



## Critical Discourse Analysis: Scrutinizing Ideologically-Driven Models

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### ABSTRACT

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse-analytical research that primarily investigates the way ideology, dominance, social power abuse, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk (and, more recently, through visual images, sound and other forms of semiosis in the social and political context. This entails a diversity of approaches to CDA research, drawing on various linguistic analytic techniques and different social theories, although all involve some form of close textual (and/or multimodal) analysis. This paper attempts to provide an overview of CDA, the multiple meanings of CDA, and the most important models of CDA, namely Critical Linguistics and Social Model, Relational-Dialectic Model, Socio-cognitive Model, and Discourse-Historical Model.

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### Introduction

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a problem-oriented and transdisciplinary set of theories and methods that have been influential not only in language studies, but also in other fields such as business, public health, organizational studies, media studies, accounting, and even tourism. More specifically, CDA is a type of discourse-analytical research that first and foremost studies the way ideology, social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are (re)enacted, reproduced, and resisted through spoken and written text (and, more recently, through visual images, sound and other forms of semiosis) in the social and political context (van Dijk 2001). Language is considered as crucial in the reproduction of ideologies, which, in turn, is seen as central in establishing and sustaining social identities and inequalities (Wodak 2001a).

CDA is not critical of other theoretical or methodological approaches to discourse analysis, but of social relations as they are established through discourse (Billig 2003). Critical discourse analysts openly adopt a political stance and aim to reveal problematic properties of discursive practices (Reisigl & Wodak 2001). The political position of most critical discourse analysts is one which empathizes with those most deprived by inequality (van Dijk 1993b). Racist and xenophobic discourse in particular have been extensively analyzed (Reisigl & Wodak 2001; van Dijk 1987, 1991, 1993a; Wodak 1996, 1999). These critical discourse analysts wish to understand, expose and ultimately resist latent racist ideologies and arguments in texts with a view to achieving changes in the social structure.

Some of the precepts of CDA can already be found in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School before the Second World War (Agger 1992b; Rasmussen 1996). Its current focus on language and discourse was initiated with the 'critical linguistics' that emerged (mostly in the UK and Australia) at the end of the 1970s (Fowler et al. 1979; Mey 1985). CDA has also counterparts in 'critical' developments in sociolinguistics, psychology, and the social sciences, some already dating back to the early 1970s (Birnbaum 1971; Calhoun 1995; Fay 1987; Fox and Prilleltensky 1997; Hymes 1972; Ibanez & Iniguez 1997;

Singh 1996; Thomas 1993; Turkel 1996; Wodak 1996). As is the case in these neighboring disciplines, CDA may be seen as a reaction against the dominant formal (often 'asocial' or 'uncritical') paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s. (van Dijk 2001).

### The multiple meanings of CDA

According to Rogers 2011, approaches to CDA may vary at the 'critical,' 'discourse,' or 'analysis' sections of the method, but must include all three parts to be considered a CDA. The term critical in CDA is often associated with studying power relations. This concept of critical is rooted in the Frankfurt school of critical theory (Adorno 1973; Adorno & Horkheimer 1972; Habermas 1976). Critical research and theory is a rejection of naturalism (that social practices, labels, and programs represent reality), rationality (the assumption that truth is a result of science and logic), neutrality (the assumption that truth does not reflect any particular interests), and individualism. As with all research, the intentions of critical discourse analysts are not neutral. According to Corson (2000), the aim of the analyst is to explore hidden power relations between a piece of discourse and wider social and cultural formations and have an interest in uncovering inequality, power relationships, injustices, discrimination, bias, etc. Another interpretation of the 'critical' in CDA is an attempt to describe, interpret, and explain the relationship between the form and function of language and why and how certain patterns are privileged over others. Also CDA explicitly addresses social problems and seeks to solve them through the analysis and accompanying social and political action. The aim of the researcher in this view of 'critical' is explicitly oriented toward identifying social problems and analyzing how discourse operates to construct and is historically constructed by such issues. In this view, analysts believe that analyzing texts for power is not enough to disrupt such discursive powers. Instead the analyst must work from the analysis of texts to the social and political contexts in which the texts emerge. This is an explicitly action-oriented position and is most often referred to as a form of critical language awareness.

