

## Critical Discourse Analysis: Discovering Hidden Ideologies in News

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, people usually start their everyday life with reading or listening the news. Therefore, news has a crucial effect on shaping our worldviews. Hence, the present study is concentrated on the news discourse to see how critically and consciously people, and especially the English language learners read the news. Therefore, two groups of English language students were considered as the participants. One of them was taught CDA principles of Van Dijk (1993), while the other group was not. They were supposed to analyze two biased texts from BBC. The results demonstrated that the first group's analysis had no organized framework, and their pieces of evidence were weak to support their claims; however, the second group, who was taught CDA principles, was more conscious of the writers' tendency, and submitted some linguistic clues as the evidence of their claims. It was concluded that learning CDA techniques is necessary for EFL learners, in order to raise their critical awareness about the hidden ideologies of the news or media, in general.

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis, critical language awareness, media discourse, news discourse

### 1. Introduction

In our modern world, communication is inevitable. Media is one of the most effective means, which transfers the information to different people around the world. Hence, it has a crucial role in shaping the ideology of people and changing their worldviews. The question is that *different pieces of news are really true facts or perhaps some pre-planned ideologies, which are injected to our minds*. This issue is considered under the term of media discourse among the scholars, which is one of the sub categories of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

The present study is focused on this very issue, media analysis, or news discourse in detail. The purpose of this study is to discover the recognition and analysis ability of the students of English language teaching (ELT), before teaching CDA principles and after it. To fulfill this aim, the study would compare the discourse analysis of two groups of M.A students, in which one group had taught CDA principles and the other one had not. This paper is to find out whether the students read and think critically the news by themselves or not, and how leaning CDA rules will affect their analysis and viewpoints.

It is hoped that this empirical study will shed some light on the concept of critical discourse for the students and also manifest the effect of media on shaping people's worldviews.

## 2. Review of literature

### 2.1 What is CDA?

Among the scholars whose works have significantly affected the development of CDA are van Dijk (1988-1998), Fairclough (1989- 1999), and Wodak (1995- 1999). (Sheyholislami, 2001) According to Van Dijk (1998), critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research, which focuses on power, dominance, and inequality in the social and political context. CDA is not a direction or school; rather, it is a different "mode" or "perspective" of theorizing and analysis. Therefore, it does not have a unitary theoretical framework. There are various types of CDA, which may be theoretically and analytically quite different, but have related aims and concepts. (Van Dijk, 1998)

Fairclough (1993) defines CDA as:

Discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (Sheyholislami, 2001)

Different scholars usually points to the similar notions in CDA, such as "power," "dominance," "hegemony," "ideology," "class," "gender," "race," "discrimination," "interests," "reproduction," "institutions," "social structure," and "social order". (Van Dijk, 1998)

As Fairclough and Wodak (1997) mention, the main tenets of CDA are:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action. (Van Dijk, 1998)

Van Dijk (1998) believes that “power”, which he defines as “control” is a central concept in the most critical discourse works. He explains that by means of power, the privileged groups, who have access to “social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, and culture” are able to control the act and minds of other groups. Besides, he points out that some specific forms of discourse, such as politics, media, and science, are included in power resources. Moreover, he mentions that our minds control our actions; therefore, “if we are able to influence people's minds, we indirectly may control (some of) their actions.”

He continues that members of more powerful social groups have more control over public discourse. “Thus, professors control scholarly discourse, teachers educational discourse, journalists media discourse, lawyers legal discourse, and politicians policy and other public political discourse.” Therefore, according to him, the group with more control over more discourse is considered to be more powerful. The powerful group has control on the content, the genre, the topic, and also the structures of the text and talk. He believes that even discourse details such as meaning, form, and style can be controlled.

In the same vein, Gee (1996) mentions that the dominant discourse usually indicates the worldview and ideology of the powerful group in the society; however, only a few people pay attention or object to them. (Kumasi and Hill, 2013) According to Maftoon and Sabbaghan (2010), one of the goals of CDA is critical language awareness, which is “to raise students’ awareness of how language is used, so that others cannot easily manipulate them.” It means that the students should be aware that sometimes language is used to inject the hidden goals of the group in power.

