

Second Edition

Critical Discourse Analysis

The Critical Study of Language

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Contents

<i>Series editor's preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>General introduction</i>	1
 Section A Language, ideology and power	 23
Introduction	25
1 Critical and descriptive goals in discourse analysis	30
2 Language and ideology	56
3 Semiosis, ideology and mediation. A dialectical view	69
 Section B Discourse and sociocultural change	 85
Introduction	87
4 Critical discourse analysis and the marketisation of public discourse: the universities	91
5 Discourse, change and hegemony	126
6 Ideology and identity change in political television	146
 Section C Dialectics of discourse: theoretical developments	 161
Introduction	163
7 Discourse, social theory, and social research: the discourse of welfare reform	167
8 Critical realism and semiosis (with Bob Jessop and Andrew Sayer)	202

Section D Methodology in CDA research	223
Introduction	225
9 A dialectical–relational approach to critical discourse analysis in social research	230
10 Understanding the new management ideology. A transdisciplinary contribution from critical discourse analysis and the new sociology of capitalism (with Eve Chiapello)	255
11 Critical discourse analysis in researching language in the new capitalism: overdetermination, transdisciplinarity and textual analysis	281
12 Marx as a critical discourse analyst: the genesis of a critical method and its relevance to the critique of global capital (with Phil Graham)	301
13 Critical discourse analysis, organisational discourse and organisational change	347
Section E Political discourse	375
Introduction	377
14 New Labour: a language perspective	380
15 Democracy and the public sphere in critical research on discourse	392
16 Critical discourse analysis and citizenship (with Simon Pardoe and Bronislaw Szerszynski)	412
17 ‘Political correctness’: the politics of culture and language	437
Section F Globalisation and ‘transition’	449
Introduction	451
18 Language and globalisation	454
19 Global capitalism, terrorism and war: a discourse-analytical perspective	478
20 Discourse and ‘transition’ in Central and Eastern Europe	503
Section G Language and education	527
Introduction	529
21 Critical language awareness and self-identity in education	531
22 Global capitalism and critical awareness of language	544
<i>Bibliography and references</i>	558
<i>Index</i>	582

General introduction

This book is a collection of twenty-three papers in critical discourse analysis (CDA) which I have written, or in the case of four of them co-authored, over a period of 25 years, between 1983 and 2008. It is a substantial revision of the much shorter first edition of *Critical Discourse Analysis* which was published in 1995 and contained just ten papers. I have retained six of these, and added seventeen new ones. I have grouped the papers in seven sections of which three (*Language, Ideology and Power*; *Discourse and Social Change*; *Language and Education*) correspond to sections in the first edition, while the other four (*Dialectics of Discourse: Theoretical Developments*; *Methodology*; *Political Discourse*; *Globalisation and 'Transition'*) reflect ways in which my work has developed since 1995. Although these sections do I think give a reasonable sense of main elements and emphases, there are inevitably some thematic overlaps between them.

My original formulation of the broad objective of my work in CDA still holds: to develop ways of analysing language which address its involvement in the workings of contemporary capitalist societies. The focus on capitalist societies is not only because capitalism is the dominant economic system internationally as well in Britain (where I have spent most of life), but also because the character of the economic system affects all aspects of social life. I am not suggesting a mechanical 'economic determinism', but the main areas of social life are interdependent and have effects on each other, and because of the dominance of the economy in contemporary societies its effects are particularly strong and pervasive. For instance, the 'neo-liberal' version of capitalism which has been dominant for the past thirty years is widely recognised to have entailed major changes in politics, in the nature of work, education and healthcare, in social and moral values, in lifestyles, and so forth.

I am working within a tradition of critical social research which is focused on better understanding of how and why contemporary capitalism prevents or limits, as well as in certain respects facilitating, human well-being and flourishing. Such understanding may, in favourable circumstances, contribute to overcoming or at least mitigating these obstacles and limits. This possibility follows from a property of the social world which differentiates it from the natural world: the meanings and concepts through which people interpret it and the knowledge they have of it are part of the social world and can contribute to transforming the rest of it (Bhaskar 1979).

My objective in publishing this book also remains the same as for the first edition: to bring together in a single place papers which have appeared in diverse and sometimes rather inaccessible locations in order to show continuities, developments and changes in one line of work within CDA. Other books I have published are also part of this picture, and I shall indicate some of the relationships between them and the papers in this volume in separate introductions to each of the sections, which summarise the papers and identify salient themes. I have kept the title *Critical Discourse Analysis* despite being conscious that it might seem misleading (and even more so in 2009 than in 1995) to use the name of what has become a substantial and diverse international field of teaching and research as the title for a collection of papers representing one line of work and tendency within this greater whole – though I think it is true to say that it has been an influential one. So let me stress that this is no more than my own particular view, changing over the years, of the field of CDA. But of course, in choosing to take this view rather than others I am suggesting that it is preferable in certain respects to others, so it is also *no less* than my own view of what CDA should be!

