering some of the advantages of using CDA, criticisms that have been levied at it, and considerations that were relevant to my research.

A brief history

In providing this overview of the version of CDA that tends to be associated with Fairclough, I recognise that I present a view based mainly on the unfolding of the approach in three book publications (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1989, 2002). Although I acknowledge that the simplicity of this overview masks many of the complexities that exist, it is the 'big picture' that has helped me to make sense of this work and its shifting foci.

Initially, Fairclough (1989, 1992a, 1995c) identified his approach to a study of language as 'critical language study' and reviewed a range of mainstream approaches, including linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, conversation analysis and discourse analysis. Fairclough (1989, 1995c) argued that, although all of these areas had something to offer language study, they also presented limitations for a critical perspective. He criticised, for example, the

positivist aspects of sociolinguistics, the individualism promoted in pragmatics, and a lack of consideration for context in conversation analysis. In attempting to overcome these limitations, Fairclough (1989, p.10) identified his approach, not as just another method of language study, but as 'an alternative orientation'. What he called 'a social theory of discourse' (Fairclough, 1992a, p.92) was an attempt to 'bring together linguistically-oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language'.

In pulling together these fields, Fairclough (1989) argued that a close analysis of language contributed to understandings about power relations and ideology in discourse. A feature of Fairclough's (1989) book, *Language and Power*, and his work in the early to mid 1990s (e.g. Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995c) was its focus on describing a method for analysing discourse. Although Fairclough (1989, p.110) argued that he was not being prescriptive and that he was offering a 'guide not a blueprint' for undertaking CDA, this work offered methodological advice. It attempted to 'synthesize a corpus of text analytic techniques' (Luke, 2002, p.98) and focused primarily on methodology and 'doing' critical analyses of discourse samples. However, it was not that this work was bereft of a theoretical base, but rather that the theory of CDA seemed to be implicit rather than explicit.

During the early 1990s, however, Fairclough (1992a, p.1) worked towards developing what he described as 'a method of language analysis, which is both theoretically adequate and practically usable'. Culminating in the theoretical work of Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), this move has provided a detailed explication of the theories underpinning CDA. This apparent shift from methodological to more explicit

theoretical considerations, however, has been criticised for its post hoc nature. In the opinion of Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000), for example, some of the recent theoretical explanations of CDA have had a bias towards making the theory sound logical and coherent rather than showing how it developed within a 'genuine historical network of influences'. Such an absence, however, should not be construed as evidence of CDA as a method searching for a theory.

More recently, Fairclough (2002) has returned to a clarification of details and 'how-to' advice about analysis, textual analysis in particular, providing a tool kit for those who wish to learn more about the linguistic analysis of texts. Although he has again foregrounded pragmatic analytical issues – to deal with what he describes as 'widespread uncertainty about how to analyse' texts – this does not mean that theoretical issues are no longer important (p.1).

Theoretical diversity

One of the benefits of CDA is its ability to bring together social and linguistic analyses of discourse, thus integrating analysis at the macro level of social structure with analysis at the micro level of social action. Although some criticism of CDA has focused on its attention to linguistic analysis and a perceived over-emphasis on the 'micro', the test of CDA's effectiveness has to be in its ability to analyse 'the social' in conjunction with linguistic microanalysis (Luke, 2002, Pennycook, 2000). As Luke (2002, pp.102, 100) argued, CDA requires the overlay of 'social theoretic discourses for explaining and explicating the social contexts, concomitants, contingencies and consequences of any given text or discourse', accompanied by 'a principled and transparent shunting back and forth' between the micro and macro.

And therein lies the nub of the problem. Without an explicit, developed social theory, the analytical techniques have limited purpose and cannot achieve the social justice purposes that define CDA (Luke, 2002, Fairclough, 1989, Widdowson, 1998). It seems, then, that accounts of CDA that suggest that it relies too heavily on linguistic examination of text, or imply that CDA equals linguistic analysis, have not necessarily taken CDA's theoretical position into consideration.

