

Critical Discourse Analysis: Scrutinizing Ideologically-Driven Discourses

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Abstract

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been used as a basic discipline in education to provide answers to questions about the relationships between language, society, power, identity, ideology, politics, and culture. Van Dijk (1997) being a leading figure of this field, has defined critical discourse studies as a new multidisciplinary discipline for the analysis of text and talk in the humanities and social sciences. CDA aims at examining the dominant culture in a society to discover the mechanisms that have made that culture dominant, and to criticize of those mechanisms. The utmost objective of any CDA study is to unravel the underlying hidden agenda which is left implicit in the discourse. This paper aims to provide a concise overview about CDA, its definition, and some CDA frameworks. In this regard, four basic CDA frameworks proposed by Van Leeuwen, Van Dijk, Hodge and Kress, and Fairclough have been presented.

Key words: Critical discourse analysis, Definitions of CDA, CDA frameworks, Principles of CDA.

1. Introduction

The rise of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has influenced most branches and sub-branches of humanities sciences in general, and applied linguistics in particular. CDA views language as a powerful means through which specific ideologies, identities, and culture become dominant in a society. CDA scholars believe that the choice of language interlocutors make reflects their intentions, ideology, and thought. This is an effective means for polarizing power in the society. Critical discourse analysts identify and study specific areas of injustice, inequality, racism, danger, suffering, prejudice, and the like. The introductory section of this article is devoted on some elaborations discourse, discourse analysis (DA), CDA, and various definitions proposed by some scholars of the field.

2. Discourse and DA

Discourse is a form of language use, and Discourse Analysis (DA) is the analytical framework which was created for studying actual text and talk in the communicative context. Fitch (2005) believes that the early DA focused on the internal structure of texts. With the emergence of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978), the DA has started to affect such disciplines as sociolinguistics with an internal focus on the ways through which personal and social processes are encoded in the text. Halliday has been an influential figure in the field. He introduced a tripartite model (tenor, mode and field) consisting of phonology, lexico-grammar and semantics. He maintains that texts are a process and a product which are created, embedded, and interpreted in a specific social context. Halliday's stratal framework has now become the foundation of a variety of discourse analysis models. Texts are analyzed according to three inseparable elements: language use, communication and interaction (Van Dijk, 1997) or description (text), interpretation (pragmatics) and explanation (the social and cultural context) (Fairclough, 1999).

The modern DA is an interdisciplinary approach, operating at two macro and micro levels, incorporating both linguistic and social analysis. Discourses are viewed as communicative events, which encompass certain beliefs, ideologies, identities, politics, and the like (Chilton and Schaffner, 2002). Communication is obviously something beyond simply transferring a message from the sender to the receiver; discourse analysts frequently speak of interpretative work (Wodak and Cilla, 2006). Sometimes textualized or verbalized statements of people aim more than conveying what they say at the surface level directly and explicitly. The most important issue is the social information that is usually conveyed inexplicitly.

Fitch (2005) believes that DA does not have a rigid framework. It is often considered as a general methodology, theory or merely critique tied to social constructionism or social power and oppression. DA methods mark differences based on their methods of analysis. Some discourse analysts are linguists or applied linguists and as such they try to analyze texts (textual and verbal) in terms of their grammatical structures, others draw mainly on conversational analysis (CA) and speech act theory. Other discourse analysts may have no specific procedure of rigorous analysis. Instead, they search for patterns of language use that may be linked to social or power structure and ideological colorings. This is another branch of DA, which is called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and which combine linguistic analysis, ideological critique and cognitive psychology. CDA has now become one of the most widely used DA models in modern linguistics. Its aim is to uncover ideological and power relations and it has mainly been applied for the analysis of political discourse. The following will provide a general introduction to the field of CDA and describe one of the CDA frameworks in detail.

3. CDA

CDA is an amalgamation of a variety of micro-sociological theories and also theories on society and power based Michael Foucault's definition of power (Van Dijk, 2001). A CDA study aims at providing a thorough description, explanation and critique of the textual strategies writers use to "naturalize" discourses. Because we are well aware of the fact that in order to inculcate certain ideologies, discourses are made to appear common-sense and apolitical (Van Dijk, 1997). Some scholars believe that there is no typical CDA method for collecting data. Some authors do not even mention data collection methods. The raw material for the analysis within CDA is the naturally occurring text and talk in their original contexts.

CDA provide some approaches to research with the primary aim of uncovering the relationship between language, society, power, ideology, values and opinions. Hence, CDA is continuously enriched with new approaches within the field of language and communication. The most significant research within CDA has been performed Teun van Dijk, who combines cognitive psychology and CDA to uncover how ideological structures are hidden in peoples memory (Chilton, 2004) who combines cognitive and pragmatic aspects (using Habermasian "Validity Claims" and Grice's "Cooperative Principle" theories) and focuses on credibility in political texts, and Wodak (1989) analyzes gender discrimination and how political groups/nations define their territory by means of language. Furthermore, Norman Fairclough focuses on social conflict and its linguistic manifestations in discourses of dominance, difference and resistance (Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

