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## Critical discourse analysis

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## 2 Critical discourse analysis

This chapter starts with an outline of the origins of the method of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is followed by a delineation of CDA itself. It introduces the main aims, concepts and representatives of critical discourse analysis and concludes with a description of the tools to be employed in the analytical part of the book.

### 2.1 Origins of CDA

The roots of the discipline of critical discourse analysis lie in critical linguistics, an approach developed mainly by Roger Fowler, Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s (Fairclough 1992, 25; Thornborrow 2002, 14). Fundamentally, critical linguists point out interrelations between language, thought and culture.

The main features of critical linguistics include an emphasis on the study of language in light of social and historical context, and the view that any linguistic structure can carry ideological significance (Fowler 1991, 67). To investigate the link between linguistic structure and social values and beliefs, critical linguists employ textual analysis, which is mainly based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar (1978), an outline of which is provided in subchapter 2.1.3, followed by a more detailed account of critical linguistics.

#### 2.1.1 *Interconnectedness between language, thought and culture*

A major study on the link between language, thought and culture was carried out by anthropological linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, who postulated the so-called Sapir/Whorf hypothesis, known also as the linguistic relativity principle. It claims that language shapes human perception of reality and human thought in a significant way, and since languages differ in their structure, each language does so differently:

The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as

representing the same social reality. [...] We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

(Sapir 1929, 209)

At the basis of the link between language, thought and reality lies categorization. As Leach (2001) points out, we live in a discontinuous environment, upon which we learn to impose a discriminating grid that makes us perceive the world as consisting of separate things, labeled with a name. The strategy of sorting the reality into categories “allows infinite variation to be simplified, and irrelevant features to be ignored” (Fowler 1996, 25). The main function of categorization is the imposition of order on a complex and overwhelming world in which human beings live (Hodge and Kress 1993; Fowler 1996). It enables people to make sense of reality and gain illusory control over it. Yet, categorization also has drawbacks, as it constrains our thought and conceptual systems, hindering alternative world-views (Hodge and Kress 1993, 64). As such, categorization has a great potential for encoding and naturalizing particular ideological perspectives.

The classification system is not solely determined by language itself, but is also shaped by culture (see Fowler 1996, 54). Combining a descriptive and a symbolic conception (see Thompson 1990, 128–32), culture is here viewed as patterns of meaning embodied in symbolic forms, by means of which beliefs, values and norms shared by members of a society are realized and constituted. The relation between language and culture is one of interplay, with the language patterns and the cultural norms constantly influencing each other (Whorf 1939). In other words, there is a dialogic relationship between language and thought, thought and culture, and culture and language. Language influences the way we conceptualize reality and shapes cultural norms, ideas and values. At the same time, cultural heritage, norms and value system have an impact on our thoughts and language.

Binary oppositions play a significant role in the categorization of phenomena. The structuralist school of thought views binary oppositions as a fundamental principle underlying the structure of language and “‘classificatory systems’ within cultures” (Chandler 1994, 75). Among the common binary oppositions that guide the way we perceive and conceptualize reality are *nature/culture*, *good/bad*, *male/female*, *up/down* and *emotion/reason*. Some binary oppositions can be considered universals of thought, as pointed out by Lévi-Strauss (1972).

A noteworthy feature of binary oppositions is that they tend to consist of an unmarked form and a marked form, which apply both at the level of the signifier and the level of the signified (Chandler 1994, 80). There is an asymmetrical relationship between the marked and the unmarked forms, with the unmarked form tending to represent the dominant form, which is perceived as *neutral*, while the marked form has an underprivileged status, being presented as *different*. Although

the dichotomies and their markedness may seem natural, they are socially constructed and “their *historical* origins or phases of dominance can often be traced” (Chandler 1994, 84).

This book investigates one of the common binary oppositions rooted in Western thinking – nature/culture dichotomy. The emphasis on reason during the Enlightenment period led to the perception of mankind as superordinate over the natural world (Hawkes 2003, 136), and such a perception has prevailed in the Western society since then. Yet, this apparent power asymmetry is challenged by natural disasters. How newspaper discourse deals with this issue will be one of the objectives of the analysis of the newspaper articles in chapters six through eight.

