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Critical Discourse Analysis: Demystifying the Fuzziness

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Abstract:

We are living in a world of fast track capitalism and brutal inequality. Each discourse practice (text-talk-visual) carries bias in terms of angle of representation in one way or another. There is no neutral text that exists and "bias" is a matter of degree. A discourse practice (text-talk-visual) is not value free rather socio-politically situated. Reflection on the role of scholars in society and the polity is an inherent character of the critical discourse analysis (CDA). An attempt to re-contextualize the text and context systematically is CDA as authority and ideology are embedded in discourses. This term paper is centered on some fragments of CDA to understand its conceptual entity; the scope in which it operates; the principle upon which its edifice is constructed; the feature that distinct it from the other discourses; the historicity of post modernity that it cherishes, the approaches wherein it swims; the theoretical frameworks within which it re-contextualizes the language and its social context; and finally, the critical comments that is forwarded which leads it to be more rigorous.

Keywords: CDA, SFL, CL, discourse, discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

This term paper sets out what 'critical', 'discourse' and 'analysis' mean under the label of critical discourse analysis; attempts to outline the very concept of critical discourse analysis (CDA Hereafter); flows with a number of key concepts like scope of CDA, principles of CDA, features of CDA, historicity of CDA, approaches of CDA, theoretical frameworks of CDA; and then finally, demonstrates some critical comments on CDA.

1.1. The "Critical" in CDA

CDA believes that discourse practices (text-talk-visual) shouldn't be taken as a granted. In fact, it is always non-neutral and embedded into social context. Hence, three interpretations of the term *critical* are found in literatures of CDA. **First**, the intention of the analyst what he wants to explore that actually decides the theoretical framework of CDA. For example, if one wants to uncover the hidden power relations, inequality, injustice, discrimination, bias, etc embedded in the society through discourse, one has to apply socio-cognitive approach and related framework to deal with the problem at hand. In CDA, 'critical' is usually taken to mean studying and taking issue with how dominance and inequality are reproduced through language use (Wodak 2009; van Dijk 2001; Jørgensenm & Phillips 2002; Rogers 2004).

The second interpretation of the term *critical* in CDA is an attempt to describe, interpret and explain the relationship between the form and function of language in discourse and why and how certain pattern privilege over others. CDA is *critical* of how unequal language use can do ideological work. Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation. When language use reflects inequality (e.g. 'man and wife' as opposed to 'husband and wife'), CDA argues that sustained use of such unequal representations does ideological work because it tacitly affirms inequitable social processes where the marginal and relatively powerless are misrepresented by the powerful (O'Halloran 2001; Rogers 2004).

The third interpretation of the term *critical* in CDA is to locate social pathology from the discourse, and describe, interpret, explain and propose socio-political action as a cure to the society. This is also called as critical language awareness. CDA is 'critical' in the sense that it aims to reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world. (Jørgensenm & Phillips 2002; Rogers 2004).

1.2. The “Discourse” in CDA

There is a difference in discourse (D) and the discourse under the framework of CDA. Avoiding the former as that is not the concern over here, the term “discourse in CDA” is embedded in critical linguistics and systematic functional linguistics (SFL hereafter). SFL treats discourse as a systematically organized set of statements which give expression to the meanings and values. Hence for CDA, it is not just a product, but a set of constitutive, dialectical, dialogic, consumptive, productive, distributive, and reproductive process in relation to the social world (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979; Kress 1985; Roger 2004; O’Halloran 2011). Gee (1996) also postulated that “discourse in CDA” is ideological, open to criticism, value-based (conceptual), and power related. Thus, “discourse in CDA” is not a reflection of social context, but it constructs and is constructed by contexts. Discourses are always socially, economically, politically and racially loaded (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979; Kress 1985; Roger 2004; O’Halloran 2011).

