Critical Discourse Analysis

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“What is ‘said’ in a text is always said against the background of what is ‘unsaid’”

(Fiarclough, 2003:17)
Introduction

What Is Critical Discourse Analysis?
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the field where the social factor plays an essential role in determining the individual’s meanings and intentions when using a language. This means that different social and individual elements have become part of producing, reproducing, interpreting and/or analyzing any discourse and, thus, of CDA studies.
Norman Fairclough is one of the prominent figures who has contributed to the CDA field most significantly; he believes that the language is an irreducible part of social life and refers to a dialectic relation between language and social reality, which can be realized through social events (texts), social practices (orders of discourse) and social structures.
Critical Discourse Analysis is the field that follows the line founded in sociolinguistics where the social factor plays an essential role in determining the meanings and intentions a piece of discourse may imply.
This means that elements like attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, culture and historical backgrounds, societal systems, education ...etc have become part of producing, reproducing, interpreting and/or analyzing any discourse and, thus, of CDA studies.
Fairclough is one of the prominent figures who has contributed to the field of the Critical Discourse Analysis most significantly; he believes that the language is an irreducible part of social life and refers to a dialectic relation between language and social reality, which can be realized through social events (texts), social practices (orders of discourse) and social structures.
In his book Language and power (2001) Fairclough explained his CDA tri-dimensional interdisciplinary approach “text-interaction-context”, part of which a ten-question model presented to analyze the formal properties of a text to find out the “hidden agenda” implied in the language used.
The lexical, grammatical, cohesive, and text structure features of any text (which is a communicative or social event) are only representations behind which lurk a lot of ideologies and values. The first seven questions of the ten-question model of analysis deal with uncovering the experiential, relational, and expressive values of the wordings, metaphors and grammatical structures of the text whereas the last three questions are related to cohesion and text structure.
The term Critical Linguistics emerged along with the prevalence of the critical theory and was then developed to be mainly based on Halliday’s systemic – functional linguistics which exceeded the limits of the formal descriptions of a piece of language into its context or the situation in which it is used in the society.
After this term has widely been elaborated in theory and practice, a new term is then alternatively used “critical discourse analysis” in which the social experience can imply struggle of a social power, inequality, dominance and hegemony.
The term discourse can be understood from Wodak and Meyer’s definition of CDA as simply language in use whereas CDA is “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)” (2001:2) . All the dimensions for the use of the word „critical” analysis of the discourse seem to be revolving around one main issue i.e. the critique of the social practice
as Bloom and Bloom show that the major part of discourse analysis of the twentieth century was in principle “non–critical” since it confines itself to the three purposes: identifying and describing how language is used for communication, developing methods of analysis to highlight its features, and ultimately building theories about how communication is to take place (2007: 12).
On the contrary, CDA can address all types of problems ranging from international events “macro issues” to individual cases “micro issues” to briefly cover the three objectives: “to analyze discourse practices that reflect or construct social problems, to investigate how ideologies can become frozen in language and find ways to break the ice, to increase awareness on how to apply these objectives to specific cases of injustice, prejudice, and misuse of power.”
CDA is then the study of the relationship between the use of the language and the social context. It has become an approach rather than a sole method for language study. This can be clearly noticed in the different perspectives adopted by the key figures in the field. Van Dijk sees that CDA is the study of “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk” (2001: 352).
Fairclough believes that language is irreducible part of the social life while CDA explores the “opaque” relationships between both the discursive practice and the wider social and cultural environment in which it occurs (1995: 132–3).
Hodge and Kress (1993) focus on the dichotomous categories: “euphemism” and “derogatory” as the cornerstone for explaining a discourse as these terms lead to different presentations of reality and ultimately ideology. But Van Leeuwen (1996) is concerned with social factors” knowledge and positioning in the community as they can be included or excluded from the centers of power.
Also, Scollon defines CDA as a “program” for critically analyzing language in use “as a means of addressing social change”. (2001: 140).
Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.
With such dissident* research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. Some of the tenets* of CDA can already be found in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School before the Second World War

*(Characterized by departure from accepted beliefs or standards )

*(A religious doctrine that is proclaimed as true without proof)
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. CDA has also counterparts in “critical” developments in sociolinguistics, psychology, and the social sciences, some already dating back to the early 1970s.
CDA – What is it all about?