Discourse within a CDA framework traces its linguistic origin to critical linguistics and systemic functional linguistics

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(Fowler et al. 1979; Kress & Hodge, 1979). Within a functional approach to language, discourse is a system of meanings or systematically organized set of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution (Kress, 1985). Gee (1996, 2011a) made a distinction between little 'd' and 'D' discourse. Little 'd' refers to language bits or the grammar of what is said. Big Discourse refers to the ways of representing, believing, valuing, and participating with the language bits. It includes language bits, but it also includes the identities and meanings that go along with such ways of speaking. This distinction helps us see that the form of language cannot exist independent of the function of language and the intention of speakers. Further, Gee asserts that Discourse is not merely a pattern of social interactions, but is connected to identity and the distribution of social goods.

Although there are many principles about discourse that unite the research of CDA, there is also disagreement within the community of CDA. Often this dissension revolves around analytic procedures. The analytic procedures depend on what definitions of critical and discourse the analyst has taken up as well as his or her intentions for conducting the analysis. There are more and less textually oriented approaches to discourse analysis. Some methods are less linguistically focused and more focused on the context in which the discourse arises. Other methods are interested in the historical emergence of a set of concepts or policies. Other methods pay equal attention to language and social theory. The CDA, then, is an analysis of not only what is said, but what is left out—not only what is present in the text, but what is absent. In this sense, CDA does not read political and social ideologies onto texts. Rather, the task of the analyst is to figure out all of the possible configurations between texts, ways of representing, and ways of being, and to look for and discover the relationships between texts and ways of being and why certain people take up certain positions vis-à-vis situated uses of language.

#### **Models of CDA**

As a research enterprise, CDA is diverse and interdisciplinary, comprising a number of methodological approaches directed towards a variety of data (Weiss & Wodak 2003). The methodology of CDA can therefore only be presented 'with reference to particular models and with regard to their specific theoretical backgrounds' (Titscher et al. 2000). Four models in particular may be identified: Critical Linguistics and social model (Fowler et al. 1979; Fowler 1991, 1996; Kress 1985; Kress & Hodge 1979); the socio-semiotic model (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b); the discourse-historical model (Reisigl & Wodak 2001; Wodak 1996, 2001b) and the socio-cognitive approach (van Dijk 1995, 1998, 2002). We refer to these four models together as 'mainstream CDA' since they are the most established and recognized. They can be distinguished from one another by the various linguistic theories they apply. However, one theory in particular is recurrent where in most studies there is a reference to Hallidayan linguistics, indicating that an understanding of Systemic Functional Grammar is essential for a proper understanding of CDA (Wodak 2001a). Hallidayan linguistics is a natural theoretical framework for CDA to draw upon, given that, for Halliday, 'language is as it is because of its function in the social structure' (1973).

While the various approaches can be distinguished according to the specific methodological tools they use, given common (critical) agendas and perspectives, they are closely connected by more general conceptual frameworks (van Dijk

2001). Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271–80) offered the following foundational principles of CDA:

- CDA addresses social problems
- discourse is a form of social action
- discourse does ideological work
- power relations are discursive
- discourse constitutes society and culture
- discourse is historical
- the link between text and society is mediated
- Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory

According to van Dijk (2001), the typical vocabulary of many scholars in CDA will feature such notions as power, dominance, hegemony, ideology, class, gender, race, discrimination, interests, reproduction, institutions, social structure, and social order, besides the more familiar discourse analytical notions. Language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication belong to micro-level of the social order. Power, dominance, and inequality between social groups are typically terms that belong to a macro-level of analysis. This means that CDA has to theoretically bridge the well-known gap between micro and macro approaches, which is of course a distinction that is a sociological construct in its own right (Alexander et al. 1987; Knorr-Cetina & Cicourel, 1981). In everyday interaction and experience the macro- and micro-level form one unified whole. For instance, a racist speech in parliament is a discourse at the micro-level of social interaction in the specific situation of a debate, but at the same time may enact or be a constituent part of legislation or the reproduction of racism at the macro-level.

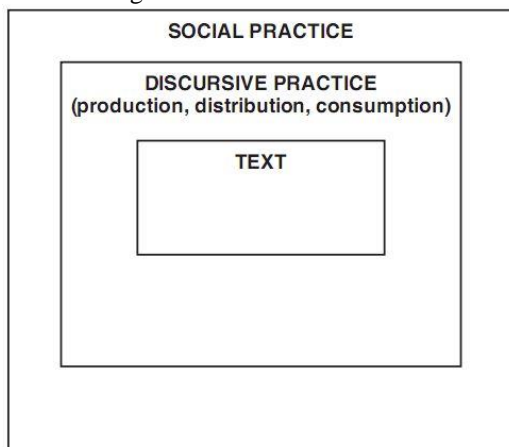
#### **Critical Linguistics and Social Model**