Colleagues in and beyond the field of CDA have contributed a great deal to the development of my views. Some of them are present in the book as co-authors (Eve Chiapello, Phil Graham, Bob Jessop, Simon Pardoe, Andrew Sayer, Bron Szerszynski), the many others include, within the field of CDA, Lilie Chouliaraki, Romy Clark, Isabela Ieţcu-Fairclough, Roz Ivanič, Jay Lemke, Gunther Kress, Ron Scollon, Teun van Dijk, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak, as well as my former research students and members of the Lancaster ‘Language, Ideology and Power’ research group over a period of some twenty years, and more recently the Bucharest ‘Re-scaling Romania’ research group. My considerable debts to past and present researchers in CDA and other areas of study that I have not worked with so directly are partially indicated in the references at the end of the book.

I shall begin by giving my views on *discourse* and on what critical discourse analysis should be analysis *of*, on what should count as *analysis*, and what

critical analysis should be. In doing so I shall be taking a position not only *on* CDA but also *in* CDA: in suggesting what discourse, analysis and critique are I will also be suggesting what they are not, and differentiating my position from that of others. I also suggest certain general measures to determine what research and analysis counts as CDA or does not count as CDA. I then discuss how CDA including my own work has contributed to critical social research on the ‘neo-liberal’ form of capitalism which has been internationally dominant over the past thirty years or so. This will lead to a ‘manifesto’ for CDA in the changing circumstances at the time of writing: a financial and economic crisis which promises to be severe in its effects and serious in its consequences. I shall discuss what role CDA can have, what it should be trying to achieve, and in particular how it might contribute to responses to the crisis which seek to tackle the difficulties and dangers that face us and enhance human well-being.

1 Discourse, analysis, critique

In my view CDA has these three basic properties: it is relational, it is dialectical, and it is transdisciplinary. It is a *relational* form of research in the sense that its primary focus is not on entities or individuals (in which I include both things and persons) but on social relations (see further Paper 12, pages 301–40). Social relations are very complex, and they are also ‘layered’ in the sense that they include ‘relations between relations’. For example, ‘discourse’ might be seen as some sort of entity or ‘object’, but it is itself a complex set of relations including relations of communication between people who talk, write and in other ways communicate with each other, but also, for example, describe relations between concrete communicative events (conversations, newspaper articles etc.) and more abstract and enduring complex discursive ‘objects’ (with their own complex relations) like languages, discourses and genres. But there are also relations between discourse and other such complex ‘objects’ including objects in the physical world, persons, power relations and institutions, which are interconnected elements in social activity or praxis. The main point for present purposes is that we cannot answer the question ‘what is discourse’ except in terms of both its ‘internal’ relations and its ‘external’ relations with such other ‘objects’. Discourse is not simply an entity we can define independently: we can only arrive at an understanding of it by analysing sets of relations. Having said that, we can say what it is in particular that discourse brings into the complex relations which constitute social life: meaning, and making meaning.

These relations are in my view *dialectical*, and it is the dialectical character of these relations that really makes it clear why simply defining ‘discourse’ as a

separate ‘object’ is not possible. Dialectical relations are relations between objects which are different from one another but not what I shall call ‘discrete’, not fully separate in the sense that one excludes the other. This sounds paradoxical, and indeed in a certain sense it is. Let us consider ‘external’ relations between discourse and other ‘objects’. Think of power and discourse. The power of, for instance, the people who control a modern state (the relation of power between them and the rest of the people) is partly discursive in character. For example, it depends on sustaining the ‘legitimacy’ of the state and its representatives, which is largely achieved in discourse. Yet state power also includes the capacity to use physical force and violence. So power is not simply discourse, it is not reducible to discourse; ‘power’ and ‘discourse’ are different elements in the social process (or in a dialectical terminology, different ‘moments’). Yet power is partly discourse, and discourse is partly power – they are different but not discrete, they ‘flow into’ each other; discourse can be ‘internalised’ in power and vice-versa; the complex realities of power relations are ‘condensed’ and simplified in discourses (Harvey 1996). Social activity or praxis consists in complex articulations of these and other objects as its elements or moments; its analysis is analysis of dialectical relations between them, and no one object or element (such as discourse) can be analysed other than in terms of its dialectical relations with others.