### *2.1.2 Halliday's systemic functional theory*

Halliday (1978, 34) defines linguistic system as “a culturally specific and situationally sensitive range of meaning potential.” Meaning potential stands for the view of the semantic system as a network of options, of paradigmatic relations, which encode some extra-linguistic semiotic system (i.e., system of meanings constituting the culture). When using language, a speaker makes selections from this network of semantic choices.

Halliday's key notion, which critical discourse analysts draw upon, is a distinction of three areas of meaning potential, the so-called functions of language, which constitute the inherent part of all uses of language – ideational, interpersonal and textual functions:

1. Ideational function is a content function through which language represents phenomena of both the outer world and the inner world of our own consciousness.
2. Interpersonal function is a participatory function through which the speaker expresses his attitudes and evaluations, and also the role relationships between the participants.
3. Textual function is a text-forming function through which language relates to the verbal and the situational context. It constitutes a pre-requisite for the realization of ideational and interpersonal meanings.

The three language functions are reflected in and realized through lexicogrammatical devices. The ideational function is reflected in the transitivity pattern of sentences, types of processes and the selection of lexis, including naming strategies for objects. The interpersonal function is mirrored in the patterns of mood and modality, and the intonation contour. The textual function is realized in cohesive devices, deixis and patterns of theme. As a result, the choice of lexicogrammatical configurations is not arbitrary, but is linked to and represents the meaning.

As follows from the situational sensitivity of meaning potential stated in Halliday's definition of language, the context of situation determines the selection of linguistic devices. Halliday distinguishes three components of the context – field, tenor and mode:

The field is the social action in which the text is embedded; it includes the subject-matter, as one special manifestation. The tenor is the set of role relationships among the relevant participants; it includes levels of formality as one particular instance. The mode is the channel or wavelength selected [...]; it includes the medium (spoken or written).

(1978, 110)

The field of discourse shapes the ideational function, the tenor of discourse influences the interpersonal function, and the mode of discourse has an influence on the textual function.

### 2.1.3 *Critical linguistics*

Drawing upon Halliday, critical linguists conceive of linguistic structure from a functional point of view, i.e., as realizing ideational, interpersonal and textual functions and thus encoding social meaning. Similarly to Halliday, they point out that lexico-grammatical devices employed in discourse are only selections from a network of possible forms (Thornborrow 2002, 14).

Critical linguistics emphasizes the importance of context in the study of language and the link between ideology and linguistic structures. It points out that language does not merely reflect reality but socially constructs it, embedding a particular worldview and value system. As Fowler (1991, 67) reveals, the aim of critical linguistics is to “display to consciousness the patterns of belief and value which are encoded in the language – and which are below the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as ‘natural’.” The discipline distances itself from other linguistic approaches that prevailed in the 1970s, such as formal descriptive approaches studying language as divorced from its context (Chomskyan tradition); pragmatics, which studied language in context, yet placed too much emphasis on individual agency rather than seeing discourse as a social phenomenon; and sociolinguistics, which at that time focused on the study of language variation and change, not paying attention to social relations and structures (Wodak 2002, 13).

Critical linguistics differs from other linguistic approaches also in the close attention that it pays to grammar and lexis in the analysis (Fairclough 1992, 27). It investigates the transitivity patterns of sentences, the syntactic transformations of

clauses, including passive transformation and nominalization, which bring about an agent deletion, lexical structure, pointing out the potential of categorization by vocabulary to reproduce ideology, modality, and speech acts (see Fowler 1991). The important argument that critical linguists make is that there is not a constant relationship between form and content. The meaning of discourse is derived not only from linguistic forms but also from context.

As pointed out by Fairclough (1992, 29), one of the drawbacks of the early work of critical linguistics was its main focus on the function of discourse in the reproduction of dominant ideology. This has, however, been overcome in more recent works by critical discourse analysts (see for instance Fairclough 1995a; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Thornborrow 2002; Wodak and Meyer 2009), which point out that discourse is often a site of conflicting ideologies, where existing power relations can be maintained, challenged or resisted. As ideology is a crucial concept both in critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis, the next section is devoted to its definition.