According to Sheyholislami (2001), people choose their vocabulary and grammar (consciously or unconsciously) based on their principles and ideologies. He also suggests some principles for CDA, based on all CDA practitioners:

1. Language is a social practice through which the world is represented.
2. Discourse/language use as a form of social practice in itself not only represents □and signifies other social practices but it also constitutes other social practices □such as the exercise of power, domination, prejudice, resistance and so forth.
3. Texts acquire their meanings by the dialectical relationship between texts and the □social subjects: writers and the readers, who always operate with various degrees □of choice and access to texts and means of interpretation.
4. Linguistic features and structures are not arbitrary. They are purposeful whether □or not the choices are conscious or unconscious.
5. Power relations are produced, exercised, and reproduced through discourse.
6. All speakers and writers operate from specific discursive practices originating in □special interests and aims which involve inclusions and exclusions.

7. Discourse is historical in the sense that texts acquire their meanings by being  
□situated in specific social, cultural and ideological contexts, and time and space.
8. CDA does not solely *interpret* texts, but also *explains* them.

There are also specific scopes and topics, which are very familiar in CDA research. Some of them are: gender inequality, media discourse, political discourse, ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, racism, and professional and institutional domination. (Van Dijk, 1998) As it was mentioned before, this study is focused on media discourse.

## 2.2 Media discourse

According to Van Dijk (1998), at the beginning steps, media studies were concentrated on the surface structures, and the use of “us/them” in the contexts. As Sheyholislami (2001) cited Boyd-Barrett (1994), Van Dijk believed that media discourse should not only focuses on the textual and structural level, -grammatical, phonological, morphological, semantic level, coherence, overall themes and topics of news- but it should also concentrates on the “analysis and explanations, at the production and ‘reception’ or comprehension level”, by which he meant “journalistic and institutional practices of news-making and the economic and social practices”. Van Dijk's media analysis displayed the relationships between the three levels of news production, which are structure, production and comprehension processes. Maneuvering on these relationships, he identifies two levels of analysis: microstructure and macrostructure. (Sheyholislami, 2001)

“Language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication belong to the micro level of the social order. Power, dominance, and inequality between social groups are typically terms that belong to a macro level of analysis. [...] In everyday interaction and experience the macro and micro level form one unified whole.” (Van Dijk, 1998)

According to Chuliaraki and Fairclough (1999), in analyzing an event three parts should be considered, which are text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. This is very similar to Van Dijk's three-dimension ideology analysis. (Sheyholislami, 2001)

## 2.3 Empirical studies on CDA

According to Van Dijk (1998), Hall et al. (1980), Agger (1992), Collins et al. (1986), Davis and Walton (1983), and Fairclough (1995) did some studies on media discourse with a special reference to cultural studies. Fowler et al. (1979) also concentrated on media studies; however, their focus was on the syntactic patterns of sentences. Fowler's later media discourse research (1991) was about the British studies definition of news, which as he reported was “not a reflection of reality, but a product shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces”. In his study he had focused on the linguistic analysis of the sentences. (Van Dijk, 1998)

Van Dijk (1988) also applied his CDA theory on news discourse in Amsterdam. Zingraf (2003) developed a study, in which he used the principles of CDA to analyze the news. In the process of the study, critical language awareness of the students improved, and it was concluded that that students, teachers and also translators should utilize critical thinking as a tool in order not to be impressed by the ideologies injected through the texts.

According to Koupaee Dar, Rahimi, and Shams (2010), Yang (2004), designed a case study to analyze seven radio shows by means of Fairclough's CDA framework. His findings revealed the fact that the shows were ideologically biased, and indicated the effect of marketization in discourse. Cots (2006) conducted a study about using CDA as a model for language use analysis in a foreign language class. Correia (2006) in his study claimed that reading comprehension should not be used as the only kind of activity in the classroom. The reason is that his students accepted the "printed material" without questioning the bias of the text. Correia (2006) believes that developing critical reading skills is necessary for EFL students. (Koupaee Dar et al., 2010)

In a study done by Icmez (2009) critical reading practices were applied to EFL reading lessons. Critical reading relates learning to the students' real lives, which affects text selection, student involvement and classroom communication; so that increases learners' motivation. Koupaee Dar et al. (2010) developed a critical study on news in Kashan, Iran, in order to motivate critical language awareness of students in learning readings. In fact, their study was the most effective element in shaping the present study.