1.3. The “Analysis” in CDA

The “analysis in CDA” refers to three stages: description, interpretation and explanation of the discourse. In the **description stage**, the text is described as rigorously and as comprehensively as possible relative to the analytical focus. A key descriptive tool used in CDA for this purpose is SFL (Young 2004). Systematicity on this stage is important since this helps ground interpretation of how the text might lead to different discourses for different readers in different situations of language use, e.g. a political speech, a chat between strangers at a bus stop, a debate on Twitter etc. The focus in the **interpretation stage** is conjecturing the cognition of readers/listeners, how they might mentally interact with the text. Fairclough (1995) refers to this as ‘processing analyses. Critique in this stage points out the misrepresentation or a cognitive problem in the discourse (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). This might mean that some significant information is absent from a particular text, which leads to the reader either being misled or not being fully apprised of the most relevant facts. This stage also seeks to show how wider social and cultural contexts and power relations within them might shape the interpretation of a text. In **explanation stage**, CDA critically explains connections between texts and discourse circulating in the wider social and cultural context, the ‘socio-cultural practice’. Critique here involves showing how the ‘ideological function of the misrepresentation or unmet need helps ‘in sustaining existing social arrangements’ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999 cited in O’Halloran 2001).

2. Conceptualizing CDA

CDA is an interdisciplinary set of approaches which attempt to describe, interpret and explain the relationship between language, power and ideology manifested in a discourse. (O’Halloran 2001). CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that views language as a form of social practice and focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced in text and talk (Fairclough 1995). In the words of Wodak (2001), CDA is fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control when these are manifested in language. 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. The analysts of CDA take the text or talk as a tool to explain them in terms of social structure and power relation (van Dijk 2001). CDA provides theories and methods for the empirical study of the relations between discourse and social domains (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). The principal architects of CDA are -- Paul Chilton, Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Holiday, etc. (O’Halloran 2001).

Hence, one may conclude that CDA is a systematic attempt to examine the delivery of a discourse practice (text-talk-image) through insight into the description, interpretation and explanation of language use. It clarifies how much a discourse practice is biased and objectionable linguistically, culturally, socially, politically and psychologically. CD Analysts are committed to social change and in the name of emancipation, they take the side of oppressed social groups. They uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal power relations, with the overall goal of harnessing the results of CDA to the struggle for radical social change.

3. Basic Tenets of CDA

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) offer eight fundamental principles of CDA and they are -- (i) CDA addresses social problems; (ii) power relations are discursive; (iii) discourse constitutes society and culture; (iv) discourse does ideological work; (v) Discourse is historical; (vi) a socio-cognitive approach is needed to understand how relations between text and society are mediated; (vii) discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory and uses a systematic methodology; and (viii) discourse is a form of social action.

4. Scope of CDA

CDA is a discipline like pragmatics, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, rhetoric, stylistics, sociolinguistics, ethnography, or media analysis (van Dijk 2001). It is an emerging field having the unique character of trans-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity. Some of the prominent areas in which it operates are: power relations, hegemony, gender inequality, media discourse, political discourse, ethnocentrism, anti-semitism, nationalism, racism, professional and institutional discourse, mind control and control of public discourse. During the past three decades, very few specific researches have been conducted under the label of CDA. For instance, Murata (2007) used reader-response data in her critical discourse analysis; Bartlett (2004) combined ethnographic data with SFL framework; Wodak (1996; 2001; 2006; 2009) always advocated discourse-historical approach in ethnographic investigation. Moreover, the recent use of large reference corpus-based CDA used by Baker et al. (2008); Charteris-Black (2004); Hidalgo Tenorio (2009); Koller and Davidson (2008); Krishnamurthy (1996); Mautner (2009); O’Halloran (2007, 2009); Stubbs (1996, 2001) for purposes of comparison with the texts under investigation has helped to reduce arbitrariness, and thus analyst subjectivity, in the

choice of salient textual features. Hence, CDA is now both qualitative and quantitative tool of inquiry. The qualitative text analysis of CDA and the statistically based quantitative analysis of corpus linguistics is proving rigor to the discipline (O'Halloran 2001).