### *2.1.3.1 Concept of ideology*

Ideology represents a problematic concept, as there have been a number of conflicting definitions. Thompson (1990, 5–6) argues for two basic categories of conceptions of ideology: neutral conceptions and critical conceptions. In contrast to neutral conceptions, which see ideology as a system of thought and belief present in any political or social action, without implying that ideological phenomena are one-sided or deceptive, critical conceptions tend to view ideological phenomena as misleading, prone to criticism and representing interests of a particular group.

Thompson (1990, 56) himself provides a definition of ideology belonging to the critical conceptions category: “the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination.” Such a definition has a serious drawback, as pointed out by Eagleton (1991, 6), since it claims that only dominant forms of social and political thought are ideological. In other words, it implies that socialism and feminism, for instance, are ideological only when in power while non-ideological when in political opposition.

Taking into account Eagleton’s critique of Thompson’s definition and drawing upon van Dijk’s conception (1995; 1996a; 1998), this book understands ideology as socio-cognitive schemata which function to reproduce, challenge or resist asymmetric power relations. The socio-cognitive approach encompasses a view of ideology both as a property of the mind, including ideas, beliefs, values and judgment, and as being shared by members of a social group and linked to the social, economic and political interests of that group (van Dijk 1995; 1996a; 1998). Ideology organizes attitudes and knowledge of group members, and consequently

has impact on their social practices. It is built into and realized through meaning/form of these practices, including discourse. The role of the mediator between social representations and their realization in the practices of group members is played by mental models, i.e., “mental representations of personal experiences of specific actions, events and situations” (van Dijk 1995, 251). Although mental models are mainly subjective and context-bound, they are also shaped by opinions of a social group.

Thompson (1990, 60) mentions five processes constituting ways in which ideology operates: legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification. Legitimation stands for the representation of asymmetrical power relations as just and worthy of support, for instance by appeal to traditions. Dissimulation works by concealing or denying rules of domination, thus drawing attention away from the existing asymmetries. It can be realized, for instance, in figurative language. Unification involves a representation of individuals as being part of a united whole, ignoring any differences that may exist among them. Fragmentation includes the representation of the other as an enemy that constitutes a threat. The last two mentioned processes, unification and fragmentation, form the basis of van Dijk’s ideological square (1996a, 37), which involves emphasizing a positive representation of US and backgrounding OUR negative characteristics and activities while emphasizing a negative representation of THEM and backgrounding THEIR positive characteristics and activities. The fifth mode of operation of ideology, reification, involves the naturalization of discursive representations, portraying a particular state of affairs as natural and commonsensical, devoid of social and historical character.

## 2.2 Framework of CDA

Critical discourse analysis does not stand for a single theory, but rather subsumes a variety of approaches and methodologies, based on different theoretical backgrounds (Wodak 2002; Weiss and Wodak 2003). Apart from drawing upon critical linguistics, CDA is inspired by and employs concepts introduced in a number of theoretical and philosophical works: Foucault’s concepts of discourse and power; Althusser’s and Gramsci’s work on ideology, mainly Althusser’s conception of the interpellation of individual subjects and Gramsci’s notion of hegemony; Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia; and others. Although critical discourse analysis is rather a diverse discipline, its common goals and features can be established.

The main aim of CDA is to study the link between language and social structures and relations, emphasizing that the relationship between language and society is dialectical:

On the one hand, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels. [...] On the other hand, discourse [...] contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions which lie behind them.

(Fairclough 1992, 64)

Critical discourse analysis combines a macro-analysis of social structure and relations with a micro-analysis of discourse as a social practice. Its interests lie in the investigation of the potential of discourse to socially construct reality, with the focus on the construction of knowledge and beliefs, social identities and social relations (Fairclough 1992, 64).

A more specific goal of CDA is to investigate the link between language, power and ideology. It focuses both on discourse as being shaped by existing power relations and on the effects of discourse – whether it serves to reproduce, undermine or transform the existing relations. Critical discourse analysts aim to “‘demystify’ discourses by deciphering ideologies” (Wodak 2006, 10); in other words, to bring into awareness ideological determinations and effects of discourse, which tend to become naturalized and viewed as commonsensical (Fairclough 1995a, 35). As critical discourse analysts view any aspect of meaning as having the potential to be ideologically invested, apart from lexis and grammar, they examine presuppositions, implicatures, argumentation and coherence (Fairclough 1995a; van Dijk 1998; Reisigl and Wodak 2009).