Fairclough's early work on CDA (e.g. 1989) offered an amalgamation of linguistic and social theories. In recognising that language is part of society, that linguistic phenomena are a particular type of social phenomenon, and that social phenomena are partly linguistic, Fairclough (1989, 1992a, 2001b) conceptualised discourse as a three-dimensional concept. In using the term 'discourse' to refer to the whole process of social interaction, he identified a discursive event as simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice. These conceptualisations integrated linguistic definitions of discourse from the work of Halliday with socio-theoretical understandings from Foucault's work in relation to discourse, interwoven with understandings from critical theory and the Frankfurt School, Marxism and neo-Marxism.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) efforts to flesh out these theorisations and to locate CDA within both a traditional field of critical research and within a broader field of social theory have resulted in a complex theoretical position that incorporates a plethora of theories, both structuralist and poststructuralist. Although one purpose for such a dense theoretical explication may have been to counter claims that CDA has had an 'animosity to theory' (Pennycook, 2001, p.25) and appears 'essentially unprincipled' (Widdowson, 1998, p.149), the diversity of theories seems to have left

itself open to other criticisms. Luke (2002, p.98) argued that the tendency for critical discourse theorists to pull together a range of linguistic and social theories – so that those that lean 'toward comprehensive, rational grand theory' sit beside those with a 'radical scepticism toward system and structure' – makes the theoretical task a tricky one. And, of course, that tendency has been a source of criticism. Pennycook (2001, p.87), for example, argued that critical discourse analysts, including Fairclough, were engaging in 'a strange mixture of theoretical eclecticism and unreflexive modernism.' Although that comment was directed mainly at apparently contradictory positions in the work of Fairclough and Wodak, Widdowson (1998, p.137) accused critical discourse analysts of 'a kind of *ad hoc* bricolage which takes from theory whatever concept comes usefully to hand.'

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, see also Fairclough, 2000, 2001a), however, have advocated theoretical diversity, suggesting that researchers should be 'open to a wide range of theory' and should allow CDA to mediate interdisciplinary dialogue between social theories and methods (Fairclough, 2000, p.163). In arguing this case, Chouliaraki and Fairclough emphasise that the theory of CDA is a synthesis of theoretical positions and cannot be separated from method. The two components are regarded as mutually informing and developing each other, so that 'the ways of analysing "operationalise" – make practical – theoretical constructions of discourse in (late modern) social life, and the analyses contribute to the development and elaboration of these theoretical constructions' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.17).

According to Weiss and Wodak (2003, p.7), it is useful to think of CDA as 'a theoretical synthesis of conceptual tools'. They argued that a plurality of theory and

method does not have to be considered unsystematic or eclectic, suggesting instead that it can be understood as a specific strength of CDA that provides opportunities for 'innovative and productive theory formation' (p.9). This conceptualisation is reminiscent of Bourdieu's understanding of theories as sets of 'thinking tools' which can be used to work with the 'practical problems and puzzles' of research (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.160), allowing researchers to focus on the specific question of 'What conceptual tools are relevant for this or that problem and for this and that context?" (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p.7). Theory, then, can be understood as tools that researchers may apply or develop, to deal with the issues, problems, puzzles and difficulties that are at hand.

Such an approach helps to open up possibilities for making sense of data from different perspectives and to put the logic of one discipline 'to work' in the development of another (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Such work requires deliberate and careful consideration of theoretical compatibilities and the negotiation of theoretical cruxes, and is not the same as 'an eclecticism based on a mishmash of disparate approaches' (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p.4). Chouliaraki and Fairclough's 'shifting synthesis', then, can be seen as enabling a principled eclecticism that strengthens rather than weakens the research approach.