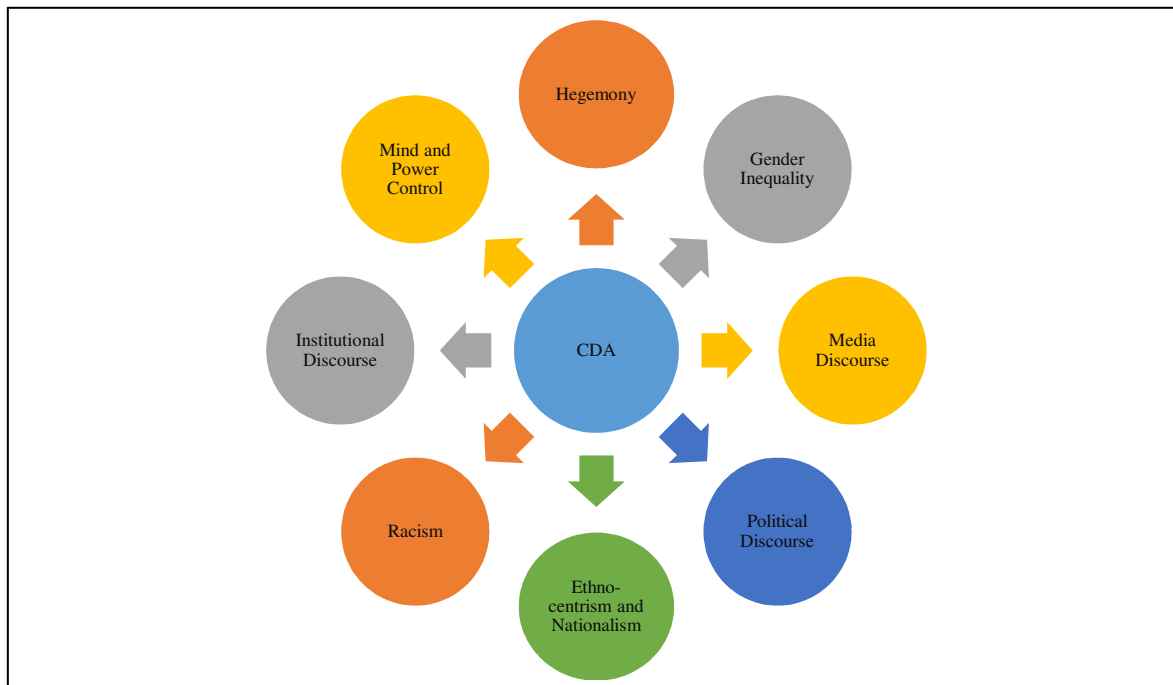


Figure 1: Scope of CDA

Thus, there are perceivable differences between DA and CDA. First, CDA differs from 'lay' critique in its 'systematic approaches in deriving inherent meanings', its reliance on 'scientific procedures' and inclusion of 'self-reflection of the researchers themselves' (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Secondly, CDA is 'committed', with analysts often being actively involved in challenging the phenomena they study. Indeed, for critical discourse analysts, there can only ever be committed discourse analysis and so their political persuasion (usually left-liberal) is often evident in their reflection and interpretation. Van Dijk (2001) rightly refers CDA as "discourse analysis with an attitude" (O'Halloran 2011).

5. Historical Background of CDA

CDA may be seen as a reaction against the dominant formal (often "asocial" or "uncritical") paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s. The roots of CDA are varied, ranging from Frankfurt School critical theory to Halliday's SFL. Among the many diverse theorists exercising a continuing influence on the field are Foucault, Bourdieu, Gramsci, Habermas, and Giddens. The immediate forerunner of CDA is critical linguistics (CL hereafter), a largely linguistic approach to text analysis developed in the United Kingdom and Australia by Gunther Kress, Roger Fowler, Bob Hodge, and other students of Halliday in the 1970s. CDA evolved beyond CL by incorporating more social, cognitive, and rhetorical theory, thus broadening the scope of analysis. Key milestones of this period include the publication of Fairclough's *Language and Power* in 1989; the first journal, *Discourse and Society* in 1990; and a symposium organized by the scholars like Fairclough, Wodak, Kress, van Dijk, and van Leeuwen in Amsterdam in January 1991. Though developed in Europe, CDA has recently become increasingly popular in North America (Fowler et al. 1979; Mey 1985; Agger 1992b; Rasmussen 1996; van Dijk 2001; Huckin et al. 2012).

