Understanding Discourse; from Theory to Method

Garima Aggarwal

Department of Elementary Education, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

ABSTRACT

Critical discourse analysis presents a paradigmatic shift in the ways many scholars envisage studies related to critical linguistics, education, health, politics and cultural studies from past 15 years. Norman Fairclough has been the most influential figure in presenting a coherent framework of analysis for same. The paper attempts to present related theoretical and methodological presumptions of the theorist aiming to infer a coherent and rationalized understanding of CDA. The paper first introduces the term discourse and its conceptualizations as done from the perspective of attempting a social analysis. Then after by explicating a link between language and power the paper presents different discourse analysis schools that are present in academia. Then the paper introduces CDA as a perspective from Norman Fairclough's point of view and reflects on its potentialities as a tool for critical social analysis. In the same pursuit the paper also evaluates its difference from critical linguistics and post structuralism. Finally the paper attempts to conclude by quoting the criticisms of CDA and framing a response to them on the basis of the discussions done during the paper.

Keywords: Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Norman Fairclough, Foucault, Linguistics, Post-structuralism

"Discourse is language as social practice determined by social structures." (Fairclough, 2001, p. 14)

Discourse as a term is generally used to designate the forms of representation, habits and patterns of language that produce culturally and historically located meanings. It refers to how people think and resonate their ideas, values and beliefs. It's the basic underling representation of the social organisation and thus as sociologists points out, is the basic force that shapes our thoughts and tenets of life. Researchers see discourse as embedded in relations of power that exists in a society within its layers of various institutions such as media, health, politics, and education.

Discourse analysis consists of interpretation and evaluation of the discourse and the various meanings that are floated within it. It is same as saying how the world conceptualizes and how the same is reflected in their further constructions (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). It does not look at language as a subordinate to the meanings rather considers it as a basic component, catalyst and having an independent role for the same. In discourse analysis the premise is that reality is constructed by people and society during their verbal communications. The field of study through this perspective therefore, is people's interactions and their actions producing phenomenon under study. In short

Address for correspondence

Department of Elementary Education, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

E-mail: garima2512@gmail.com

the field of study is society as constructed through communication amongst its participants. Language is considered as the basic force that not only constructs meaning within a particular social setup but also permits its existence and growth.

Through this paper I intend to embark upon a comprehensive journey from describing the term discourse to how it is connected to critical discourse analysis (CDA). It aims to discuss the various popular school of thoughts within the same perspective and how one of them presents a coherent, precise and a close knit tool for social analysis. It then attempts to explore its basic presumptions about the link between society and language. To have a precise and clear theoretical understanding of same the paper also discusses the theoretical difference between 'critical linguistics' (Halliday 1961, 1978, 1985) and 'ideology' (Foucault, 1972) as a perspective. At the end the author has attempted to respond the critics of CDA.

Language and Power

Language is not just a system which has been created through various abstract permutations and combinations of words rather social use of language convey ideologies, thoughts, images and even politics. Language and Power (1989) by Fairclough is a major series where the theorist has dealt with the same inference in an in depth manner. It deals with issues of social and professional concern within language studies.

As readers we first need to understand that the way we communicate structures major forces of the society and get influenced by the same in turn. Major theorists (such as Foucault) coming from the epochs such as linguistics, sociology and cultural studies considers the significance of the relationship between language, society and power.

Language theories and understanding around them has grown in recent years and communication has been accepted as the primary medium of social control and power. It can be argued that ideology is pervasive in language and therefore the ideological nature of language has attained the status of being one of the major themes of modern studies. Language is therefore important enough to merit the attentions of the researchers and

theorist dealing with the human sciences. Scholars and researchers having an interest in understanding social phenomena cannot do so without getting into the depths of communication and interactions that the societies are producing. Fairclough accepts that the general level of awareness about the significance of language has been awfully inadequate and therefore the sociological analysis of various fields hasn't been able to achieve the précised effectiveness for which they wish to work. This gap between the contemporary consciousness of language studies and any form of sociological analysis has very well bridged by the writings of many theorists (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk 1997; Clark and Ivanič, 1999; Bakhtin, 2006).