4. Definitions of CDA

As was mentioned earlier in this paper, critical linguistics and theories have laid the basis of CDA. This discipline has attracted many scholars since the 1980s significantly with the works of the British sociolinguist Norman Fairclough. Fairclough (1995) provided the following definition for CDA:

By CDA I mean discourse analysis which aims 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; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (pp. 132-3)

Wodak and Meyer (2001) depict the concept in the following manner:

CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analyzing 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, signaled, constituted, and legitimized, and so on by language use (or in discourse). (p. 2)

Furthermore, Scollon (2001) defines CDA as "a program of social analysis that critically analyses discourse - that is to say language in use - as a means of addressing social change". (p. 140)

5. CDA Frameworks

5.1. CDA Framework by Fairclough

Fairclough is considered to have contributed to the field of CDA most significantly. His model may be the core section of the entire field of CDA, because he was the first to create a theoretical framework, which provided guidelines for future CDA research.

His belief that the language is an irreducible part of social life is the main part of his framework. The dialectic relation between language and social reality is realized through social events (texts), social practices (orders of discourse) and social structures (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough attempts to uncover ideological and power patterns in texts in his research method of analysis. He is the only CDA scholar who defines the relationship between power and language (social power and ideology) in his research (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough provides a three-dimensional framework for the analysis of text and discourse: 1) the linguistic *description* of the formal properties of the text; 2) the *interpretation* of the relationship between the discursive processes/interaction and the text, where text is the end product of a process of text production and as a resource in the process of text interpretation and lastly, 3) the *explanation* of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality. Fairclough's (1989) analysis has gone beyond the "whatness" of the text description towards the "how" and "whyness" of the text interpretation and explanation. There are certain underlying assumptions behind certain selections of discourse. These assumptions are never value-free and innocent; rather they are ideologically driven and motivated. By studying the forms of the language, we can discover the social processes and also the specific ideology embedded in them. This leads to the exploration of power relations that exist in the society or community. He believes in a "hidden agenda".

5.2. CDA Framework by Hodge and Kress

The dichotomous categorization of "euphemism" and "derogatory" is the milestone of the explanations provided in this framework. According to Hodge and Kress (1993), the main focus of a particular vocabulary item will be on its origin of classification, schemes, and ideologically significant relations such as synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy, relational values and expressive values. To come up with the detection devices for manipulation of realities and ideologies in text by the application of euphemistic and derogatory terms, Hodge and Kress's (1993) model treating "language and ideology" has been the main criterion. It is a "syntagmatic model" made up of the assumptions regarding the interaction of the language, thought, ideology and the classification system which consists of "actionals" and "relationals". In this framework, actional models represent the perceived relationships in the physical world. Actionals are divided more specifically into "transactive" and "non-transactive". Relational models encompass "equative" and "attributive" sections. They are concerned with the classificatory and evaluative systems of the language. Equative models create the relations between nouns while attributive models bring about relations between nouns and qualities. Relationals indicate the consequence of mental activities, suggest judgments, comments, etc. Euphemistic and derogatory words belong to the relational part of this framework and are used as detection devices for recognizing the manipulation of realities and ideas. Ideology, according to Hodge and Kress (1993), involves a systematically organized presentation of reality. The application of different euphemistic or derogatory terms leads to different presentations of realities and therefore ideologies.

5.3. CDA Framework by Van Dijk

Van Dijk's (1997) framework has provided some illustrations of the categories that he believes to be important in doing CDA studies. He asserts that the main point of the analysis is to show how various ideologies are expressed in various kinds of structures. There are hundreds of such categories so we make a small selection as described below.

- **Actor description (meaning):** Our ideologies will determine the way actors are described in discourse. Accordingly, if we divide them into ingroup and outgroup members, we will describe the former members in a neutral or positive way, and the latter members in a negative way.
- **Authority (argumentation):** People of different ideologies cite different authorities.
- **Categorization (meaning):** Generally, people tend to categorize people based on their social affiliation, race, ethnicity, etc.
- **Comparison (meaning, argumentation):** In contrast to racist talk, that outgroups are compared negatively and ingroups positively, in anti-racist talk, we may negatively compare our country or government with repulsive undemocratic regimes.
- **Disclaimers (meaning):** Disclaimers are the ideological base of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation strategy.
- **Euphemism (rhetorical, meaning):** Euphemistic devices are used to beautify the social facts that may be offensive to the members of a community (e.g. sex, supernaturals, death)
- **Evidentiality (meaning, argumentation):** Authority figures, institutions and various forms of evidentiality may happen by claims or points of view. This information may be provided by reading, hearing, or seeing something.