The cornerstones for CDA as an established field of linguistic research were laid by the 'critical linguistics' (CL) which developed in Britain in the 1970s (Fowler et al. 1979). This was closely associated with functional-systemic linguistic theory (Halliday 1978), which accounts for its emphasis upon practical ways of analyzing texts, and the attention it gives to the role of grammar in its ideological, context-dependent analysis. CL drew attention to the ideological potential of certain grammatical forms like passive structures, transitivity and nominalizations. Such linguistic forms (and others like certain metaphors, argumentative fallacies, rhetorical devices and presuppositions) have subsequently proven to be fruitful points of entry for critical semiotic analysis of social problems. However, it is important to state that one cannot simply 'read off' ideological analysis from such forms; while they facilitate a description of the object of research, any critical interpretation must relate to the socio-political and historical context.

Some of the major scholars in critical linguistics later developed 'social semiotics' (Van Leeuwen 2005a). This highlights the multi-semiotic and potentially ideological character of most texts in contemporary society, and explores ways of analyzing the intersection of language, images, design, color, spatial arrangement and so forth. Recent work has focused on the semiotics of typography (Van Leeuwen 2005b) and new media, for example their kinetic design (Van Leeuwen and Caldas-Coulthard 2004). Jay Lemke's recent work explores multimedia semiotics and its implications for critical research and pedagogy (2006). Clearly the links between new media are at once semiotic, ideological, material and economic. As such they play a key role in the political economy of so-called hypercapitalism, helping to transmit and embed particular social values across a global terrain (Graham 2006)

### Relational-Dialectic Model

Fairclough's work has developed a dialectical theory of discourse and a transdisciplinary approach to social change. According to Fairclough (1989), using language is the commonest form of social behavior'. If language is a form of social behavior, then there is a need to relate theories of society to theories of language. Fairclough (1992) sees every instance of discourse as having three interrelated dimensions: as a text (spoken or written); as an interaction between people involving processes of producing and interpreting the text; and as part of a piece of social action. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is reproduced in the Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional view of discourse**

The model is an analytical framework for empirical research on communication and society. All three dimensions should be covered in a specific discourse analysis of a communicative event. The analysis should focus, then, on (1) the linguistic features of the text (text), (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice); and (3) the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice).

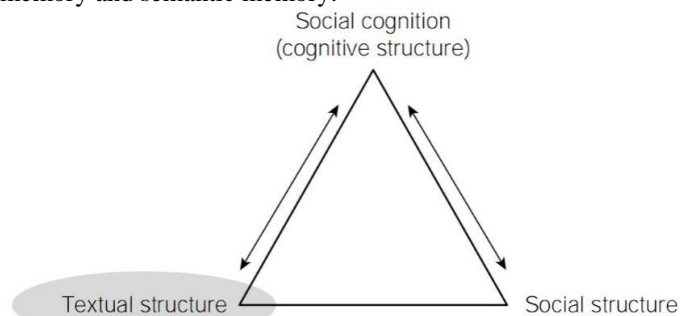
Fairclough's most recent work concerns with the Cultural Political Economy research agenda which incorporates a theory of discourse in analyzing salient concepts in capitalist society like the 'information society' and 'knowledge economy'.

### Socio-cognitive Model

A leading figure in cognitive approaches to critical discourse studies is Van Dijk, whose work has highlighted the cognitive dimensions of how discourse operates in racism, ideology and knowledge. For van Dijk (1985, 1988b, 2008, 2009), textual structure and social structure are mediated by social cognition. Social cognition is defined as 'the system of mental representations and processes of group members' (1995). Van Dijk (1993b) states that it is theoretically essential for micro-level notions such as text and macro-level notions such as social relations to be mediated by social cognition. Indeed, to explain how texts can be socially constructive presupposes an account that relates textual structures to social cognition, and social cognition to social structures. The model proposed in the socio-cognitive approach may be diagrammatically represented as in Figure 2, where the shaded area signifies the micro-level focus of text analysis and the bidirectional arrows the dialectical relation between textual structure and social structure mediated by social cognition.

Social cognition is connected to what van Dijk (2002) terms social memory. For van Dijk, cognitive processes and representations are defined relative to an abstract mental structure called memory (2002), which is broken down into short-term memory and long-term memory. Actual processing

of information (discourse) occurs in short-term memory against information stored in long-term memory (discourses). Long-term memory, in turn, is further broken down into episodic memory and semantic memory.



