Critical Discourse Analysis, a Tool for Understanding Language Functionality

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Abstract
Language, a means of communication, plays various significant functions in all activities undertaken by humans. Even animals make use of language. The aim of this study is to show that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a linguistic approach that aids the understanding of language functionality. Data are sourced from the internet along with some library materials. Introspection supplements the secondary data relied on. The qualitative analysis shows that by engaging critically with and analyzing language alongside its usage in different contexts to identify and solve the associated issues, CDA is indeed a viable tool for understanding language functionality. The essay concludes that CDA is not just a linguistic theory in applied linguistics but also a multidisciplinary tool for interrogating, analyzing and understanding different circumstances and trends within and outside linguistics. It charges linguists to deploy CDA as a tool for widening their horizons and solving different issues.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, Tool, Understanding, Language, Functionality

Ụmị

Asụsụ, ụzọ mkparịta ụka na-arụ ọtụtụ ọrụ pụrụ iche na mmekọrịta mmadụ na ibe ya. Ọ bụladị anụmanụ na-eji asụsụ eme ihe. Mbunuche ọrụ a bụ igosipụta Nnyocha Ụbụbọ Ọrurugha (NỤO) dị ka ụzọ amụmamụ asụsụ nke na-enye aka n'ighọta arụmọrụ asụsụ. E nwetara njatụle site n'ọwa ozi ọnya nwudude a kpọrọ ntanịt na kwa site n'ọba akwụkwọ dị iche iche. Ọzọ, e jikwa echemeche sitere na nleta nsonye wee mere ihe n'ọrụ a. Nkọwa nseke gosiri na site n'ileru anya tụchaa asụsụ dabere n'ọrụ ya n'ọnọdụ dị iche iche n'igbo mkpa dị iche iche, NỤO bụ ngwa ọrụ kwesiri ekwesi n'ighọta arụmọrụ asụsụ. Ọrụ a kpebiri na NỤO abụghị sọ atụtụ amụmamụ asụsụ n'amụmamụ asụsụ ndịnọrụ kama ọ bụkwa ngwa ọrụ n'ịchọpụta, iseke na ighọta ọnọdụ dị iche iche n'amụmamụ asụsụ na kwa n'ammamụ ndị ọzọ. Ọ jaliri ndị amụmaụ asụsụ n'iwebata NỤO dị ka ngwa ọrụ n'igbasa oke amamihe ha n'igbo mkpa dị iche iche.

1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a cross-discipline set forth in the early 1990s by a group of scholars, such as Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough. At that time, theories and methods of CDA have been formulated to differentiate this paradigm from other theories and methodologies in Discourse Analysis. Later on, the term has been known under many designations. While, according to their fields of research or areas of study, some scholars prefer the concept Critical Linguistics (CL), others choose to use the label Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). The foregoing highlights the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature and problem-solving capacity of CDA.

Given the above, this study rises to engage with CDA within the confine of linguistics to explore its place in the understanding of the functionality of language in different contexts. Since the last decade or so, there has been a resurgence of the application of the theory of CDA to a range of studies. It is observed that previous research about language took on an individualistic perspective, which implies that language production and comprehension were erstwhile given a singular rather than plural perspective (Clark, 1996).According to Clark (1996), even though there is a single individual who produces the sentence, there has to be another person being the listener or audience. The person at the other end is the one who listens and acts upon the message communicated by the speaker/encoder, who produced.

2.1 Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA has been developed out of a critique of structuralist approaches to language, which analyze language as an abstract system devoid of contextual considerations. As such, CDA is part of a wider strand in applied linguistics39 and other human and social sciences that indicate a profound shift in thinking about the relation between language and context and hence the role of language in social life. The focus in CDA is not on "… language or the use of language in and for themselves, but upon the partially linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures" (Fairclough & Wodak 1997, p. 271). In the context of linguistic turnthe term discourse gained great currency and has been used in a vast number of vague and at times rather scholarly ways.

Most generally, discourse might be understood as language in use, or "talk and text in context" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 3), a perspective that acknowledges how the contexts of production and reception influence the internal constituents, processes and make-upof the respective texts including not only linguistic elements but also other forms of social semiosis. The above mentioned shift has to a large extent been brought about by the French philosopher Foucault who developed a theory of discourse in his attempt to overcome the rather crude Marxist view of economic relations (structure) as primary to every other cultural formation (superstructure), thereby denigrating culture to an ideological distortion of consciousness: generated by specific social conditions culture serves the interest of a particular, allegedly homogeneous social class.

One of Foucault's main contributions was thus to break with the dualism of a false consciousness and an underlying or hidden truth. To him, 'truth' itself was a contentious and problematic category and dependent on certain formations of knowledge consisting of specific categories and views of social reality, social relations and the self - claimed to be 'true,' a perspective that is particular relevant in the present context of investigation. He understood these discursive

formations or regimes of truth as to be internalised, embodied and enacted: "… practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 42).