6. Approaches of CDA

Approaches in CDA are axioms or correlative assumptions which provide theoretical framework and associated tool of analysis to systematically study (describe, interpret and explain) the discourse and its problem under investigation. There are seven major approaches in CDA and they are – CL, socio-cognitive analysis, discourse historical approach, socio-cultural change approach, feminist approach, multi-model approach and conceptual metaphor theory. CDA is multidisciplinary, encompassing a number of different but related approaches which may be combined in description, interpretation and explanation. Some salient approaches are shown below:

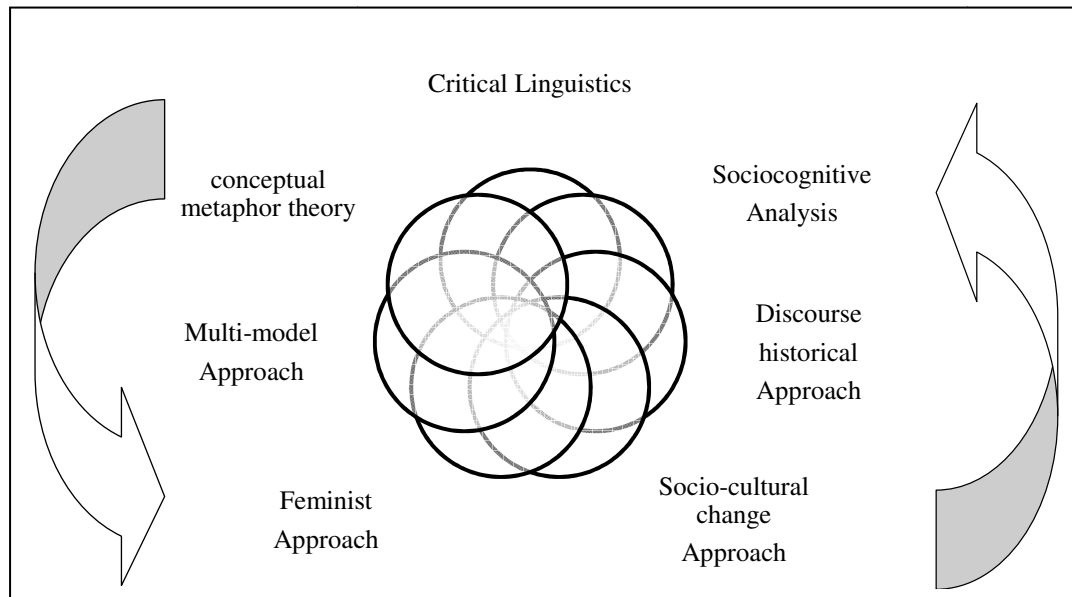


Figure 2: Approaches to CDA

Although approaches mentioned above are different in their scope, however, there are similarities among them what Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) has highlighted that all of these CDA approaches are-- (i) discursive and socially situated; (ii) constitutive and constituted; (iii) socially contextualized; (iv) ideological; and finally (v) critical.

6.1. CL Approach

CL aims to reveal the biases, or the 'angles of representation', in seemingly 'transparent' language use (Fowler et al. 1979; Trew 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979; Fowler 1991; White 2004; Young and Harrison 2004; Coffin and O'Halloran 2006) and how these biases can mystify the actual nature of the events in a discourse. One key focus of CL approach is how agency for an action is represented in the discourse. However, the perspective in CL on how language can be used to mystify responsibility for social action is still a fixture of CDA.

6.2. Socio-cognitive Approach

Socio-cognitive approach focuses on the dialectical relationships between social structure and cognition in discourse. The extent to which cognitive theory is employed in socio-cognitive analysis fluctuates. It is suggested that it should be entertained with due consideration to an individual's cognition because it can do ideological work in reproducing inequitable discourses and social structure. That is why, Fairclough (2001) used a limited number of cognitive concepts, for example, member's resources – the socio-politicized knowledge people bring to texts and from which they make inferences in reading (Wodak 1996; van Dijk 1998; Fairclough 2001).

