DCA – Critical Discourse Analysis

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CDA – Some definitions

Critical Linguistics (Ruth Wodak) or CDA provide an:

- Analytical and interdisciplinary approach to discourse, which is viewed as a cultural and social practice.
- A political approach to language in context.

History of CDA

Discourse and Society (1990) goes back to

- The emergence of an interest in language as structuring (no just expressing or reflecting) power relations (a concept that first appeared during '70s)

- Kress and the group at University of East Anglia. Assumptions about language:

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- Language is social,
- Social institutions and groups have systems of meanings and values like individuals do,
- Texts are the units of communication
- Readers are interactive active operators

(Wodak & Meyer, 2001: 6)

… continued

Concerns of CDA:

- Manifestations of ideology;
- Power/dominance relations in society (manifestations of social asymmetry via discourse) and, consequently,
- Forms of racism, sexism, and in general segregation and discrimination.

Discourse areas

- Discourse areas of interest to and explored by CDA:

  - Institutional and political discourse, as aspects of public discourse,
  - gender and media discourse

To sum up

- CDA is a political statement in that it refuses to accept established structures of dominance and,
- By identifying and 'denaturalising' or 'foregrounding' the hidden manifestations of power, aims to disrupt those consolidated expressions of inequality in society.

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- CDA looks at discourse in context not at utterances in isolation
- It considers discourse as a specific historical product (Fairclough, 1995 particularly draws attention to this)

…continued

According to Kress, CDA's clear political goals make this discipline of linguistic studies different from sociolinguistics, pragmatics or any aspect of text linguistics

…therefore

CDA studies the way in which

'Social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' Van Dijk (2001:352)

To make an example…

- 2003 Iraq war BBC discourse portrayed the Anglo-American coalition as orderly and professional while the Iraqis were portrayed as an undistinguished crowd, often unruly and emotional (recent study on visual coverage of Iraqi conflict by M. Lipson) .
- Beside images what language is used to refer to Iraqis as opposed to coalition forces?
- What message is BBC conveying?

Binary oppositions in media

Lévi-Strauss's study of myths in tribal cultures (1964).
Myths and themes as binary oppositions.

From this to the identification of oppositions in media discourse, in terms of 'us' and the 'other' i.e. the US, the UK, the Western world versus the Iraqis, Iran, Islam …

Most CDA linguists (e.g. van Dijk) take a distance from traditional Marxist interpretation of ideology as false consciousness.

Group control, they believe, is reached by a control of people's attitudes. Van Dijk, but also Wodak and Kress, believe that in contemporary democracy dominance is exercised not through coercion but through persuasion.

The reader's role

- In CDA, the reader is not passive recipient of established meanings.
- S/he is equipped with the ability to reconstruct the system of meanings congruent with the ideology that informs a text (Fowler, 1996: 7)

Methodology of CDA:
- Close attention to social-historical-cultural constructs. Kress stresses that isolated utterances have no value.
- DA and CA
- Wodak (*Language, Power and Ideology*, 1989) encourages 'multiple methods'

Variety of methodologies

- Qualitative analyses
- Corpus-based analyses (on small corpora)
- No typical data collection methodology
- Usually a top-down approach is preferred that starts from a social or political problem

- *Interdisciplinarity* e.g. work on visual devices in media and TV production
- *Interdiscursivity* and *intertextuality* (cf. notion of discourse polyphony in Bakhtin [1952] 1986, and Kristeva, 1986)

CDA and Functional Systemic Linguistics

M.A.K. Halliday's grammar and the notion of three metafunctions of language (language is shaped by the social functions it serves):
- *Ideational*: language in a dialectical relation with society, language reflects and 'construes' social reality,
- *Interpersonal*: relationships between participants
- *Textual*: levels of textuality

However, Wodak, Fairclough and Thornborrow, amongst others, also refer to cultural and social theory. Their definition of discourse is therefore more complex.

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Thornborrow (2002) refers to social theories of power.

- Power as a discursive phenomenon in Althusser (1971). Criticism from within a poststructuralist perspective: identities and subjectivities that are shaped within a particular ideological structure are not fixed but continuously redefined.