The view that discourses are systematic and unavoidable, has implications for the concept of power: rather than assuming power to be exercised purposefully and intentionally by particular individuals who can, through recourse to material or relational resources, pressure other individuals or groups towards specific actions, Foucault emphasized its social distribution cutting across social divisions, relations, subjects and discourses in complex ways. As aconsequence, and in contrast to the negative view of power, he stressed that it cannotexclusively be equated negatively with constraint and oppression but have to be seen as also enabling social life (Zotzmann, 2006).

2.2 Criticism of Foucault's Theory of CDA

Although highly acclaimed, Foucault's concept of discourse displays several shortcomings. One reservation authors writing from a CDA perspective have with Foucault concerns his underlying social ontology where the difference between discourse and extra-discursive (material) reality is not made sufficiently explicit. Approaches following his ontology seem to regard power as embodied in each individual actor but lack a satisfying perspective on how it is embedded on an institutional or societal level. In other words, the focus on micro aspects of power marginalizes an in depth analysis of relevant macro aspects. It thus remains unclear where it emanates from and, consequently, how resistance, struggle and social change (and by implication agency) could possibly emerge (Zotzmann, 2006).

As a consequence, Foucault's view appears rather static bearing a "heavily structuralistflavour" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 45), for a similar argument see Eagleton 1996 and Sayer 2000a: 44). By either refusing to make any statements about the relationship between text and context (ontology) or by assuming that we can apprehend reality only discursively (epistemology), strong postmodernist writers in the Foucauldian tradition tend to equate the totality of social life to discourse46. In their attempt to avoid universalizing and allegedly ethnocentricperspectives (so-called 'grand narratives'), thus refuting the supposedly 'modern' idea that access to the world 'out there' is possible, postmodernists flip from naïve objectivism to the other extreme (idealism) and replace the "restrictive social ontologyof essences with an implicit ontology of social ephemera" (Sayer,1999, p. 31; Sayer, 2000a, p. 67). As an effect, "discourse swallows up all other phenomena, social, political, ideological" (Eagleton 1996, quoted in Holborow 1999, p. 6). Their skepticism towards material existence is described by Harvey (1996: 11) as a "new idealism" that marginalizes questions of "real oppression, real suffering and pain, the very things that make politics so important."

In fact, this kind of discursive determinism is in danger of rendering the question of critique almost obsolete and resistance or social change unaccountable. In contrast, CDA emphasizes that discursive practices:

> … are constrained by the fact that they inevitably take place within a constituted, material reality, with preconstituted 'objects' and preconstituted social subjects. The constitutive processes of discourse ought therefore to be seen in terms of a dialectic, in which the impact of discursive practice depends upon how it interacts with the preconstituted reality. With respect to 'objects', it is perhaps helpful to use both the terms 'referring'

> and 'signifying': discourse includes reference to preconstituted objects, as well as the creative and constitutive signification of objects. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 60).

Language is regarded as one element of social semiotic practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), assuming that there is a world 'out there' "regardless of what we happen to think about it" (Sayer, 1999, p. 2). All construction uses materials, and a necessary condition for the success of attempts at construction is that they use the materials according to their properties – properties that exist largely independently of the constructors and are not merely a product of wishful thinking, though they may be products of earlier incidents of social construction, which in their turn were constrained and enabled by the properties of the materials used (Sayer, 2000b). Although discourse plays a crucial role in social life it has no miraculous power to create reality and depends in its effectiveness on other contextual features and powers to be actualized (Zotzmann, 2006).

In order to capture these processes and interrelationships better, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, p. 8) draw in their social ontological view upon Harvey's (1996) understanding of discourse/ language as one of six deeply interrelated but distinctive- even though not discrete - elements of social life in:

- language/ discourse
- power
- beliefs, fantasies, values and desires
- institutions, rituals
- material practices
- social relations

According to Harvey (1996), each of these elements is actualized in specific social moments in social processes internalizing dialectically other elements to varying degrees: "The social process as I conceive of it, flows in, through and around all of these moments and the activities of each and every individual embrace all of the moments simultaneously" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 79).Through this internalization of other elements, discourses are linked up with other moments in social life. Discourses express human thought, fantasy, and desire. They are also institutionally based, materially constrained, experientially grounded manifestations of social and power relations. By the same token, discursive effects suffuse and saturate all other moments within the social process (affecting, for example, beliefs and practices as well as being affected by them). But to privilege discourse above other moments is insufficient, misleading, and even dangerous. Errors arise when examination of one 'moment' is held sufficient to understand the totality of the social process (Harvey, 1996, p. 80).It is the linguistic and, in fact, material realisation of a certain moment in social and cultural life. Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer (2001) draw attention to:

> … the relative weight of these different elements within the overall configuration of a social action is bound to vary from case to case. In this regard it is worth noting that there is a range of 'semioticity' insofar as different social actions, events, or orders may be more or less semioticized. Indeed, one might be able to construct a continuum ranging from technologicalsystems through to religion in terms of the relative weight of semiosis and materiality in their overall logic (p. 10).