6.3. Discourse-historical Approach

The discourse-historical approach is associated with Ruth Wodak (1996) which places importance on the contextualizing and historicizing of texts. To foster critical analysis, this approach systematically synthesizes available background information in the analysis and interpretation of a written or spoken text. Wodak (1996) proposed a concentric circular model of interpreting a discourse context (Wodak 1996; Wodak and Reisgl 2001; Wodak et al. 2009).

6.4. Socio-cultural Change Approach

Proposed by Fairclough (1995) socio-cultural change approach focuses on how socio-cultural change (globalization) and discourses are related. He observes how the border shift between public and private discourse in the late twentieth/early twenty first century is revealed in texts where subjects are positioned in a more informal, chatty manner like recent advertisements, computer mediated communications etc. Texts are barometers of changes in contemporary capitalism, or what is also referred to as 'late modernity'. This approach contends that 'late modernity' is reflected in textual hybridity – the mixing together of different genres, styles and discourses. SFL is embraced as a best tool to trace textual hybridity under this approach (Fairclough 1995b; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Fairclough et al. 2002; Fairclough 2003).

6.5. Feminist Approach

Feminist approach in CDA aims to analyze the relationships between gender, language use and power (Lazar 2005; Litosseliti 2006). Sexism and the construction of gender identity, as well as the appreciation of gender as a dynamic construct, are key foci while analyzing discourses within this approach.

6.6. Multi-model Approach

Multimodal approach within CDA takes account of the relationship between text and image (or what is known as “multimodality” drawing from SFL (van Leeuwen; Lassen et al. 2006, Kress and vanLeeuwen2006).

6.7. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The conceptual metaphor theory associated with the work of George Lakoff (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Chilton 1985; Lakoff 1987;Charteris-Black 2004;Koller 2004; Wodak 2006; Goatly2007; Hart andLukeš2007) is an anthology which draws together different uses of cognitive theory in CDA.

7. Theoretical Frameworks of CDA

Although CDA is sometimes mistaken to represent a 'method' of discourse analysis, it is generally agreed upon that any explicit method in discourse studies, the humanities and social sciences may be used in CDA research, as long as it is able to adequately and relevantly produce insights into the way discourse reproduces (or resists) social and political inequality, power abuse or domination. That is, CDA does not limit its analysis to specific structures of text or talk, but systematically relates these to structures of the sociopolitical context. Vividly, the investigator identified three types of frameworks to conduct CDA and they are: Wodak framework, Fairclough framework and SFL framework.

7.1. Wodak Framework (1996)

Ruth Wodak in 1996, proposed a concentric circular model of interpreting a discourse context. Each circle had its own meaning of interpretation. The smallest circle is the discourse unit itself and the micro-analysis of the text. The next circle consists of the speakers and audience of the interactants with their various personality features, biographies and social roles. The next context level involves the ‘objective setting’, the location in times and space, the description of the situation. Then, the next circle signifies the institution in which the event takes place. And we could naturally expand to the society in which the institution is integrated, its function in society and its history. The interaction of all these context levels would then lead to an analysis of discourse as social practice. Thus, the discourse-historical approach seeks to comprehend how discourse helps to generate and reinforce ideas such as ‘race’, ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’ (Wodak 1996; Wodak and Reisgl 2001; Wodak et al. 2009).