**Figure 2. Textual-cognitive-social structure triangle**

Episodic memory stores information based on personal experiences and semantic memory stores more general, abstract and socially shared information, such as our knowledge of the language or knowledge of the world (van Dijk 2002). vanDijk (2002) uses social memory to refer to semantic memory given the contrast between the socially shared nature of semantic memory and the idiosyncratic nature of episodic memory. Social cognitions are socially shared mental structures and representations. Although embodied in the minds of individuals, social cognitions are social 'because they are shared and presupposed by group members' (van Dijk 1993b). In this sense, the socio-cognitive model bridges both the individualism and social constructivism associated with text-consumption. Social cognitions can be characterized more abstractly as attitudes, ideologies, opinions, prejudices, discourses or member resources. Crucially, these socially situated cognitive structures and representations are largely acquired, used and changed through texts (van Dijk 1990). This process is facilitated by the human capacity for meta representation (Sperber 2000). A meta representation is a representation of a representation. Texts are public meta representations which 'convey mental representations and have, at least by extension, some of the properties of the mental representations they convey' (Sperber 2000). Interpreting texts involves constructing cognitive meta representations of the linguistic representations in text.

Recent developments combining cognitive perspectives and CDA include Koller's work on cognitive metaphor theory, particularly in the area of corporate discourse (2005). Her work also includes analyses of the use of politically resonant metaphors in corporate and public branding (2007). Paul Chilton's cognitive linguistic approach has made important contributions to the analysis of political discourse (Chilton 2004), as well as to the development of the CDA research agenda (Wodak & Chilton 2007). For example, he has recently argued that in the context of an increasingly globalized research community, one of the key challenges facing CDA is to address its tendency toward culturecentrism. Specifically, he believes that CDA frequently fails to address the fact that freedoms to engage in critical practice, as well as understandings of 'critique', vary considerably from one culture to the next.

### Discourse-Historical Model

This Discourse-Historical Model was developed by Wodak and other scholars in Vienna working in the traditions of Bernsteinian sociolinguistics and the Frankfurt school. The approach is particularly associated with large research projects in interdisciplinary research teams focusing on gender, sexism, anti-Semitism, identity politics, organizational discourses and

racism. One of the major aims of this kind of critical research has been its practical application.

The Discourse-Historical Model was specifically devised for an interdisciplinary study of post-war anti-Semitism in Austria. The distinctive feature of this approach is its attempt to integrate systematically all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of a written or spoken text, specifically taking into account four layers of context, leading from the broad socio-political context to the textual co-text of utterances (Wodak 2001a, b). The study for which the model was developed attempted to trace in detail the constitution of an anti-Semitic stereotyped image as it emerged in public discourse in the 1986 Austrian presidential campaign of Kurt Waldheim.

Several other studies on prejudice and racism followed this first attempt and have led to more theoretical considerations on the nature of racist discourse (Kryzanowski & Wodak 2008). The Discourse-Historical Model is designed to enable the analysis of implicit, coded prejudiced utterances, as well as to identify and expose the allusions contained in prejudiced discourse. It has variously been applied to identity-construction in European politics (Wodak 2009a), and to right-wing politics in Austria and the United Kingdom (Heer et al. 2008; Richardson & Wodak 2009a, b).

More recently the Discourse-Historical Model has been combined with ethnographic methods to investigate identity politics and patterns of decision-making in EU organizations, offering insights into the 'backstage' of politics, as well as the exploration of social change in EU countries (Wodak 2009a). In its work on EU institutions, Wodak has also extensively explored the discursive construction of social identity, both national and gender-based (Wodak et al. 2009).

#### Open questions and perspectives

Over the years, several issues have arisen as important research areas which have not yet been adequately discussed (Wodak & Meyer 2001), which certainly present problems not only for CDA but for text and discourse analysis in a much broader sense:

- The problem of operationalizing theories and relating the linguistic dimension with the social dimensions (problem of mediation);
- The linguistic theory to be applied: often enough, a whole mixed bag of linguistic indicators and variables were used to analyze texts with no theoretical notions or grammar theory in the background;
- The notion of 'context', which is often defined either very broadly or very narrowly: how much extra-textual information do we need to analyze texts, how many and which theories have what kind of impact on the concrete analysis and interpretation of texts?
- The accusation of being biased – how are certain readings of text justified?
- To justify certain interpretations, the decisions for a particular analysis should be made more explicit.
- Inter- or trans-disciplinarity have not yet been truly integrated into text analysis.

#### Conclusion

Critical Discourse Analysis offers a promising paradigm for identifying and interpreting the way ideology functions in and through discourse. The present paper attempted to provide a concise explanation on CDA, and introduce four major models of CDA proposed by leading figures in the field as a means to examine the function of language as a social practice

implementing a vast number of functions in different types of texts.

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