Discourse Analytical Schools

As pointed by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), there can be said to have specific directions in academia such as Marxism, sociolinguistics, social psychology and ethnomethodology, from where the perspective of discourse has taken its specific theoretical and methodological shape. They present three different discourse analytical schools- critical discourse analysis, discourse psychology and discourse theory.

CDA has been developed by the pioneer work of Norman Fairclough (1995) who is also the basic focus of the presented paper. His work has added a very significant dimension to the understanding of discourse i.e. critical understanding of conversations. For him linguistic interpretations unlike conversational analysis (which conceives the relationship between the word and society as simple and not consisting of ideological formations) cannot be done without locating their historical, cultural and ideological constructions.

The second wave (discourse psychology) under the purview of discourse has been considered flourishing from the school of social psychology. It has developed by locating a criticism against the view of cognitivism which does not believe in social construction of phenomenon. For cognitivism it's all there in the mind of the individual and is solely dependent on their capacity, will and motivation. On the other hand discourse psychology believes in the co-construction of meanings by the individuals and the society. The belief that minds

and selves are co-constructed (Mead, 1956; Wetherell, 2001). The focus therefore remains on the discursive construction of these meanings within a social setup.

Third and the last school of discourse analysis described by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) is of discourse as a theory itself. The theorist which has been considered presenting a pioneer work in the same are Foucault. They believe in discourse as a complete perspective which enables the researcher to look into the matters of institutional oppressions and subjugations. Foucault who basically stems from the post-structuralist school of thought has specifically looked into the relationship of discourse and thought and how the same affects the social practices.

The focus of the presented paper is to understand discourse on a continuum whereby the author is wanting to start from its theoretical underpinnings moving on towards its methodological orientations. This is the basic reason why CDA as an approach given by Norman Fairclough has been chosen as the basic idea of study. His approach provides a close knit and concrete framework to understand CDA theoretically and also to analyses social transactions within its purview. The assertion just made in the last sentence is also the one of the major articulations of the paper. It will be pondered upon in detail in later sections of this paper. For now I shall start discussing CDA and the pioneer work of Norman Fairclough around the same.

Understanding Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Norman Fairclough

Critical discourse analysis is an extended and evolutionary understanding of discourse that has been basically applied for social analysis in various fields by language theorists, specifically coming from the background of critical studies. It basically focuses on how the power relations, ideology, and social identities are getting shaped during the discursive constructions of meanings within a particular social setup. In locating the understanding of Critical Discourse analysis, the author (Fairclough) is assuming three premises

"Firstly, that language is a part of society, and not somehow external to it. Secondly, that language is a social process. And thirdly, that language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other (non-linguistic) parts of society." (Fairclough, 2001, p-18-19).

There is further a need to describe each feature for a coherent sense of Critical Discourse analysis. CDA assumes that both language and society have a dialectic relationship with each other and thus both play a significant role in shaping the other. Therefore academia need to understand that any analysis pertaining to any one of the field mentioned above is dependent on the other and is interlinked due to co-construction of meaning by the two. Secondly language is very much a part of the society that helps a society to attain its meaning. It's a social process which breathes within the layers of every sector, segment and region of society. It attains its meaning only within a context which is provided by the society. Thirdly constructions within language create patterns and habituations which then become essential for social development of a particular sector of society. This conditioning is very much accounted in CDA.

Furthermore, CDA amalgamates three issues/ levels of analysis- the actual text, the discursive practices, and the larger social context (Fairclough, 2001). Text is the verbal record of communication including both the oral or written forms of it. It is the manifestations of thoughts in forms of concrete words which according to Fairclough provides a reliable site of inquiry to social researchers. Discursive practices are the rules, beliefs, norms and mental models that float within a society and affect the communicational procedures of the same. The social construction of meaning that happens during these communications is the basic constituent of the discursive practice. Discursive practices comprises of ways of being in the world (Gee, 1990). Finally the larger social context is the institutional environment (Schools, religious denotations, politics, academia, media etc.) of any society that affects not only its thinking procedures and capacity but also the way individuals shape up their social identities.

CDA accounting for Critical Social Analysis

Critical theories are generally concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways social, economic,

historical and cultural orientations create systems (Rogers et al, 2005). Individuals and groups use language to make sense of their world and to construct social actions of everyday life while at the same time, social use of language also positions and make available certain meanings for them in turn (Lucke, 1996). CDA deals with long term analysis of this procedure of positioning and explores the layers of power relationships that are constructed within them. This is also maintained by Fairclough (1989) that CDA addresses the ideological character of discourse.