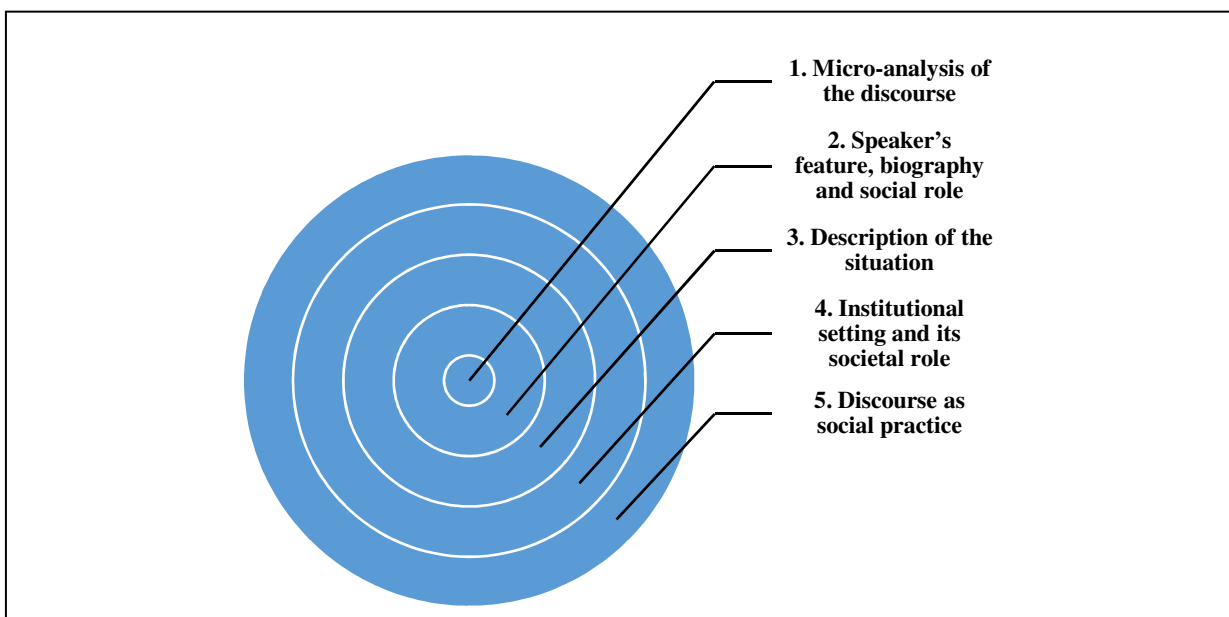


Figure 3: Developed from Wodak Framework (1996)

7.2. Fairclough Framework (2001)

Fairclough in 2001, developed a three-dimensional framework for studying discourse, where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of socio-cultural practice (Fairclough and Clive 1995; Fairclough 2001). Particularly, he combines micro, meso and macro-level interpretation. At the **micro-level**, the analyst considers the text's syntax, metaphoric structure and certain rhetorical devices. The **meso-level** involves studying the text's production and consumption, focusing on how power relations are enacted. At the **macro-level**, the analyst is concerned with inter-textual understanding, trying to understand the broad, societal currents that are affecting the text being studied (Karreman2000). There are several ways to analyze and bridge these levels, and thus to arrive at a unified critical analysis:

- i. Members–groups: Language users–engage in discourse as members of (several) social groups, organizations, or institutions; and conversely, groups thus may act "by" their members.
- ii. Actions–process: Social acts of individual actors are thus constituent parts of group actions and social processes, such as legislation, newsmaking, or the reproduction of racism.
- iii. Context–social structure: Situations of discursive interaction are similarly part or constitutive of social structure; for example, a press conference may be a typical practice of organizations and media institutions. That is, "local" and more "global" contexts are closely related, and both exercise constraints on discourse.
- iv. Personal and social cognition: Language users as social actors have both personal and social cognition, personal memories, knowledge and opinions, as well as those shared with members of the group or culture as a whole. Both types of cognition influence interaction and discourse of individual members, whereas shared "social representations" govern the collective actions of a group (Jørgensenm and Phillips 2002).