The terms Critical Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are often used interchangeably. In fact, recently, the term CDA seems to have been preferred and is being used to denote the theory formerly identified as CL.
The manifold roots of CDA lie in Rhetoric, Text linguistics, Anthropology, Philosophy, Socio-Psychology, Cognitive Science, Literary Studies and Sociolinguistics, as well as in Applied Linguistics and Pragmatics.
Nowadays, some scholars prefer the term Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). For example, Teun van Dijk provides us with a broad overview of the field of (C)DS, where one can identify the following developments: between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s, new, closely related disciplines emerged in the humanities and the social sciences.
Despite their different disciplinary backgrounds and a great diversity of methods and objects of investigation, some parts of the new fields/paradigms/linguistic sub-disciplines of semiotics, pragmatics, psycho- and sociolinguistics, ethnography of speaking, conversation analysis and discourse studies all deal with discourse and have at least seven dimensions in common:
- an interest in the properties of ‘naturally occurring’ language use by real language users (instead of a study of abstract language systems and invented examples)
- a focus on larger units than isolated words and sentences and, hence, new basic units of analysis: texts, discourses, conversations, speech acts, or communicative events
the extension of linguistics beyond sentence grammar towards a study of action and interaction

the extension to non-verbal (semiotic, multimodal, visual) aspects of interaction and communication: gestures, images, film, the internet, and multimedia

a focus on dynamic (socio)-cognitive or interactional moves and strategies
the study of the functions of (social, cultural, situative and cognitive) contexts of language use

an analysis of a vast number of phenomena of text grammar and language use: coherence, anaphora, topics, macrostructures, speech acts, interactions, turn-taking, signs, politeness, argumentation, rhetoric, mental models, and many other aspects of text and discourse.

(Using a pronoun or similar word instead of repeating a word used earlier)
The significant difference between DS and CDS (or CDA) lies in the *constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary approach* of the latter, apart from endorsing *(supporting)* all of the above points. *CDA is therefore not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach.*
The objects under investigation do not have to be related to negative or exceptionally ‘serious’ social or political experiences or events – this is a frequent misunderstanding of the aims and goals of CDA and of the term ‘critical’ which, of course, does not mean ‘negative’ as in common-sense usage.
Any social phenomenon lends itself to critical investigation, to be challenged and not taken for granted.
It is obvious that the notions of text and discourse have been subject to a hugely proliferating (increasing) number of usages in the social sciences. Almost no paper or article is to be found which does not revisit these notions.
Thus, *discourse* means anything **from** a historical monument, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, **to** language per se.
We find notions such as racist discourse, gendered discourse, discourses on un/employment, media discourse, populist discourse (A politician who only advocates policies that are popular-democrat), discourses of the past, and many more – thus stretching the meaning of *discourse* from a genre to a register or style, from a building to a political programme.
This causes and must cause confusion – which leads to much criticism and more misunderstandings.
The CDA as a network of scholars emerged in the early 1990s, following a small symposium in Amsterdam, in January 1991. 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, specifically CDA.
The meeting made it possible to confront with each other the very distinct and different approaches, which have, of course, changed significantly since 1991 but remain relevant, in many respects. In this process of group formation, the differences and sameness were laid out:
differences with regard to other theories and methodologies in Discourse Analysis and sameness in a programmatic way, both of which frame the range of theoretical approaches (Wodak, 2004).
In the meantime, for example, some of the scholars previously aligned with CDA have chosen other theoretical frameworks and have distanced themselves from CDA (such as Gunther Kress and Ron Scollon); on the other hand, new approaches have been created which frequently find innovative ways of integrating the more traditional theories or of elaborating them.
In general, CDA as a school or paradigm is characterized by a number of principles: for example, all approaches are problem-oriented, and thus necessarily interdisciplinary and eclectic. Moreover, CDA is characterized by the common interests in de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual).
CDA researchers also attempt to make their own positions and interests explicit while retaining their respective (Considered individually) scientific methodologies and while remaining self-reflective of their own research process.