- **Generalization (meaning, argumentation):** generalization is a powerful move in argumentation. It is used in racist discourse, for instance to formulate prejudices about generalized negative characteristics of immigrants.
- **Hyperbole (rhetoric):** Hyperboles are semantic rhetorical devices for enhancing and exaggerating meaning. By using especial metaphors, especially in the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, we may expect that good or bad actions or properties of the self or other be expressed in hyperbolic terms.
- **Implication (meaning):** Pragmatic contextuels are the main reasons that discourse remains implicit. Recipients deduce and infer this implicit information by their attitudes, knowledge, and their mental models.
- **Irony (rhetoric):** Accusations are more effective in the forms of irony than when they are stated directly.
- **Polarization (meaning):** In categorizing people in ingroup (self/us) and outgroup (others/them) the expression of polarized cognitions are very prevalent.
- **Presupposition (meaning):** Presuppositions are mostly used to presuppose the truth when they are not established.
- **Vagueness (meaning):** Writers or speakers sometimes use the expressions that are unclear because they do not give enough information or they do not say exactly what they mean.
- **Victimization (meaning):** Telling bad stories about nations, in order to focus on their bad characteristics is the consequence of ingroups and outgroups in polarization.

Van Dijk (2001) states that textbooks are ideologies embedded in curriculum. He claims that enforcing hegemony and dominance over the community is achieved by “controlling discourse”.

5.4. CDA Framework by Van Leeuwen

Leeuwen’s (1996) social actors are influenced by the policies and decisions of powerful organizations which either include or exclude them from the centers of power. He explains the principal ways in which social actors can be represented in discourse. In this view, CDA is the impact of power structures on the production and/or reproduction of knowledge and its effect on identity and subjectivity of the members of the community. Indeed, this is language and discourse in relation with production, reproduction, dissemination, and interpretation of knowledge in line with researchers’ arrangement. Leeuwen’s (1996) framework consists of the following main sections:

1. Exclusion:
 - a. Suppression
 - b. Backgrounding
2. Inclusion:
 - a. Activisation vs. passivization
 - b. Genericisation vs. specification
 - c. Individualization
 - d. Assimilation
 - e. Indetermination (anonymous)
 - f. Determination
 - g. Nomination and categorization
 - h. Functionalization and identification
3. Impersonalized social actors
 - a. Abstraction
 - b. Objectivation

Some other theorists have presented different aspects of CDA in relation with ideology. For example, Cameron (1992) explains “stereotypes” which lead to social inequalities. He believes that critical language should “defamiliarize” taken-for-granted notions. Halliday (1985) views this topic differently in his “Language and functional perspective”. In his “systemic theory” a method of text analysis is introduced which is a theory of meaning as a choice, by which a language is interpreted as networks of interlocking options. It emphasizes choice, the selection of options from systems constituting meaning potentials. Choice entails “inclusion” and “exclusion”.

6. Pedagogical implications of CDA

CDA aims at developing an insight into the discursive structures of various texts and genres along with their socio-political effects. Moreover, it aims at raising awareness of the readers and listener to hidden parts of discourses. Discourse analysts want their recipients to play an active critical role when exposed to a text and do not just the "tip of the ideological iceberg" (Van Dijk, 1997). People usually view the text as the true reflections of realities and facts. Critical analysis of the texts attempts to create a sensitivity and consciousness about the implicitly left, invisible section, misinformation, manipulation, and misinterpretation practiced by some writers and speakers. Another implication of CDA studies is a call for the readers to be aware and conscious of different aspects a text production such as the writer's socio-political background, the historical setting, and the cultural tendencies. These elements are the essential ingredients of critical thinking and self-actualization as the ultimate goal of all educational enterprise (Reichenbach, 2001). It is a powerful method against limited-sighted, closed-minded mentalities which is the cornerstone of most educational systems. Texts are not ideologically neutral rather that are replete with ideologically motivated materials which can be brought the readers' and listeners' views through CDA studies.

Another important insight that can be gained from CDA studies is that language is a very strong device in promoting certain ideologies, institutions, nationalistic self-glorification, positive self and negative other presentations, fallacious arguments, demolishing of minority languages, specifying religious and political taboos, political conflicts, suppression of minorities, distorting the realities, construction and imposition of ideologies, and the like. CDA propagates the idea that enhancement of critical thinking is conducive to a society in which justice and equality are materialized and power is distributed fairly among people. This mental ability makes readers and listeners perceptive to judgmental prejudiced discourse and prompts them to act against injustice and incommensurate distribution of power.

7. Conclusion

Language plays a crucial role in expressing, changing and particularly reproducing ideologies. Language is not produced in a context free vacuum, but in discourse contexts that are constructed with the ideology of social systems and institutions. Since language operates within this social dimension, it tends to reflect and construct ideology. Therefore, if we want to know what ideologies are, how they work, and how they are created, changed, and reproduced, we need to investigate their discursive manifestations because discursive practices are embedded in social structures, which are mostly constructed, validated, naturalized, evaluated and legitimized in and through language i.e., discourse. CDA is an appropriate method for the detection of biased and manipulative language, and can be used as a powerful device for deconstructing the texts to come up with their intended ideologies. It is a methodological approach for those involved in socio-cultural studies. Also, it can be a theory for finding the manners in which the attitudes, political powers and identities cause sociolinguistic variations in different communities. The present paper attempted to provide a concise explanation on CDA, and introduce four major frameworks of CDA proposed by leading figures in the field (frameworks of Fairclough, Van Dijk, Van Leeuwen, Hodge and Kress) as a mean to examine the function of language as a social practice implementing a vast number of functions in different types of texts. This article can provide a brief yet helpful review on CDA and its major models.

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