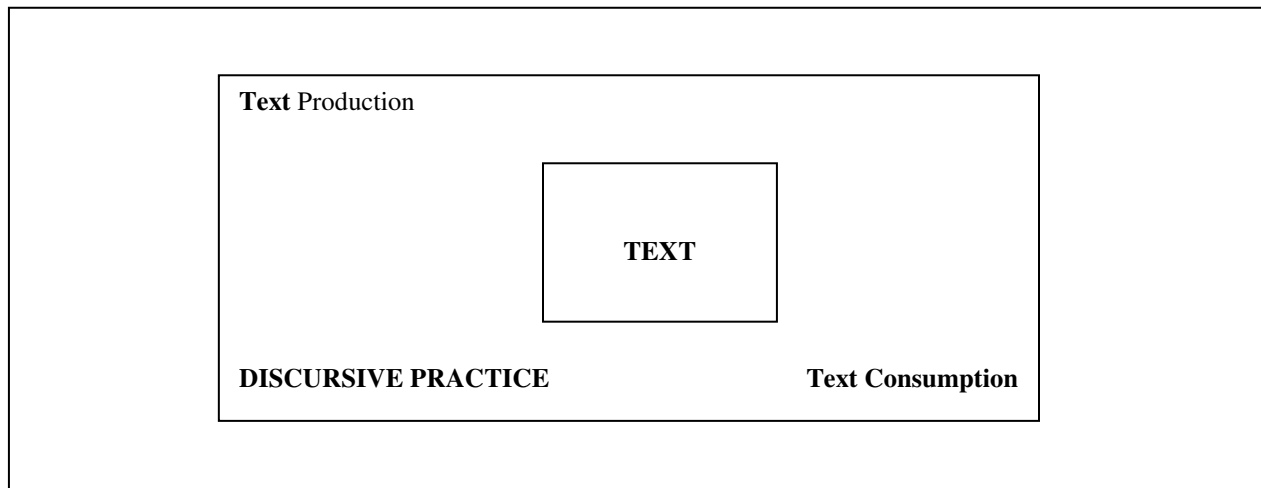


Figure 4: Developed from Fairclough (1992b)

7.3. Hallidayan SFL Framework (2003)

In 2003, Halliday came up with one of the most scientific framework to CDA: SFL framework. SFL analyses discourse from the view point of meaning; It is a framework through which meaning is extracted. SFL looks at who the participants are, what action is done, and in what circumstances it is done. It draws meaning on the basis of meta-function of language. According to him, any discourse is equipped with three inseparable meta-functions: ideational, textual and interpersonal. At ideational level six participants' involvements are analyzed, that is, mental, material, verbal, relational, existential and behavioral. At textual level, speaker's message arrangement, encoding, flow and cohesion are analyzed. At interpersonal level, speaker's attitude, judgment, mood and modality is analyzed (Coffin and O'Halloran2006; White 2004; Young and Harrison 2004).

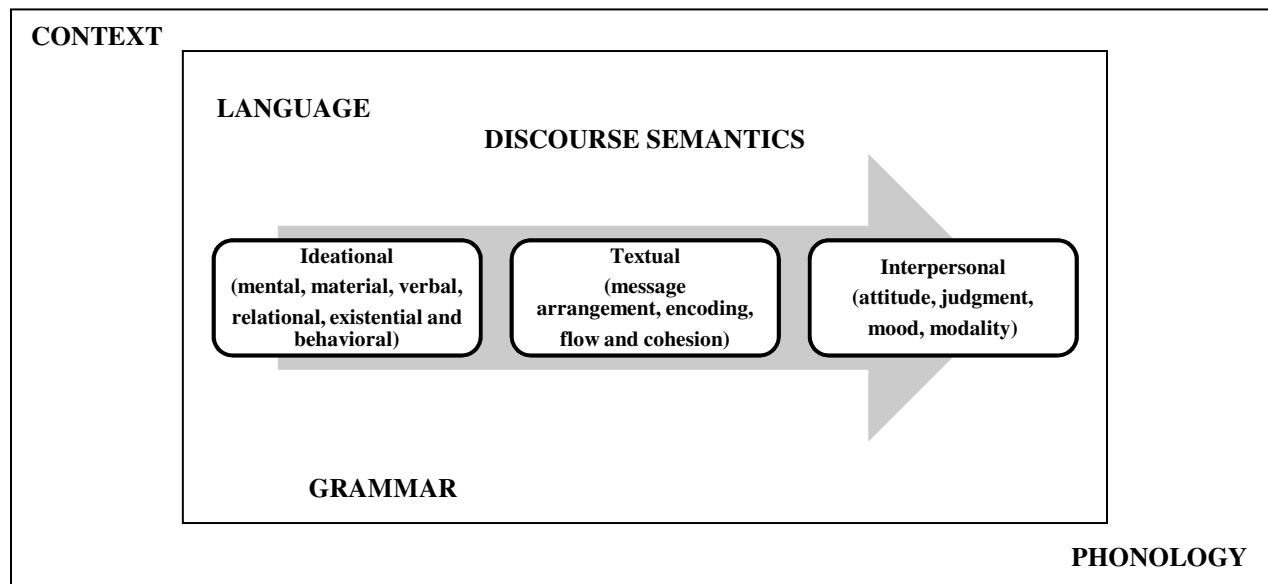


Figure 5: Developed from Hallidayan's SFL Framework (2003)

8. Critical Comments

CDA is often criticized by many scholars (Billig 2003; Blommaert 2005; Hammersley 1997; Stubbs 1997; Toolan 1997; Cook; Jørgensen & Phillips 2002) around the following dimensions. First, drawing a line of dialectical relationship of discursive and non-discursive practices empirically is difficult (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). A second critique is that their analyses of texts are subjective because they are influenced by their own political commitments and they 'cherry-pick' facets of text to focus on which fit a pre-figured interpretation. The analysts know what they want to find before they begin. They just confirm through their studies what they want to achieve. (O'Halloran 2001; Widdowson 2004). A third critique is that the disciplinary boundaries of CDA are looser (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). A fourth critique is that large number of text samples are not yet studied in CDA including the use of quantitative methods which could give a firmer linguistic grounding to its social claim (Stubbs 1997; Toolan 1997 as cited in Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). A fifth critique is that CDA neglects socio-psychological aspects, and a very little space has been given to emotion and psychology in CDA whereas; they are important determinants of discourse practices. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory provides insight into it (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; Rogers 2004).

A sixth critique is that there is still a methodological and theoretical gap between more linguistically oriented studies of text and talk and the various approaches in the social. The first often ignore concepts and theories in sociology and political science on power abuse and inequality, whereas the second seldom engage in detailed discourse analysis. Integration of various approaches is therefore, very important to arrive at a satisfactory form of multidisciplinary CDA (van Dijk 2001). A seventh critique is that there is a lack of balance between the share of linguistic method and social theory, often the CDA is lopsided. Finally, a counterpoint perspective to CDA is 'positive discourse analysis' (Bartlett 2009; Martin 2004). The focus here is on understanding and promoting discourse which inspires and uplifts (writing by Mandela and Tutu) as well as discourse which is effective in mediation, diplomacy and promoting reconciliation, peace and happiness. Toolan (1997) calls for a positive discourse analysis in arguing that it is not enough in CDA to criticize manipulative representations in texts; CDA should also be explicit about showing what non-manipulative texts would look like.

9. Conclusion

We have seen in this term paper that what is critical, discourse and analysis in CDA, the concept of CDA, the scope and the historical background of CDA. We have also sketched the complex approaches, theoretical frameworks and critical comments in analyzing discourse and power, and provided a glimpse of the many ways in which power and domination are reproduced by text and talk.

Over the past three decades many research have been conducted using CDA. The roots of CDA are now very strong especially in US. Like quantitative research, there is no prescriptive formula to conduct CDA rather research is taken out from the critical theory of social world. It comes as no surprise that central notions in most CDA works are -- "power," "dominance," "hegemony," "ideology," "class," "gender," "race," "discrimination," "interests," "reproduction," "institutions," "social structure," and "social order," besides the more familiar discourse analytical notions. In the past three decades, CDA has become an important new research methodology in a variety of disciplines around the world. As no social science research method is free from drawbacks, same is the case with CDA too. For its further strength, CDA needs to be more clearly and firmly grounded.

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