Theorising the social world
Although CDA opens up opportunities for a principled theoretical eclecticism, its framing within critical and poststructuralist theories implies a potential for tension between structuralist and poststructuralist positions. For my research, Chouliaraki

and Fairclough's (1999) theory of the social world offered a starting point, albeit a complex one, for thinking about how the social world works and for contemplating how such theory might inform an analysis of particular social practices such as literacy.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theory is based on the assumption that individuals and groups use language to achieve a variety of social purposes and considers the relationship between everyday social practices (social events) and society (social structures).   In understanding social life as comprising networks of social practices, they use the term 'social practice' ambiguously, referring to both an instance of a social interaction that occurs in a particular place and time and a way of acting that has become relatively permanent or habitual. They argue that the nature of social practices is due partly to the structures of society – the 'long-term background conditions for social life' – and partly to the social events through which people live their lives – 'the individual, immediate happenings and occasions of social life' (p.22). Social practices are not only shaped, constrained and maintained by the 'relative permanencies' of social structures (p.22), but they are also practices of production – with 'particular people in particular relationships using particular resources' (p.23) – and therefore can play a part in the transformation of social structures.

This view recognises social life as constrained by social structures, but does not rule out agency or possibilities for creativity or transformation. In focusing on social practices as a 'point of connection' between social structures and individual actions, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, p.21) acknowledge a structuralist-constructivist

understanding of social life. From this position, they reject 'a structuralism which

construes social life as an effect of structures and eliminates agency', as well as 'a

rationalism which views social life as entirely produced through the rational activity

of agents' (p.25). Such points indicate the complexity of integrating theories and of

positioning CDA within a range of theoretical sources.

What Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) have accepted is a dialectical relationship

between structures and events. Drawing on the work of Harvey (1996), they have

argued for internal and dialectical relationships between the macro level of social

structure and the micro level of social action, as well as within aspects of social

practice. Harvey conceptualised social practice as comprising six diverse elements or

'moments' – discourse/language, power, social relations, material practices,

institutions/rituals, and beliefs/values/desires. Although the moments may be

discussed as separate elements, they internalise each other dialectically so that, for

example, 'discourse is a form of power, a mode of formation of beliefs/values/desire,

an institution, a mode of social relating, a material practice. Conversely, power,

social relations, material practices, institutions, beliefs, etc. are in part discourse'

(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.6).

I continue to be challenged by trying to make sense of the relationships amongst the

six 'moments', social structures and social actions. The discarded diagrammatical

representations that I've relegated to the waste paper bin are perhaps indicative of the

difficulties and complexities of trying to understand how 'the social' works and of

dealing with what Harvey (1996, p.58) described as the 'seeming slipperiness' of

dialectical arguments. In my research, Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theory of

the social world has complemented my understanding of literacy as active and interactive practices that always occur within social situations and cultural contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, Luke, 1992). This sociocultural view of literacy recognises the instrumental role played by teachers in the selection, construction and distribution of particular types of literacy, in socialising students into particular versions of the world, and in deciding what constitutes satisfactory literacy performance.

In keeping with Chouliaraki and Fairclough's advocacy for a synthesis of theoretical sources, I foregrounded poststructuralist theories of textuality (see Alloway & Gilbert, 1997, Davies, 1994), to release the plurality of textual meaning and to conceptualise and problematise the multiple social and discursive constructions of literacy learners that were evident in the interview data that I collected. This allowed me to examine the data for evidence of intertextuality between text and context. It thus provided an opportunity to explore how the context helped to limit teachers' explanations of students' literacy learning and to restrict the pedagogical options that were available. At the same time, it permitted an investigation of teachers' explanations which enabled potentially more productive approaches to literacy teaching and learning (Henderson, 2005). In doing this, I set out to do what Toolan (1997, p.83) described as 'suspicious inspection of how discourses shape and frame', in this case, teachers' stories about literacy learners and literacy learning.