Deeply or seriously thoughtful
The start of the CDA network was marked by the launch of Van Dijk’s journal *Discourse and Society* (1990), as well as by several books which were coincidentally (or because of a *Zeitgeist*) published simultaneously and led by similar research goals.

The spirit of the time; the spirit characteristic of an age or generation
The Amsterdam meeting determined an institutional start, an attempt both to constitute an exchange programme (ERASMUS for three years), as well as joint projects and collaborations between scholars of different countries, and a special issue of *Discourse and Society* (1993), which presented the above-mentioned approaches.
Since then, new journals have been created, multiple overviews have been written, and nowadays CDA is an established paradigm in Linguistics; currently, we encounter Critical Discourse Studies, The Journal of Language and Politics, Discourse and Communication and Visual Semiotics, among many other journals; we also find several e-journals which publish critical research, such as CADAAD. The generally accepted perspective of a particular discipline at a given time
Book series have been launched (such as *Discourse Approaches to Politics, Culture and Society*), regular CDA meetings and conferences take place, and handbooks are under way. In sum, CDA (CDS) has become an established discipline, institutionalized across the globe in many departments and curricula.
The common ground: discourse, critique, power and ideology

When deconstructing the label of this research programme – we view CDA basically as a research programme, the reasons for which we will explain below – we necessarily have to define what CDA means when it employs the terms ‘critical’ and ‘discourse’.
Michael Billig (2003) has clearly pointed to the fact that CDA has become an established academic discipline with the same rituals and institutional practices as all other academic disciplines.
Ironically, he asks the question whether this might mean that CDA has become or might become ‘uncritical’ – or if the use of acronyms such as CDA might serve the same purposes as in other traditional, non-critical disciplines; namely to exclude outsiders and to mystify the functions and intentions of the research.
Most recently, has Billig reiterated this question under a new umbrella: do scholars who employ CDA write in the same way mainly by using nominalizations extensively, like the many texts which they criticize ((Billig, 2008)?
“The problem with talking about the unconscious, repression, mental representations, mirror-stages, etc., is that it is easy to assume that we have solved problems by discovering ‘things’. And the more we write about these ‘things’, the more we take their existence for granted.
Analysts might have once understood these concepts semi-metaphorically, but soon they write about them literally. In my view, the cognitive psychology of ‘mental representations’, or the psychoanalysis of ‘the unconscious’ and ‘repression’, makes psychology too easy and too non-materialistic – too prone to accept that non-material entities provide the solution to the puzzles that, in effect, analysts are avoiding.
Billig (2008) ends his quite provocative argument by stating: [t]here is no reason for supposing that for academics, writing their academic articles, the active forms are psychologically primary.
However, we believe that he points to potentially very fruitful and necessary debates for CDA. More specifically, Billig points to the danger which can befall any discipline (or school or group) when it becomes established and institutionalized after having been marginalized for a long time.
Once established, he argues, one might forget the basic desiderata and become corrupted by the system – in our case, the Knowledge-based Economy (KBE) which influences all our lives in so many ways (Billig, 2003).
At this point, it is important to stress that CDA has never been and has never attempted to be or to provide one single or specific theory. Neither is one specific methodology characteristic of research in CDA.
Quite the contrary, studies in CDA are multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds, oriented towards different data and methodologies. Researchers in CDA also rely on a variety of grammatical approaches.
The definitions of the terms ‘discourse’, ‘critical’, ‘ideology’, ‘power’ and so on are also manifold. Thus, any criticism of CDA should always specify which research or researcher they relate to.
Hence, we suggest using the notion of a ‘school’ for CDA, or of a programme, which many researchers find useful and to which they can relate. This programme or set of principles has, of course, changed over the years (see (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 1996).
Such a heterogeneous school might be confusing for some; on the other hand, it allows for continuous debates, for changes in the aims and goals, and for innovation.
In contrast to ‘total and closed’ theories, such as Chomsky’s Generative Transformational Grammar or Michael Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics, CDA has never had the image of a ‘sect’ and does not want to have such an image.
This heterogeneity of methodological and theoretical approaches that can be found in this field would tend to confirm van Dijk’s point that CDA and CL ‘are at most a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis’ (Van Dijk, 1993a: 131).
Below, we summarize some of these principles, which are adhered to by most researchers.