Although there are many empirical studies on CDA, there is still a need for more linguistic discourse analysis studies especially in news discourse. Therefore the present study is concentrated on the linguistic analysis of news, with a critical point of view, to see how consciously the ELT students read the news.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Design**

The design of this study is basic qualitative. It is aimed to study the attitudes, worldview, and consciousness of the students in analyzing the news.

#### **3.2 Settings and Participants**

In this study, purposive sampling is applied to choose the participants. Therefore, all the M.A students of English language teaching in the Fars Science and Research University, who had taken the discourse analysis course, were considered to be the participants of this study. They were forty students, who were studying at the third term, in two different classes. The reason of choosing M.A students was that they were equipped with enough English language knowledge to be able to analyze the considered texts.

### 3.3 Instruments

Two different articles were selected from the online newspaper of BBC. One of them was about the nuclear talks of Iran, and another one was about the violence in Gaza strip. These two pieces of news selected because they seemed to be biased, and it was aimed to see whether the students could recognize it or not.

### 3.4 Data Collection

As it was mentioned above, two different classes were considered to be the participants of the study. Both had taken the course of discourse analysis on that semester. One of the classes participated in a one-day workshop in which they were taught the Van Dijk' CDA principles (1993) to get familiar with the critical discourse analysis basics; while the other group didn't get any specific information about CDA. The reason of making this distinction was to see whether the students could recognize the writers' bias by themselves or not, and also to discover how critically they read news. Therefore, both groups were given the two articles to analyze at home, to have enough time to analyze them and support their claims. It was presupposed that the group, who were taught the CDA techniques, could analyze the texts more critically, profoundly, and linguistically.

### 3.5 Data analysis

The data analysis method of this study is content analysis in a comparative way. In other words, after the two groups analyzed the texts, the researchers studied and compared their way of analysis to find out if they had reported any bias, how they justified their claims, and whether they used CDA techniques or not.

## 4. Results

To speak generally, for the news, which was about Iran, both groups mostly recognized the side the writer was in favor. However, in the news about Gaza strip, 20% of the students of the first group did not realize the side the writer was biased for. In fact, they considered the text as a real fact, because it was published in a famous newspaper.

In a more detailed view, in the first group, students didn't know any specific framework in order to analyze the texts in an organized way. Besides, although they were able to realize the bias of the text, they had no idea about the function of the specific lexicons and structures in expressing the hidden worldview of the writer. Therefore, in their analyses they provided some sentences as the clues to show the bias of the writer; however, they didn't point out to the special words, structures, or word orders. In fact, they weren't aware of the role of linguistic elements in directing the hidden ideology of a discourse.

In the second group, who were taught CDA techniques and became familiar with the effect of linguistic elements, the students had attempted to analyze the texts based on the Van Dijk's principles, so that they had a framework in their analyses. Moreover, instead of referring to the sentences or paraphrasing them, they identified some specific word orders or structures to justify their claims. In other words, they recognized the negative connotation of the words. However, 15% of the students did not analyze the text linguistically. It seems that their knowledge of the critical analysis wasn't enough. In fact, more practice and more time on CDA techniques was needed for all students to submit more detailed analyses.

Although some of the students could not analyze the articles linguistically or their pieces of evidence were weak, their viewpoints about the news discourse changed in the process of the study. Students claimed that they are careful and critical readers now, even in their first language.

According to Koupaee Dar et al. (2010), teaching CDA is the opposite of "blind memorization" and superficial learning. It can alter the passive students to active and critical ones. It protects the EFL learners from being manipulated by foreign authors, and provides them with more social and political awareness to realize in favor of which side or country the discourse is. Therefore, teaching CDA is very fruitful for the students, even to understand their everyday life better.

## Conclusion

Studying the students' analyses, led us to the fact that the first group was rarely aware of the critical clues in the language, while the second group, who was taught CDA principles, analyzed the texts with more critical point of view. The second group was able to identify more tangible pieces of evidence such as the words with negative connotations and passive or active voice of verbs, and they could relate these linguistic clues to the author's worldview. Therefore, it can be concluded that the workshop raised their critical awareness. The students learned that for critical reading, they should go beyond the textual meaning, in order to indicate the hidden ideology and goal of the writer.

It is hoped that the present study could make the English language community more familiar with the notion of critical discourse analysis, especially with the scope of news discourse. More empirical research with more participants or more time for workshop is needed in the future, in order to submit more comprehensive results.

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