Other theoretical considerations

CDA's integration of critical and poststructuralist theories has been considered problematical, especially at the nexus of theories where contradictions have become

obvious. Pennycook (2001), for instance, critiqued the way that critical discourse

analysts have taken a political view of society but have not necessarily taken a similar

stance on the nature of knowledge. He pointed to 'the modelling and systematizing'

in Fairclough's work as attempting to 'construct a scientific edifice around CDA',

arguing that such contradictions demonstrate 'a blindness to the politics of

knowledge' (pp.84, 85). Although Fairclough (2001b, p.4) has described his work as

a 'scientific investigation of social matters' and has identified critical social science as

needing a scientific basis, he defined 'scientific' in terms of rational and evidence-

based arguments. As he explained, 'being committed does not excuse you from

arguing rationally or producing evidence for your statements' (Fairclough, 2001b,

p.4). Indeed, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, p.27) have acknowledged that

'theory is itself a practice', thus emphasising that 'no theory can be made 100 per cent

ideology-proof'.

In considering some of the debates that have occurred in discourse research,

Wetherell (2001) highlighted criticisms of CDA that have demonstrated concern

about objectivity and what might constitute 'good' scientific practice. Schegloff

(1997), for example, questioned the potential for bias in critical and political

approaches to discourse, whilst Widdowson (1998) and Toolan (1997) criticised CDA

for being uncritical of its own discursive practices. In Widdowson's (p.150) opinion,

the application of CDA to issues relating to social justice and domination has meant

that some research 'carries conviction because it espouses just causes'. Comments

like these, that raise much broader questions about the validity and intellectual

accountability of CDA research, have highlighted the need for those using CDA to

show how theory has been used and to demonstrate that CDA is much more than 'method'.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p.259) argued that CDA should be scholarly and that 'standards of careful, rigorous and systematic analysis apply with equal force to CDA as to other approaches'. Even though Fairclough (2001b, p.12) described two of the chapters of *Language and Power* as 'a systematic presentation of a procedure for critical analysis', he has neither supported the 'systemisation' of CDA nor promoted positivist truth or knowledge claims as Pennycook (2001) suggested. Instead, Fairclough (2001b, 2002) has emphasised that his approach is a set of guidelines that can be used flexibly, and that CDA can never be objective, always has particular interests, always comes from a particular perspective, and proffers insights that are always partial, incomplete and provisional. Fairclough (2001b, p.4) has been open about the perspective he takes, describing himself as 'a socialist with a generally low opinion of the social relationships in society and a commitment to the emancipation of the people who are oppressed by them'. His approach has been to declare his standpoint, such as his commitment to emancipation and to acknowledge the way that his 'reading' or analysis of data is made from a particular position.

However, although Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) argued for researchers to have reflexive understandings of their own social and historical positionings and Fairclough (2001b, pp.11-12) emphasised that different readings should not be regarded as 'grounds for consternation' but are instead 'worth exploring', analyses presented by Fairclough have not usually offered multiple readings. Although Fairclough appears to have circumvented the complexity and plurality of meaning that

others have taken up in their use of poststructuralist theories of textuality and subjectivity (e.g. Alloway & Gilbert, 1997, Davies, 1994), CDA offers opportunities to make multiple and contested readings of text.

In my examination of teachers' social and discursive constructions of literacy learners, poststructuralist theories have fostered the conceptualisation of meaning, truth and knowledge as sociocultural and historical productions (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997, Pennycook, 2001), and have allowed me to consider how particular versions of 'truth' are constructed and why some social and discursive constructions of literacy learners appear dominant in particular circumstances or contexts. In one school that experienced an influx of itinerant farm workers' children during the annual harvesting season on nearby farms, deficit constructions of the children as literacy learners seemed prevalent. Many teachers linked the children's generally low literacy performances to social, behavioural, learning and developmental problems in the children and to perceived inadequacies of the children's parents, who were deemed to be working too many hours and to be too tired to provide adequate supervision, care, or home literacy experiences for their children. These deficit explanations prospered in an institutional context where the arrival of itinerant children triggered the rearrangement of classes, increased workloads for teachers, and the need to share limited resources amongst the members of a growing school population (Henderson, 2004).