What then is CDA analysis of? It is *not* analysis of discourse ‘in itself’ as one might take it to be, but analysis of dialectical *relations between* discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the ‘internal relations’ of discourse. And since analysis of such relations cuts across conventional boundaries between disciplines (linguistics, politics, sociology and so forth), CDA is an interdisciplinary form of analysis, or as I shall prefer to call it a *transdisciplinary* form. What this term entails is that the ‘dialogues’ between disciplines, theories and frameworks which take place in doing analysis and research are a source of theoretical and methodological developments within the particular disciplines, theories and frameworks in dialogue – including CDA itself (see Section D, Methodology in CDA research).

Note that this is a *realist* approach which claims that there is a real world, including the social world, which exists irrespective of whether or how well we know and understand it. More specifically it is a ‘critical realist’ approach (see Papers 8 and 13), which means among other things a recognition that the natural and social worlds differ in that the latter but not the former depends upon human action for its existence and is ‘socially constructed’. The socially constructive effects of discourse are thus a central concern, but a distinction is drawn between *construal* and *construction*: the world is discursively construed (or represented) in many and various ways, but which construals come

to have socially constructive effects depends upon a range of conditions which include for instance power relations but also properties of whatever parts or aspects of the world are being construed. We cannot transform the world in any old way we happen to construe it; the world is such that some transformations are possible and others are not. So CDA is a ‘moderate’ or ‘contingent’ form of social constructivism.

So much for ‘discourse’ and what CDA is analysis of. Let me come to ‘analysis’. Given that CDA should be transdisciplinary analysis, it should have a transdisciplinary methodology (see Section D and especially Paper 9). I use ‘methodology’ rather than ‘method’, because I see analysis as not just the selection and application of pre-established methods (including methods of textual analysis), but a theory-driven process of constructing *objects of research* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) for research topics, i.e., for research themes as they initially present themselves to us (for instance, the current financial and economic crisis). Constructing an object of research for a research topic is converting it into a ‘researchable object’: cogent, coherent and researchable research questions. For instance, faced with the topic of the current financial and economic crisis which I discuss further below, we have to ask: what are the best, or the right, or the primary research questions to try to answer? Objects of research are constructed in a transdisciplinary way on the basis of theorising research topics in terms of the categories and relations of not only a theory of discourse (such as that of the version of CDA I work with) but also other relevant theories. These may be, depending on the topic, political, sociological, political-economic, educational, media and/or other theories.

Objects of research constructed in this transdisciplinary way allow for various ‘points of entry’ for the discourse analyst, the sociologist, the political economist and so forth, which focus upon different elements or aspects of the object of research. For instance the discourse analyst will focus on discourse, but never in isolation, always in its relations with other elements, and always in ways which accord with the formulation of the common object of research. For example, one object of research for the topic of ‘the crisis’ could be the emergence of different and competing strategies for overcoming the crisis, and the processes through which and the conditions under which certain strategies can be implemented and can transform existing systems and structures. This formulation is based upon a theory of crisis which among other things sees crises as events which arise from the character of structures, and sees strategies and structures as in a relationship such that the effects of structures give rise to strategies oriented to changing structures. If it also sees strategies as having a partly discursive character, one ‘point of entry’ for research could be focused

on discursive features of strategies and how they may contribute to their success or failure. This might include for instance analysis of explanations of the crisis and attributions of blame, justifications for and legitimations of particular lines of action and policy, and value claims and assumptions in explanations, justifications and legitimations.

Bringing diverse theories or frameworks together to co-construct transdisciplinary objects of research gives rise to issues of ‘translation’ between the concepts, categories and relations of CDA and of other theories or frameworks. Let’s take the case of theories of and frameworks for analysing relations of power. Since research will be concerned with dialectical relations between discourse and power, the challenge is to find ways of coherently connecting categories and relations such as ‘discourse’, ‘genre’, ‘recontextualisation’ and ‘argumentation’ (from discourse theory) with categories and relations such as ‘power’, ‘hegemony’, ‘ideology’ and ‘legitimacy’ (from political theory). Given a particular theory of power, how can we coherently articulate its categories and relations with those of a theory of discourse so as to analyse ways in which discourse is internalised in power and power is internalised in discourse, that is, so as to be able to analyse dialectical relations between discourse and power for the particular topic and object of research? It is not a matter of substituting discourse-analytical categories and relations for political ones, or vice-versa. It is a matter of recognising the need for them to be separate (power is not *just* discourse, discourse is not *just* power) yet avoiding incoherent eclecticism. It is a matter of the translatability or *commensurability* (Jessop and Sum 2006) of concepts, categories and relations: a concern in transdisciplinary research is to both assess how good the match is between concepts, categories and relations from different theories and frameworks, and move towards increasing it. (An example is the category of ‘recontextualisation’ which was developed in sociology (Bernstein 1990) but interpreted in terms of CDA categories (including ‘genre’) in a way that increased the commensurability between the two (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999. See further below.) In doing so we are achieving an aim of transdisciplinary research which I mentioned above – using the dialogue between different disciplines or theories as the source of the theoretical or methodological development of each.