Turning to power Fairclough explains that: "... we can say that power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" (1989, p-38-39). Within discourse Fairclough identifies three constraints that the powerful can apply to non-powerful participants. The first is in regards to the content, "on what is said or done", the second is to do with relations or "the social relations people enter into in discourse", and thirdly that of subjects regarding the "'subject positions' people can occupy" (1989, p-39). CDA, according to him is able to account for all the three characteristics with its close-knit yet diverse theoretical and methodological framework and has potential for finding and further creating useful vicinities for a critical analysis of a social field.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) In Qualitative Research

Critical Discourse analysis has been extensively applied to many areas of research, specifically in the field of education and language studies (Walsh, 2011). But it has to be stated here that the perspective cannot be applied with all kinds of research orientations. It comes with its own set of premises and foundations. Each specific approach within its purview is not just a theoretical exploration but also comes attached with its methodological requirements (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). According to the authors " The package contains, first, philosophical (ontological and epistemological) premises regarding the role of language in the social construction of the world, second, theoretical models, third, methodological guidelines for how to approach

a research domain, and fourth, specific techniques for analysis" (p. 4). Therefore it is imperative to discuss how the perspective has been used and constructed within academia till now from methodological point of view.

Van Dijk (2006) maintained that CDA is primarily interested in understanding the existence and public and personal anatomy of pressing social issues. A similar view has been postulated by Rogers et al (2005) stating that critical theories are principally concerned with issues of power and justice and how the same construct, reproduce or transform social systems. Such issues need a long term analysis with an in-depth inquiry and comprehensive investigation. Therefore, CDA requires data which is able to provide coherent likeages between talk, text and society. Such a data collection is not feasible in previously derived quantitative categories. Therefore CDA and qualitative orientation to the research goes hand in hand. Specifically stating in context of education, it can be of greater assistance as the field requires an in-depth analysis of interactions between the teacher and the taught.

Critical Linguists, Ideology and Norman Fairclough

This has been maintained by Fairclough (1995) himself that his theory is influenced by the work of Michael Halliday in linguistics and for ideological standing by Foucault. He still argues how his work provides a better grounding when it comes to social analysis of any kind. This section is an attempt to explore this assertion of Fairclough and also endeavors to understand his distance from post-structuralism (Foucault being one of the main tenets).

Michael Halliday (1978, 1985) presents a strong account of critical linguistics. Halliday gave systematic functional linguistics looking at language as a semiotic system (not just as combinations of a few signs) having meaning at the basics. He defined language by how people constructs and communicates meaning. Criticizing Halliday, Fairclough maintained that language-ideology interface is too narrowly conceived in critical linguistics. He describes that critical linguistics ignores significant aspects of language (such as argumentation and narrative structure) that can give an important ideological direction to the complete talk. He postulates

that dealing with only the grammatical structures and vocabulary while analyzing language is not sufficient even if the theorist has been claiming to account for ideological stance of the text. Also Fairclough maintains that critical linguistics has practically not been able to analyze spoken dialogues, rather they have restricted their analysis till written monologues. Concluding evaluative remark as maintained by Fairclough includes his assertion that critical linguistics need for a better social grounding in their framework and an attempt to create and include discourse as a perspective.

Further as stated earlier Fairclough was also influenced by the work of Foucault specifically by his conceptualization of discursive nature of power. Foucault work encapsulated the gap that critical linguistics could not envisage in its theoretical analysis. For Foucault the construction of social world is not simple rather its value laden. The same should be accounted for if any kind of social analyses is attempted. There are however some difficulties that emerges while analyzing from Foucauldian framework as pointed by Fairclough. First most is that it does not include text analysis which according to Fairclough is one of the most significant constituents of any form of social analysis. Fairclough is also cautioning that he is not reducing discourse analysis to any form of textual analysis. But for him a concrete picture emerges only hen examples are cited in the spoken world.

Stemming from the criticisms explained above, Fairclough maintained that there is a need for a framework that is able to look at the discourse with a closer linguistic analysis as well as accounting for the overall social environment and its impact. This is why he developed a close knit framework of CDA which encompasses not only the critical theoretical perspective but also is able to look at the language of its participants with a clear focus.

