Critical Discourse Analysis: Current Approaches and the Advent of Multimodality

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Introduction

CDA emerged as a network of scholars in the early 1990s, following a small symposium in Amsterdam in January 1991 (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 3). It has been described as "an academic movement, a way of doing discourse analysis from a critical perspective", (Baker et al, 2013, p. 1). It is characterised by "the common interests in demystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken and visual)" (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 3). It seeks to develop methods and theories that can better capture the interrelationships between language, power and ideology, and to draw out and describe the practices and conventions in and behind texts that contain political and ideological investment (Machin and Mayr, 2009, p. 4). CDA is used to identify and study "specific areas of injustice, danger, suffering and prejudice", and while it is now widely accepted that many social problems arise from the "injudicious use of language and other forms of communication", it is unclear just how effective intervention in discourses alone can help to mitigate such problems, CDA can help to shine a light on these issues and point societies in the direction of change (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, pg 3). There is no one uniform, common theory formation determining CDA, and, in fact, there are several approaches (Weiss and Wodak, 2003, p. 6; Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 19-23). Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak (2011, p. 357) see CDA as "a problem-orientated interdisciplinary research

movement", which subsumes a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda. CDA addresses the ideological character of discourse (Fairclough, 2010, p. 10), and whilst it can focus on larger issues such as the ideology of globalisation and capitalist hegemony, it can also find use in other, localised contexts (Baker et al, 2013, p. 3). CDA typically analyses "news texts, political speeches, advertisements, school books, etc" identifying strategies which appear normal or neutral on the surface, but which might actually be ideological and "seek the representation of events or persons for particular ends" and can show, for example, how kinds of power relations, such as those involved in racism, are maintained through various manners of discourse such as news texts and political speeches (Machin and Mayr, 2009, p. 5).

Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak (2011, p. 359) note that the recent growth of CDA as a field "corresponds to, contributes to, but also draws upon" an increase in critical interest in language in contemporary society. They argue that there is a widespread cynicism about the rhetoric of commodity advertising, the "simulated personalness" used in impersonal service interactions, and the increased use of 'spin' within the field of politics. Politicians now have unprecedented access to vast audiences, through television and the Internet, offering them new and powerful opportunities to shape public opinion and garner support for their ideas and policies. Also, they argue, there is a high level of popular awareness about sexism and racism in modern discourse, and that political activism and public criticism of the 'War on Terror' have brought to people's attention the linguistic strategies through which the war has been legitimised and prosecuted. What follows is a short overview of some of the more prominent approaches to CDA research.

Dialectical Relational Approach (DRA)

Norman Fairclough's text Language and Power (1989) is regarded by many as being a foundational text in CDA. It lays down a radical view of CDA by emphasing the power behind discourse, rather than the power in discourse, that is, how powerful people "shape the 'order of discourse' as well as the social order in general". It sets as CDA's objective "the raising of people's consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, as a step towards social emancipation" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 3). This approach takes a "grand-theory-orientated position", which focuses on social conflict in the Marxist tradition, trying to detect its linguistic manifestations in discourses, "in specific elements of dominance, difference and resistance" (Wodak and Meyer, p. 26). According to Fairclough, it incorporates a dialectical theory of discourse and transdisciplinary approach to social change (1992, 2003, 2006). This approach explores the discursive aspect of contemporary processes of social change. In Fairclough's own applications of his approach, CDA is engages with other sociological and social scientific research in order to ascertain to what extent and in what ways these changes are changes in discourse. Fairclough (2009, p. 163-164) makes the point that discourse is commonly used in various senses including (a) meaning making as an element of the social process, (b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice, and (c) a way of understanding the world associated with a particular social perspective (for example a capitalist discourse of market forces). Given that it is easy to confuse them, he chooses to use the term semiosis which is understood as "an element of the social process which is dialectally related to others. Therefore, CDA focuses not only on semiosis, but on the relations between semiotic and other social elements. Given this, CDA needs to be integrated within frameworks for transdisciplinary research

whereby, though dialogue between different disciplines and theories when brought together to address research issues, they become mutual sources for the theoretical and methodological development of each of them.

Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

DHA (Reisigil and Wodak, 2001, 2009) was developed for an interdisciplinary study of postwar anti-semitism in postwar Austria. A distinctive feature of DHA is that it attempts to systematically integrate all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of written and spoken text, taking into account four specific layers of context (Fairclough, Muderrig and Wodak, 2011, p. 364). It tries to establish a theory of discourse by linking 'theories of action, genres, discourse and texts', and although it is aligned with critical theory, "grand theories" play a small role compared to the discourse model and the emphasis on historical analysis, as context is understood as being mainly historical (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 26). Fairclough (2015, p. 19-20) describes DHA as working with a view of critique as having three aspects: an 'unpolitical "immanent critique"', which is aimed at discovering "inconsistencies, (self-)contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas' within the discourse; a 'sociodiagnostic critique', which aims to "'demystify' the 'persuasive, propagandistic, populist, "manipulative" character' of discourse from a 'normative-ethical perspective'"; and a 'prospective critique', which aims to transform and improve communication.

Socio-Cognitive Approach (CSA)

Van Dijk (2009, p. 62-64) favours the term Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), which, he claims, is a critical approach involving, not only critical analysis, "but also critical theory, as well as critical applications." He asserts

that the critical approach of CDS characterizes its practitioners, rather than the methods they employ. CDS scholars, he claims, are sociopolitically committed to social equality and justice, and are typically interested in the way discourse (re)produces social domination, that is, the power abuse of one group over another, and how dominated groups might discursively resist such abuse. Central to this particular study is van Dijk's notion of 'discursive injustice'. CDS is premised on the belief that "some forms of text and talk may be unjust" insofar as they violate internationally recognised human rights and/or contribute to social inequality. CDS, he writes, aims to expose and help to combat such injustices. Also of central importance to this approach is van Dijk's triangular framework of discourse-cognition-society. He considers the study of cognition to be of fundamental importance to the critical analysis of discourse, communication and interaction. He is interested in the "study of mental representations and the processes of language users when they produce and comprehend discourse and participate in verbal interaction". This approach examines how cognitive phenomena are related to the "structures of discourse, verbal interaction, communicative events and situations, as well as societal structures, such as those of domination and social inequality".

Corpus Linguistics Approach (CLA)

Corpus linguistics (CL) is, according to McEnery and Wilson (1996, p. 1), "the study of language based on real life language use". It is a methodology which uses a variety of computer software packages to analyse authentic bodies of textual data, in particular, concordance programs, which allow for the analysis of often very large bodies of text (Mautner, 2009, p. 122). Whilst the use of corpus analysis in CDA is becoming increasingly common, it is still co paratively rare for critical discourse analysts to go to

the web for their primary data (Mautner, 2013, p. 253). However, in the era of the Internet many corpus linguists are seeing the web as a corpus from where texts that they want can be intelligently harvested and compiled into corporas (Lee, 2010, p. 115). To qualify as a corpus-based discourse analysis, argues Thornbury (2010, p. 271), a study would need to use quantitative methods with the aim of producing findings that are both descriptive and explanatory. He argues that descriptive findings are generated by searching for particular discourse features in a corpus - typically a collection of texts, using computational means. To explain the frequency, significance and use of these features would generally involve reference to context, either in the co-textual environment, or to other texts. Therefore, an analyst can compare and contrast an individual text, or sub-corpora of a specific type, with texts of another type. Baker (2006, p. 1) argues that, unlike exclusively qualitative approaches to research, corpus linguistics uses bodies of electronically encoded text and implements quantitative methods by using, for example, frequency information to identify the "occurrences of particular linguistic phenomena". Biber et al (1998, p. 4) point out that corpus-based analysis employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, "Association patterns represent quantitative relations, measuring the extent to which features and variants are associated with contextual factors. However, functional (qualitative) interpretation is also an essential step in any corpus-based analysis". Baker et al (2008, p. 273-274) also take the view that CL employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches. They do not view CL as being a single method, rather it utilises a collection of various methods that are related insofar as they "are performed on large collections of electronically stored naturally occurring texts". They are quantitative and/or make use of statistical tests. "However, most CL methods require considerable human input, which often includes qualitative analysis (such as examining

concordance lines)". This is disputed by Fairclough (2015, p. 20-21) who says it is misleading for Baker et al to "establish that corpus linguistics is not only quantitative, but also interpretative and qualitative". Concordances do provide extended co-texts that can be, to some extent, interpreted and analysed qualitatively, but when corpus linguists "switch hats" and do this themselves, they are no longer doing corpus linguistics, he argues.

Whilst there is an increasing amount of CDA analysts using CL as a method of analysis, according to Mautner (2009, p. 122-123), the techniques of CL are not yet generally considered as being part of the core of CDA's methodological canon. He lists three ways in which CL contributes to CDA: Firstly, CL allows researchers to work with much great bodies of text data than if doing analysis manually; Secondly, by enabling analysts to significantly broaden their empirical base, CL can help to reduce researcher bias (also see Baker, 2006, p. 10), which goes some way to overcoming a problem for which CDA has received "harsh and persistent criticism (e.g. Widdowson 1995)"; Thirdly, Corpus linguistics software allows for both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on data. It offers analysts the opportunity to compute frequencies of lexical items and measures of statistical significance, as well as "presenting data extracts in such a way that the researcher can assess individual occurrences of search words, qualitatively examine their collocational environments, describe salient semantic patterns and identify discourse functions".

A distinction is drawn within CL between 'corpus-based' and 'corpus-driven' linguistics. Baker (2006, p. 16) notes that the corpus-based approach uses a corpus as a set of examples, to "check researcher intuition or to examine the frequency and/or plausibility of the language contained within a smaller data set". On the other hand, corpus-driven analysis is more inductive, "the corpus itself is the data and the patterns in it are noted as the

way of expressing regularities (and exceptions) in language." Flowerdew (2014, p. 174) asserts that CL in the corpus-driven sense is underpinned by a "phraseological syntagmatic approach to language data consisting of five categories of co-selection "with the core lexical item and the semantic prosody as obligatory elements, and collocation, colligation and semantic preference as optional categories". Proponents of the corpus-driven approach regard CL as essentially a theory with corpus analyses identifying previously unknown aspects of language, thereby challenging the "'underlying assumptions behind many well established theoretical positions' (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001, p. 48)".

Building corpora

A first consideration in building a corpus is what kind of corpus is most appropriate for the research intended. Reference corpora tend to be ready-made and commercially available and can be accessed online, or analysts can use bespoke software. The largest of these often contain millions of words from a large range of texts, such as the British National Corpus, which contains approximately one hundred million words, the majority of which is collected from written sources such as websites, newspapers, magazines and books, but there is also a large body of spoken data from radio, television and informal conversations. The Bank of English (BoE) corpus by COBUILD currently consists of approximately 650 million words. Reference corpora are ideal for investigating how broader social issues such as racism or ageism are reflected in the various genres and discourses represented therein, for example, newspapers, spoken language, or fiction (Mautner, 2009, p. 131).

Specialized corpora (Baker, 2006, p. 26) are used to study aspects of a particular variety or genre of language. For instance, we might be interested in analysing language used in business magazines, academic journals, or

spoken language of high school students in a particular area or at a particular time. Mautner, (2009, p. 132) points to the emergence of the World Wide Web as being a key resource for corpus builders. The Internet offers a wide range and unlimited supply of resources. The cut-and-paste facility allows researchers to build large corpora in relatively short periods of time. Corpora can now be built by individual scholars working with limited resources, rather than those with large budgets and supported by research staff. He argues that enlisting corpus methods has a democratising effect on critical research.

Looking at further corpus design issues Mautner (2009, p. 29-30) details McEnery et al's definition of a corpus (2006, p. 5, original emphasis) as being a collection of (1) machine-readable (2) authentic texts […] which is (3) sampled to be (4) representative of a particular language or language variety. He then goes on to look at each of the four characteristics and how there might be implications when using corpora in CDA. Given that corpora are analysed using concordancing software it is necessary to build files suitable for use with the software. Standard concordance software, such as AntConc and Wordsmith, use plain text files, which are stripped of all formatting, layout and graphics or photographs. This is an issue for critical discourse analysts insofar as meaning making can come about as a result of the relationship between these absent factors. Font size, colour and format, and the text-images relationships "are not merely embellishments, but play an integral role in making text function as socially situated discourse". Therefore, in order to preserve what is lost for future reference, should the need for multimodal analysis arise, it is advised to make hard copies or scanned originals. Regarding characteristics (3) sampling and (4) representativeness, the first step is to identify the 'universe of possible texts' (Titcher et al, 2000, p. 33), that is, the field or area from which the

researcher decides to select the texts. The next stage is sampling. This can be done randomly, for example, by numbering the texts within the 'universe' and then selecting those whose number has been selected by a random number generator. Another method might be guided by criteria which are applied systematically, and in a top-down selection process, which can help to narrow down the corpus to a manageable size, for example, "take one article about Topic A from newspapers B and C published each week between dates X and Y".

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA)

Four twentieth century schools of linguistics have worked with semiotic modes other than language. The first was the Prague School in the 1930s and 40s, which extended linguistics to the visual arts and non-verbal elements of theatre. Second was the Paris School whose focus was mostly on popular culture and mass media, and which utilised methods from structural linguistics. Around the same time, American linguists began taking an interest in the multimodal analysis of both spoken and non-verbal communication. A fourth school emerged in the 1990s, inspired by the linguistics of M. A. K. Halliday, and it was this school which first started using the term 'multimodality' and developing methods and tools for the multimodal analysis of discourse (Leeuwen and Kress, 2014, p. 107).

Whilst the general bias in CDA has been towards linguistically defined textual media, there is a greater understanding of the importance of incorporating visual images into concepts of discourse and a moving towards multimodal conceptions of semiosis (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 450). Multimodal CDA is a relatively new branch of CDA with its origins in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) who argue that meaning is communicated not just through language, but through visual images and that

this can be described as a grammar approach to visual communication. Multimodality is the term they use to describe the grammar of visual communication that is used by image designers. It is "an analysis of the rules and principles that allows viewers to understand the meaning potential of the relative placement of elements, framing, salience, proximity, color saturations, styles of typeface, etc." (Machin, 2007, p. ix-x). Kress (2014, p. 37) makes the argument that a multimodal approach assumes that language, whether written or verbal, is only one of many means available for representation and meaning making, in other words, that meanings revealed by analysis of only written or spoken discourses can only ever be "'partial' meanings".

Researchers have started to look at various other means of communication such as political cartoons (Mazid, 2008), and even children's toys, (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2009) to ascertain how they make meaning. Machin (2007, p. x) further notes that multimodality has been influential in language-based disciplines where attention has not been paid to the visual. Linguists like Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and O'Halloran (2004) have started to design their own analytical approaches that "draw on the same kinds of precision and more systematic kinds of description" that are found in CDA (Machin, 2007, p. 1). However, what is central to MCDA is the principle of criticality that is core to CDA. Through linking the key principles of CDA and social semiotics theory, analysts now have a valuable theoretical and methodological tool to help understand how language and other types of semiotic entities are used to construct, convey, and challenge social power. According to Machin and Mayr the job of MCDA is to identify and reveal the choices made by authors when choosing texts and images "through a careful process of description guided by the tools provided" (2012, p. 9). They are interested in showing how images, diagrams, photographs,

and graphics create meaning, as a means to better understand what message an author is trying to get across. They say, "we want to place these meanings next to those we have found in the accompanying text". They want to uncover "ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions" in both the images and texts in order to reveal the kinds of power interests buried in them (2012, p. 10). Furthermore, they point out that CDA and MCDA share the view that other modes of communication are a means of social construction, that visual communication, as well as language, "shapes and is shaped by society". Therefore, MCDA is not interested in the visual semiotic choices in themselves, but in how they play a role in the communication of power relations.

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