For CDA, analysis of course includes analysis of texts. Many methods of textual analysis have been developed in linguistics (phonetics, phonology, grammar, semantics, lexicology), pragmatics, stylistics, sociolinguistics, argumentation analysis, literary criticism, anthropology, conversation analysis and so forth. In principle any such methods might be recontextualised within CDA, though note that this implies that they may need to be adapted to fit in

with CDA's principles and purposes. The particular selection of methods for a particular research project depends upon the object of research which is constructed for the research topic. But the version of CDA I work with has a general method: textual analysis has a dual character. It is firstly *interdiscursive* analysis, analysis of which discourses, genres and styles are drawn upon in a text and how they are articulated together. This mode of analysis is based on the view that texts can and generally do draw upon and articulate together multiple discourses, multiple genres, and multiple styles. And it is secondly *linguistic* analysis or, for many texts, *multimodal* analysis of the different semiotic 'modes' (including language, visual images, body language, music and sound effects) and their articulation. The level of interdiscursive analysis is a mediating 'interlevel': on the one hand, discourses, genres and styles are realised in the more concrete form of linguistic and multimodal features of texts; on the other hand, discourses, genres and styles are categories not only of textual analysis but also of analysis of orders of discourse, which are the discoursal element or moment of social practices, social organisations and social institutions. Analysis in terms of these categories therefore helps to link 'micro-analysis' of texts to various forms of social (sociological, political and so forth) analysis of practices, organisations and institutions.

Let me turn to the third question, what is critique, what is *critical* discourse analysis? Critique brings a normative element into analysis (on normative social research, see Sayer 2005). It focuses on what is wrong with a society (an institution, an organisation etc.), and how 'wrongs' might be 'righted' or mitigated, from a particular normative standpoint. Critique is grounded in values, in particular views of the 'good society' and of human well-being and flourishing, on the basis of which it evaluates existing societies and possible ways of changing them. For instance, many people (though not all) would agree that societies ought to be just or fair, ought to ensure certain freedoms, and ought to provide for certain basic needs of their members (for food, shelter, healthcare etc.). The devil of course is in the detail: people have very different ideas of justice, freedom and need, and critical social research is necessarily involved in debates over the meaning of these and other value-related concepts. The crucial point, however, is that critique assesses what exists, what might exist and what should exist on the basis of a coherent set of values. At least to some extent this is a matter of highlighting gaps between what particular societies claim to be ('fair', 'democratic', 'caring' etc.) and what they are. We can distinguish between *negative critique*, which is analysis of how societies produce and perpetuate social wrongs, and *positive critique*, which is analysis of how people seek to remedy or mitigate them, and identification of further possibilities for righting or mitigating them.

A primary focus of CDA is on the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs, and in particular on discursive aspects of power relations and inequalities: on dialectical relations between discourse and power, and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements. This includes questions of *ideology*, understanding ideologies to be ‘meaning in the service of power’ (Thompson 1984): ways of representing aspects of the world, which may be operationalised in ways of acting and interacting and in ‘ways of being’ or identities, that contribute to establishing or sustaining unequal relations of power (see Section A). This focuses on the function of ideologies (in serving power), but ideologies are also open to critique on the grounds that they represent or explain aspects of the world inadequately. This leads to another way of answering the question ‘what is critique?’ with radical implications for CDA: it identifies critique of discourse as an inherent part of *any* application of critical method in social research.

Critical analysis aims to produce interpretations and explanations of areas of social life which both identify the causes of social wrongs and produce knowledge which could (in the right conditions) contribute to righting or mitigating them. But interpretations and explanations already exist – inevitably, because a necessary part of living and acting in particular social circumstances is interpreting and explaining them. So along with and as part of the areas of social life which critical researchers research, they find interpretations and explanations of them. These interpretations and explanations moreover include not only those of the people who live and act in particular circumstances, but also of those who seek to govern or regulate the ways in which they do so, including politicians and managers. And critical researchers will almost certainly find not only these interpretations and explanations but also prior interpretations and explanations of social researchers, historians, philosophers etc. Furthermore, it is a feature of the social world that interpretations and explanations of it can have effects upon it, can transform it in various ways. A critique of some area of social life must therefore be in part a critique of interpretations and explanations of social life. And since interpretations and explanations are discourse, it must be in part a critique of discourse.