In comparison with other social practices (e.g. selling a car, being a nurse), academic practices are to a much larger degree discursive in nature, i.e. texts and discourse constitute the core of social scientific work. Although Harvey provides a fruitful and sophisticated perspective on the nature of social elements, it seems difficult to operationalize their concrete interrelationship, effects and flow in specific social moments on the basis of his rather broad outline. It is here where Critical Realism (Sayer, 1998, 2000a), a philosophical tradition which is based on the ontological assumption that the world consists of phenomena with distinctive properties and powers, can offer not only ontological depth but also orientation towards more concrete methodologies (Zotzmann, 2006).

A critical realist perspective thus allows a different perspective on the relation between causes and effects (causality) in the social world. Even though it is agreed that we can apprehend reality to a large extent discursively, i.e. through meaning making processes, it is not concluded that all elements are discursive in nature; in other words, we might 'construe' but not 'construct' the world by means of our theories (Sayer, 1999, p. 11, Ackroyed & Fleetwood, 2000, p. 6). The crucial explicatory notions of agency as the self-conscious reflexive actions of human beings and structure as "the enduring, affording and constraining influences of the social order" (Sealey & Carter, 2004, p. xiii) are retained. The realist view "… is committed to an explanatory model in which the interplay between preexistent structures, having causal powers and properties, and people, possessing distinctive causal powers and properties of their own, results in contingent yet explicable outcomes" (Sealey & Carter, 2004, p. 12).

3. Critical Discourse Analysis and Language Functionality

As Bloor and Bloor (2007) has noted, CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that can be used by professionals of different fields, such as sociologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, philosophers, politicians, historians, business institutions, lawyers, and gender scholars, among others. They all rely on (use) CDA to investigate social problems relating to their work on one hand and to proffer solutions to the problems on the other hand.

Language is a social practice through which speakers organise their experiences and negotiate their identities. As speakers thereby find themselves in different communities, different dimensions of identity are brought to bear for them to be accepted in such communities. posits that people, in a bid to define them and other people take on different positions and shift their identities in conversations. Interlocutors, through interaction, employ different tactics to negotiate meaning in the moment. Identity and meaning are not categories imposed beforehand.

CDA as a textually oriented method and form of analysis. The central point to be made here is that there is a dialectical relationship between language and social reality.The dual application of CDA is based on an understanding of social scientific research as always conceptually and theoretically driven. That is, research objects are unavoidably approached (and construed) through methodologies that follow from implicit or explicit theoretical assumptions. Authors writing from a CDA perspective therefore try to avoid both "theoreticism – 'theory for its own sake' - and methodologism – seeing methods as a theory-free means of achieving results" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, p. 16) by developing both simultaneously in a reflexive manner.

The CDA-approach developed by Fairclough is methodologically informed, above all, by a functional systemic form of linguistic analysis developed by Halliday (1994) and Halliday and Hasan (1985), Eggins (1994) and Thompson (1996). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) classifies and interprets linguistic features in relation to their meaning making function in specific contexts and thereby draws"attention to what language 'does'" (Poynton 2000, p. 36).

Language is viewed as a system of phonological, lexico-grammatical, semantic and textual/ organizational resources which are chosen and assembled in order to achieve different effects in the respective social context. Choices between linguistics resources are hence regarded as significant and meaningful (otherwise there would be no point in having alternatives) and related to the social circumstances speakers and writers encounter, the communicative intentions they bring to the situation and those they develop therein. Language in use is thus: "… a continuous process of semantic choicea movement through the network of meaning potential, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set" (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 10).

Hallidayan linguistics takes semantics as its base and regards descriptive categories as particular to each language in question. It is argued that three types of process or so-called meta-functions (interpersonal, experiental and textual) go on simultaneously in a given text. These are on the one hand understood as being universal but at the same time as being realised in a variety of ways. Conversely, the same linguistic forms can have different communicative effects depending ultimately on the con- and co-text they are employed in, the meaning they are endowed with and the available alternatives. Fairclough (2003) speaks similarly of the texturing of a specific text, i.e. the production of cohesion through elements such as for example connectives, repetition, argumentative structure, references etc. but also draws attention to the incoherencies and contradictions that still prevail as well as to the unsaid and silenced aspects in specific instances of representations (often hiding places for ideological presuppositions).