- Bourdieu (1992): power takes the shape of 'cultural capital'. Different people have different access to different social practices according to their power and authority.
- Foucault (1977, 1980): power is not a stable construction but rather a continuously reshaping intricate network of social and cultural relations

(Thornborrow, 2002: 6-7).

Aims and objectives of CDA

- An example from Thornborrow (2002) The asymmetry of institutional discourse in a police station interview.

  No neat correspondence betw institutional context and ideological discourse, but 'conflicting discourses at work in any instance of asymmetrical institutional talk' (39)

Let's look at transcript (pp. 40-41)

- Who's got the upper hand?

- Are questions really info-seeking acts or requests for confirmation (cf. Labov & Fanshel's, 1977, 'B-events', i.e. qs = statements about H)

- Are assumptions behind the policemen discourse shared by the woman or are they blame-implicative statements?

Other applications of CDA

- Discourse in the courtroom. Questions asked by magistrates in an asymmetrical situation as a way of control (Harris, 1984)

  Magistrate: I'm putting it to you again - are you going to *make* an offer- uh - uh to discharge this debt
  Defendant: Would you in my position
  Magistrate: I - I'm not here to answer questions - you answer *my* question

Ideological relativity of representation

- Does CDA unveil the truth and the falsity of ideology? Is this its political thrust? NO!

- CL/CDA and the theory and practice of representation. Let's read Fowler (1996: 4):

'[A]ll representation is mediated, moulded by the value-systems that are ingrained in the medium (language in this case) used for representation; it challenges common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way with a very different significance.This is not, in fact, simply a question of 'distortion' or 'bias': there is not certainly any true reality that can be unveiled by critical practice, there are simply relatively varying representations.'

CDA: a tool for social transformation

While CDA has a 'value-free theory of representation' (ibid.), in practice it aims to identify and eradicate forms of distorted ideology and encourage awareness of how dominance and power is expressed by language or, better, how language works as one of the very many social practices in society.

Another example

Downes (1978) explored how the ideology of McCarthyism tapped into the psychological frames, scripts or schemata of Americans (see active role of the reader in CDA)

CDA in the media: an example from van Dijk

A text from the *Sun* (23 Jan 1989) on immigration. Let's look at the two excerpts (1996: 96 and 98).

What assumptions are made about the readers' scripts? What does van Dijk mean by the *Sun* colluding with the Conservatives on issues of immigration?

Representation

• What linguistic forms are associated with the immigrants?
• What lexis is used to define them?
• Who's got agency and responsibility, local employers or immigrants?

One more example from Coulthard (1996)

Discourse analysts have scope and opportunities for critical action in the area of law.

Police records (from spoken to written) are *recreation from memory* of the ideational and textual function and exclude the interpersonal.

- Incidentally, this is in line with Fairclough's claim (1995):

Reported discourse in newspapers is not marked as such, therefore the reporter's intervention is not clearly highlighted

Focus on the **ideational** (content) but not **interpersonal** meaning (more next week about this)

… Coulthard continues

- Indicators of disfluency are absent in *Hansard* versions of Parliamentary proceedings and so are any markers of regional variety = all MPs are equal

- Police can 'tamper' with records and choose to colour the speech of an interviewee with non-prestige forms (cf. transcript)

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- Incriminating interviews can be used as evidence in court.
  e.g. *'I know you **know** I did it'* instead of
  *'I know you **think** I did it'* (p. 175)
- Police representation as cooperative and supportive.
  e.g. *'I feel very sorry that you have this dreadful disease of being a gambler…'* (p. 174)

To sum up

- CDA is a social and political practice in that it highlights the ideological elements in representations that make it possible to perpetuate situations of discriminations and injustice
- Historicised and contextualised discourse (Fairclough, 1995) is the means through which ideology is expressed.

Ideology is both in
- the discourse conventions (the creation of 'orders of discourse' that support and are integral to a given ideology, similar to Foulcault's views) and
- the events that are organised in support of the ideology (e.g. Margaret Thatcher's interview on radio)
  (Fairclough, 1995)

Essential bibliography

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