But the critical analyst, in producing different interpretations and explanations of that area of social life, is also producing discourse. On what grounds can we say that this critical discourse is superior to the discourse which its critique is partly a critique of? The only basis for claiming superiority is providing explanations which have greater explanatory power. The explanatory power of a discourse (or a theory, which is a special sort of discourse) is its ability to provide justified explanations of as many features of the area of social life in focus as possible. So we can say that it is a matter of both quantity (the

number or range of features) and quality (justification). One aspect of the matter of quantity is the extent to which existing lay and non-lay interpretations and explanations are themselves explained, as well as their effects on social life, in terms of what it is or was about this area of social life that lead to these interpretations and explanations emerging, becoming dominant and being implemented. This is where ideology comes into the picture: interpretations and explanations can be said to be ideological if they can be shown to be not just inadequate but also necessary – necessary to establish and keep in place particular relations of power. On the matter of quality (justification), explanations are better than others if they are more consistent with whatever evidence exists, including what events take place or have taken place, how people act or have acted, what the effects of their actions are, and so forth. The relative explanatory power of different explanations, discourses and theories is of course an issue which is constantly in contention. A final point is that the explanatory power of a theory and an analysis informed by it contributes to its capacity to transform aspects of social life, which brings us back to dialectical relations between discourse and other social elements with respect to the aims of critique to not merely interpret the world but contribute to changing it.

This is a complex argument, but I think it is a strong one for CDA. Let me sum up its strengths. First, it repeats from a somewhat different vantage point my emphasis earlier on dialectical relations between discourse and other elements as a necessary part of social life. Second, it claims that critical analysis of discourse is a necessary part of any critical social analysis. Third, it provides a basis for determining which discourses (interpretations, explanations) are ideological. Fourth, it presents critical analysis as itself discourse which is dialectically related to other elements of social life. On this view of critique see Paper 12, and also Bhaskar (1979) and Marsden (1999).

The approach I have summarised in this section is based on a *transformational model* of social activity which is essentially Aristotelian in nature, ‘in which the paradigm is that of the sculptor at work, fashioning a product out of the material and with the tools available’ (Bhaskar 1979). Social activity is a form of production or work which both depends upon and transforms the material and tools available. Or to put it in different terms: in which society is both a condition for and an outcome of social activity, and social activity is both the production (which is transformative, effects changes) and the reproduction of the conditions of production (i.e., society). Moreover as I have suggested above social activity understood in this way consists in dialectical relations between different elements or moments including discourse. The view of discourse above conforms with the transformational model in that it fashions products (texts) out of available material and tools (languages, orders

of discourse, discourses, genres, styles etc.) which are its condition of possibility and which it both transforms and reproduces. What we might call *texturing*, producing text out of available material and tools, is one moment of social activity as work or production. But what must be emphasised is its dialectical interconnection with other moments in a process of production whose character we might sum up as material-semiotic. Analysis must seek to elucidate the complex interpenetration of material and semiotic (discoursal) moments, and resist treating text and texturing as having an existence independently of these dialectical relations.

2 What is CDA, and what is not CDA

Interest in CDA has increased quite remarkably since the publication of the first edition of *Critical Discourse Analysis*. It has spread to new areas of the world, and to a great many disciplines and areas of study (Fairclough, Graham, Lemke and Wodak 2001). The proliferation of researchers who are using CDA is very pleasing and very welcome. CDA has also become more institutionalised, in the sense that there are many more academic posts and programmes of study and research, and it has become more mainstream, and certainly more ‘respectable’ than it was in the early days.

I have the impression that, perhaps as a consequence of these developments, work is sometimes identified as ‘CDA’ which is arguably not CDA. If CDA becomes too ill-defined, or the answer to the question ‘what is CDA?’ becomes too vague, its value in social research and its appeal to researchers may be weakened. So I think it is important to discuss the question of what counts as CDA and what doesn’t. My purpose in doing so is emphatically not to advocate conformity. On the contrary, the vitality of the field depends upon people taking CDA in different and new directions, and indeed the view of transdisciplinary research as a source of theoretical and methodological development amounts to advocating a continuing process of change. But I think it is possible to draw from the discussion above of discourse, analysis and critique a few general characteristics which can differentiate CDA from other forms of research and analysis. I suggest that research and analysis counts as CDA in so far as it has all of the following characteristics.

1. It is not just analysis of discourse (or more concretely texts), it is part of some form of systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process.
2. It is not just general commentary on discourse, it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts.