

On CDA's Potential for Application in Education

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In their introduction to the subsection on critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the article, "Multiple discourse analyses of a workplace interaction", Marra and Holmes summarize the aims of CDA. These include raising "people's awareness of the reciprocal influences of language and social structure" (p. 367) as well as showing how "power and dominance are produced and reproduced in social practice through the discourse structure of generally unremarkable interactions" (p. 367). These aims seem to be in line with Fairclough's (1989) view of the need to "increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation" (p. 1).

Without a doubt, raising awareness about power relations embedded in discourse (spoken or written) is an important, albeit not the sole goal of CDA. Using insights into the relationship between language and power in *the teaching of language in schools* has been, according to Fairclough (1989), "woefully inadequate and contrived to ignore its [language's] most decisive social function (p. 3). In this respect, Marra and Holmes' discussion of CDA's aims could have been taken beyond the explication of the approach and interpretation of power relations to the *more applied* spheres of both applied linguistics and language education. Regrettably, in my view, no references to the strong potential of CDA's applicability to education have been made in this article.

This obvious absence of *applicability* from discourse analysis to various educational branches has been previously pointed out as a potential weakness of, among other disciplines and approaches, applied linguistics and conversation analysis (CA). For example, Pennycook (1994), in his analysis of the use of pronouns, warns of "the danger that [the attention to the inherently political nature of all] pronouns may be ignored amid the descriptivist biases of applied linguists" (p.178). Furthermore, in Fairclough's own words, "conversation analysis has been resistant to making connections between 'micro' structures of conversation and the 'macro' structures of social institutions and societies" (1989, p. 12).

Clearly, one strength of CDA, which could be utilized in educational practices, is its "methodological tactic to move back and forth from analysis of text to analysis of social formation and institution, from micro to macro levels" (Luke, 2002, p. 100). This aspect of analysis could be added to language education and academic programs that aim at enhancing critical reading skills. More specifically, in addition to understanding the main idea of the text and being able to recognize the implied messages of text authors, college students may benefit from building an understanding how texts wield power or strive to mold reader's views. Examining linguistic tools such as handling causality and agency (i.e., who is represented as causing what to happen), nominalization, and ways of positioning the reader (Fairclough, 1989, p. 51) could help enhance students' understanding of various texts, from textbooks to newspapers and other mass print.

Additionally, many college reading and writing courses could utilize the CDA method in order to frame both fiction and non-fiction texts used in the classroom within broader socio-political contexts, not solely within reading theories, such as reader response criticism or formalism. Such framing is essential since the meaning of the texts used for educational purposes (and indeed, all texts) needs to be situationalized within both current and past power-center holders and disseminators in order to understand text messages and their purposes more completely. This is because, according to Fairclough (1989), the exercise of power in modern society is increasingly achieved through the ideological workings of the language (p.2). The markers of power have become less overt through the use of media and TV.

Consequently, an understanding of how daily socio-political developments affect both the mass media and the textbook writing is a very much needed lens in classroom discourse. Raising awareness is just one aspect, or one step, in the life-long learning process of understanding what a published text is really saying or doing to the reader. One of the reasons for establishing such teaching and learning practices in schools is because “language has grown dramatically in terms of the uses it is required to serve, in terms of the range of language varieties, and complexity of language capacities that are expected of the modern citizen” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 3). CDA offers a tool with which a deeper understanding of language use could be built and expanded. Unfortunately, Marra and Holmes’s article misses the mark as it fails to suggest even one possible application of the CDA approach beyond providing an additional angle to view discourse.

In the age of globalization, and at the time when democratic practices appear to be in flux, raising and nurturing new generations of civic-minded students (and by extension citizens) may be one way of addressing socio-political changes, which, without exception, have an impact on educational theories and practices. Applied linguistics and discourse analysis research have the potential to offer ways to improve current educational practices for all, and certainly, I would argue, in undergraduate reading and liberal arts courses. Marra and Holmes, as well as other linguists, may need to redirect their efforts more towards the *applied* benefits of discourse analysis if we are to gain a more central stage in the world of linguistics, education and beyond.

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