Referring to the way the world is represented (for example through transitivity including processes and participation) and differentiates the interpersonal dimension further into the enactment and representation of social identities and social relations, that is the way the (ideal) reader and the writer are construed and related to one another (potentially expressed for example through mood, i.e. through for example the choice between declarative sentences, questions and commands, the choice of pronouns (e.g. we versus they) or modality (through, for instance, the use of modal verbs) showing commitment to a statement) among others.An SFL framework, however, does not coincide in all conceptual and methodological aspects with a CDA-perspective. While both frameworks include a variety of different approaches represented by different individuals or groups of academics, the relation between micro-textual and macro-social aspects of a given communicative instance are generally viewed differently (Zotzmann, 2006).

As Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) argue, "SFL leans strongly towards textually orientated analysis lacking a satisfactory social theoretical background" (p. 143). The concepts used in order to relate texts to context - for instance field (what is happening), tenor (who is taking part in terms of roles and status), mode (the channel) and register (the specific linguistic choices and textual realisations dictated by social setting and purpose) - are based on a fairly static view of social interaction where agents instantiate the social through language instead of reworking the resources they draw upon in a creative way. The CDA view adopted here conceptualizes the interrelationship between language and sociality, which highlights the overall functionality of

language in social context and otherwise, as a functional system of nature for communication (Zotzmann, 2006).

4. Functionality Importance of Language

The importance of language is captured by Agbedo (2011), who posits that language is the pivot on which all human activities, ranging from the most prosaic to the most profound, revolve around. As an exclusively human activity, the seemingly inexhaustible potentials of language are continually exploited by humans for business transaction, exchange and communication of all kinds. Language provides the unique medium through which the belief system, worldview, moral values, and virtually all the basic ingredients of any given society are passed on from generation to generation. Agbedo holds that the essential thread that runs through all these activities is communication, i.e. interlocutors trying to exchange their ideas. Language as a natural ability is common to every normal human being. In other words, all normal human beings are naturally disposed to using language for the sole purpose of communication.

An action performed through language is not produced and comprehended in a vacuum. The very fundamentals of language use are intertwined with social concerns (Clark, 1996; Emeka-Nwobia, 2007). An understanding of how language is both produced and comprehended also concerns the social dimension of language. So, any action performed with language is a social action. The communication function of language influences its form due to the pressures posed by the process of reading and understanding messages. Language is viewed as a vehicle that transports feelings, thoughts, emotions, ideas and expressions from one entity to another for the purposes of communication (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015; Dibie & Robert, 2014; Nwala, 2008; Emeka-Nwobia, 2007; Agbedo, 2000). This can be in form of oral, written or sign language, which must be acceptable by members of a particular speech community.

Language is used to communicate knowledge, inform and direct; give directives, orders, and instructions; perform various activities; and share interactions and exchange of pleasantries, express knowledge, wishes, desires, feelings, love, etc., and for business transactions (Anagbogu et al., 2001; Monday & Eze, 2012). Language is vocal or auditory, creative, versatile, unique, rule-governed, dynamic, systematic, learnable, dualistic, symbolic, innate, arbitrary, productive, discrete, semantic, interchangeable, displaceable, conventional, culture transmission and universal, etc. (Hockett, 1958; Agbedo, 2000; Nwala, 2008; Monday & Eze, 2012). In addition to the aforementioned functions of language, Monday and Eze (2012, p. 161) emphasize that language represents a particular field of human activity, as in Linguistics, English or French. Besides, language is used to keep records, influence people, and as an instrument of faction.

It performs various significant functions and possesses as well as exhibits some essential characteristics across all cultures. It performs communicative, expressive, informative, performative, directive, ideational, unification and humanisation functions. Communication, especially personal and interpersonal communication, can only take place with language use. Communication can never take place without language, as various communication modes (signs, gestures, attire, gesticulations, silence, dispositions, pictures, singing, dance, etc.) are all aspects of language as well as its functions and types: human, animal and sign (Nwala, 2008, p. 12; Anagbogu et al., 2001, p. 13). Hockett (1958) has maintained that every language displays the core functions of language. In this case, Hockett talks about one language among many languages of the world, as he reasons that every people's language possesses and displays what other peoples' languages possess and display.

5. Summary and Conclusion

Language is a tool for communication. CDA is a linguistic and communicative tool that approaches a range of issues from different angles with high level of criticality and in-depth analysis. As the study has shown, CDA is a viable tool for explaining, determining, analyzing and understanding the functionality of language in different contexts. With CDA, one understands that language is central to discourses of all kinds and in proffering solutions to different problems. Therefore, the study concludes that CDA is not just a linguistic theory in applied linguistics but also a multidisciplinary tool for interrogating, analyzing and understanding different circumstances and trends within and outside linguistics. Linguists are charged to deploy CDA as a tool for widening their horizons and solving different issues.

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