Critiques of CDA and my response to them

The first critique of CDA is done from the perspective of conversational analysis (Schegloff, 1977). They say that CDA is not able to look at linguistic twists and turns as closely as they do. The author also maintains that CDA is often short on detailed and systematic analysis of conversations.

As a response I would want to say that CDA aims to look at different issues and concerns (issues of power) which requires a widened lens of inquiry and just a focus on linguistic rotation is not sufficient. The same has been maintained by Wetherell (1998). He argues that conversational analysis scholars ignores social analysis and restricts their field of study to the grammatical, structural, linguistic and semantic turns. Further he argues that these two approaches complements each other if done together. She maintains that it can render researchers in a kind of situation where they would find many future avenues, possibilities and potentialities for further research.

There have also been theorists and researchers which have been criticizing CDA on ground of less strict text analysis framework and less robust ideological connections that it is able to build (Toolan, 1997; Stubbs, 1997). They also maintained that this might be because Fairclough tried to accommodate everything in one method and his articulations seems more eclectic in nature than being theoretically sound. In this regard Van Dijk (2001) point out a very well made point which seems my point of agreement after reading Fairclough and the related scholarship is that CDA needs to be multidisciplinary, diverse and thus encompassing. This is basically because it purports do study relationship between language and its social nature which is the most diverse task in its nature.

It has to be maintained here that CDA makes it visible the way in which institutions and their discursive constructions shape us and how we are an integrated part of the society. It assumes the articulation of ideologies, social formations and cultural beliefs is very significant in order to achieve a complete picture of the social analysis. Indeed it is imperative to say that CDA is everywhere from our newspapers to classrooms, from journals to e-lists and from textbooks to oral narrations of any sort. It can account for each and every kind of verbal input within any particular social setup.

References

Bakhtin, M.M. 2006. "The Problem of Speech Genres". In Jaworski and Coupland (eds), 2006, pp. 98-107.

Clark, R. and Ivanič, R. 1999. "Raising Critical Awareness of Language: A Curriculum.

Aim for the New Millennium". *In Language Awareness* **8**(2): 63-70.

Fairclough, N. 1992. Discourse and Social Change. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. 1995. Critical discourse analysis. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. 1999. "Linguistic and intertextual analysis within discourse analysis". In Jaworski and Coupland (1999), pp. 183-211.

Fairclough, N. 2001. Language and power. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. 2006. Language and Globalization. London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. 1972. The Archaeology of Knowledge. London: Tavistock Publications.

Gee, J.P. 1990. Social linguistics and literacies: Ideologies in discourse. London: Falmer.

Jørgensen, M.W. and Phillips, L.J. 2002. Discourse analysis as theory and method. Sage.

Halliday, M.A.K. 1961. Categories of the theory of grammar. *Word*, **17**: 241-92.

1978: Language as Social Semiotic. London: Edward Amold. 1985: Introduction to Functional Grammar. London: Edward Amold.

Lucke, A. 1996. Text and Discourse Analysis. New York: American Educational Research Association. **21**: 3-17.

Mead, G.H. 1956. On social psychology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rogers, R., Malamcharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D. and O' Garro Joseph, G. 2005. Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature. Washington. Sage Publications.

Schegloff and Emanuel, A. 1997. Whose Text? Whose Context? *Discourse & Society*, **8**: 165-87.

Stubbs, M. 1997. Whorf's children: Critical comments on critical discourse analysis (CDA). *British studies in applied linguistics*, **12**: 100-116.

Toolan, M. 1997. What is critical discourse analysis and why are people saying such terrible things about it? 1. *Language and literature*, **6**(2): 83-103.

van Dijk, T.A. (ed.) 1997. Discourse as Social Interaction. London: Sage.

van Dijk, T.A. 2001. "Critical Discourse Analysis". In Schiffrin *et al*. (2001), pp. 352-71.

Walsh, S. 2011. Exploring Classroom Discourse Language in classroom, Rutledge.

Wetherell, Margaret 1998. Positioning and Interpretive repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, **9**: 387-412.

Wetherell, M. 2001. Minds selves and sense making: Editors introduction. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor and S.J. Yates (eds.), Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader. London: Sage. pp. 186-197.