Nevertheless, even though low literacy performances appeared to be 'natural' and predictable learning outcomes for students whose families were itinerant, culturally different from the residentially-stable population and of low socioeconomic status, some teachers presented as resistant 'readers' who had not taken up the commonsense

assumptions that seemed so prevalent (Henderson, 2005). The drawing together of critical and poststructuralist theories facilitated the potential for different and 'critical' readings of the research data and provided opportunities to examine constructions of itinerant children that identified their differences as strengths rather than deficits.

However, some aspects of CDA have highlighted issues that may jar with poststructuralist understandings, particularly in relation to subjectivity and power. For example, Fairclough's (2001) suggestion that 'differences in the MR [members' resources] brought to the task of interpreting the text' (p.12) might be responsible for different readings and his identification of members' resources as 'socially determined and ideologically shaped' (p.9), appear to reject the fluidity that poststructuralist theories accept. Whilst poststructuralist theories make it possible to understand how individuals are positioned and position themselves within multiple subjectivities and thus take up contradictory subject positions (Davies, 2000), Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) position seems more fixed.

Poststructuralist approaches see individuals as positioned within complex sets of shifting power relations, rendering individuals as powerful at times and powerless at other times, positioned within competing social and institutional discourses (Baxter, 2002, Davies, 1994, Foucault, 1977, 1978). Whilst such explanations recognise the complexities of power relations, Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) understanding appears to be more inflexible, focusing on the repressive nature of power and linking it to ideology and domination, despite recognition of the notion of networks of power relations. Whilst there are times when power seems to be reified, Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue for a view of power as 'invisible, self-regulating and inevitably

subjecting', complemented by a view that 'acknowledges the overdetermination between "internal" and "external" practices and establishes causal links between institutional social practices and the positions of subjects in the wider social field' (p.24).

For those wanting to draw on a Faircloughian approach to CDA, the theorisation of discourse and ideology is a necessary consideration and an area that Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) acknowledge as having been theoretically problematic. The focus on repressive power, domination and ideology has been especially controversial. Fairclough's conceptualisation recognises that power can be exercised through coercion in various ways, including physical violence, and through the manufacture of consent, whereby 'those who have power can exercise it and keep it: through coercing others to go along with them' (Fairclough, 2001b, pp.27-28). Fairclough's declared interest in the role of language in producing, maintaining and transforming unequal power relations has no doubt influenced the perspective that he takes.

Whilst Fairclough (2001b, p.46) distinguished between power 'in' and 'behind' discourse, he identified the latter – the way that 'the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power' – as working ideologically through language. Ideologies are thus understood as the commonsense assumptions that make differential power relations appear universal and natural. It is this notion of 'ideology', and the concomitant assumption that discourse and language carry ideological assumptions or power relations, that Patterson (1997) and Pennycook (1994, 2001) questioned. The suggestion that ideological critique of text can uncover what is hidden and thereby reveal 'the truth' about repressive power relations

contradicts understandings about the constructed nature of reality in texts. As
Patterson (1997, p.427) pointed out, 'the idea that something resides in texts awaiting
extraction, or revelation, by the application of the correct means of interpretation is
precisely the assumption that poststructuralism sets out to problematise'.

Such contradictions are evident in Faircloughian approaches to CDA. In *Language
and Power*, for instance, Fairclough (2001b, pp.118, 57) promoted the 'unveiling' and
'demystification' of ideological assumptions through CDA, whilst arguing that power
and ideologies are linked neither to particular groups of people or linguistic forms nor
to a 'permanent and undisputed attribute of any one person or social group'. In later
work on CDA (e.g. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, Fairclough, 2003), ideology is
linked to discourse and the other moments of social practices, whilst ideologies are
identified as 'constructions of practices from particular perspectives … which "iron
out" the contradictions, dilemmas and antagonisms of practices in ways which accord
with the interests and projects of domination' (p.26). This shifting of positions in
relation to the concept of ideology is but one example of the morphing that occurs,
and needs to occur, in our understandings of theoretical issues.

Analytical considerations

Despite the criticisms, many educational researchers have used, and are using, various
versions of CDA. As Luke (2002, p.99) pointed out, publishers now offer many 'how
to' textbooks on CDA and 'graduate student theses openly declare CDA as a method
and supervisors needn't look far for paradigmatically sympathetic examiners.' A
significant reason for this is that CDA is being seen as a useful tool to examine
educational questions about normative understandings of curriculum, pedagogy and

schooling and to examine how deficit and disadvantage play out in school settings (Luke, 1997, 2002).

Even though Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) have helped to make the theories of CDA more explicit and have developed a framework for analysis based on Bhaskar's explanatory critique, many researchers continue to draw on the text-interaction-context model of Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995c) earlier work. This model still provides a useful framework from which to conceptualise and 'do' CDA (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). I have found the model useful for framing text within situational and sociocultural contexts and for highlighting the necessity for 'analysis' to incorporate textual, discursive and social levels. In recognising discourse simultaneously as text, discursive practice and social practice, Fairclough (2001b, p.21) argued that CDA is more than 'just analysing text' or just 'analysing processes of production and interpretation.' It incorporates analysis of the relationship between texts, processes and their social conditions; it takes the 'social' into consideration; and it offers a way of focusing on the interconnections between the dimensions of discourse and the 'interesting patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted and explained' (Janks, 1997, p.329). 'Orchestrated and recursive analytic movement between text and context' have been described as characteristic of CDA (Luke, 2002, p.100). Although the model provides a frame for analysis, however, it cannot be taken up without due regard for its theoretical implications.

Whilst Fairclough's (1989, 2001b) guide to CDA, based on his text-interaction-context model, might appear straightforward, Fairclough (2001b) argued that even description of the formal features of text is not as uncomplicated as it might sound.

He explains that 'text' should not be considered as an unproblematic object that can be described through the identification and labelling of its formal properties. Indeed, Fairclough (p.22) argues that 'what one "sees" in a text, what one regards as worth describing, and what one chooses to emphasize in a description, are all dependent on how one interprets a text'. Not everyone agrees with this position. Widdowson (1998, p.145), for example, critiqued CDA for what he perceived as its 'disregard of inconvenient textual features'. However, in presenting alternative analyses of Fairclough's data, Widdowson managed to illustrate, perhaps ironically, the way that a critical approach can offer different or resistant readings.

Whilst Fairclough (1995b) regarded the description of the formal features of text as an important element of CDA, he also emphasises that the text and its features should be 'framed' by the other two dimensions of analysis – interpretation (of the relationship between text and interaction) and explanation (of the relationship between interaction and sociocultural contexts). As he explained, these are important because the relationship between text and social structures is an indirect one, mediated by discourse and social context (Fairclough, 1992b, 1999, 2001b, see also Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). As a result, the values of textual features 'only become real, socially operative, if they are embedded in social interaction,' and discourses 'only become real, socially operative, as parts of institutional and societal processes' (Fairclough, 2001b, p.117).

In one sense, this paper seems to have come full circle. Now that I am beginning to talk about the methodological use of CDA, about using it for analytical purposes, I find that I cannot do that successfully without referring to theory. As Chouliaraki and

Fairclough (1999) pointed out, method 'operationalises' and develops theory, and theory helps to construct method. In addressing the issue of whether a Faircloughian approach to CDA is method-driven or theoretically-framed, then, I would have to argue that it is both. It is not a matter of either/or. Even though theory tended to be implicit in Fairclough's (1989) early work and was more explicitly identified in the work of Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), theory and method have both been there all along and work to inform each other. As Chouliaraki and Fairclough acknowledged, the relationship is a complex one.

The capacity of CDA to deal with a range of social theories, to allow interdisciplinary inquiry and to inform productive theorising sits beside its application to a range of semiotic forms. Whether working with new and hybrid forms of text or with old forms of text that are being used in new contexts, CDA is useful for generating theorised understandings about aspects of education. Yet, as has been explained, I continue to be challenged by the theory of CDA and its possibilities.

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