Recently, multimodal analysis has been incorporated into CDA. As a part of social semiotics, it recognizes that “human societies use a variety of modes of representation” (such as verbal, visual, gestures, etc.), with each mode having a different potential for meaning making (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 39). All semiotic modes interact to convey systems of meaning that constitute our culture, yet they do so independently. Thus, to be able to account for all the meanings expressed in discourse, it is necessary to employ multimodal analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998; 2006). Similarly to language, each semiotic mode simultaneously fulfills three functions: ideational, which represents the world around and inside us, interpersonal, which expresses relations among participants in the situation and their attitudes, and textual, which makes representations cohere into the meaningful whole (Halliday 1978).

Other characteristic features of the critical discourse analysis paradigm include problem orientation and interdisciplinarity (Wodak and Meyer 2009). CDA does not focus merely on the investigation of specific linguistic items per se but rather on the study of semiotic and linguistic aspects of social problems (Fairclough and Wodak 2010). The complexity of social problems necessitates the employment of a multi-disciplinary approach combining multiple perspectives (Weiss and Wodak



2003; Wodak and Meyer 2009). CDA is also characterized by the investigation of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, i.e., the examination of other genres and discourse types that the discourse under study draws upon, and the study of discursive change, i.e., a change in discursive practices that reflects and contributes to social change (Wodak 2002).

Drawing upon the major representatives of CDA – Norman Fairclough (1989; 1992; 1995a) and Teun A. Van Dijk (1993), the present study employs a three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis. The first dimension is constituted by a close linguistic analysis of a text, seen as a product of social discursive practice. Attention is paid to the simultaneous analysis of form and content of both micro and macro levels of structure. The second dimension is the analysis of discursive practice, i.e., the processes of text production, distribution and consumption. The third dimension consists of an analysis of social practice, focusing on the social and institutional conditions of the discursive event, and the constructive effects of discourse. Although Fairclough's and van Dijk's approaches to the mediating dimension connecting text and social practice differ in focus, they share the same principle. Fairclough (1989, 24) points out that during the processes of text production and consumption, people draw upon the members' resources, involving people's "knowledge of language, representations of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs, [and] assumptions." He adds that the members' resources are socially determined. Similarly, van Dijk (1993, 258) argues that "concrete text production and interpretation are based on so-called models, that is, mental representations of experiences, events, or situations," which are shaped by socially-shared knowledge, ideologies and attitudes. Thus, they both view the mediating dimension of discursive practice as involving socio-cognitive processes.

Recently, an emphasis has been placed on the incorporation of cognitive studies into CDA (Wodak 2002; Chilton 2004; Hart and Lukeš 2007), the aim of which is to investigate the conceptual structures behind language (Hart and Lukeš 2007). The present book follows this tendency, as it applies the method of the cognitive theory of metaphor, discussed in chapter 3.

## 2.3 Tools for analysis

The analytical part of this book is data-driven, i.e., all the conclusions are arrived at empirically from the data itself, with an attempt to avoid imposition of any preconceptions. The aim is to discern recurrent and systematic patterns and tendencies in newspaper discourse on natural catastrophes with relevance to the research questions stated in chapter one. Following van Dijk (1988a), the analysis focuses both on macro- and micro-structures of discourse. It starts with the ex-

plication of macro-structures to obtain a general picture of the articles (chapter six) and moves on to the investigation of micro-structures, through which macro-structures are materialized (chapters seven through nine). Based on the previous works of critical discourse analysts, mainly Fairclough (1995a), van Dijk (1995), Meyer (2001), van Leeuwen (2008) and Reisigl and Wodak (2009), the following aspects of discourse are to be examined:

### **1. Semantic macrostructures – Topics/Themes**

The analysis starts with the exploration of global meanings of entire discourses. It explicates the main topics or themes of the articles. In other words, it is concerned with the investigation of the subject matter or gist of the discourses and points out the most significant concepts (van Dijk 1988a, 31). As van Dijk (1988b, 226) reveals, these semantic macrostructures “define the coherence of the text and ensure that local meanings of words and sentences at the micro-level have the necessary interconnections and unity.” The analysis of global meanings serves as the cornerstone for the analysis of microstructures in discourse.

With relevance to ideology, an examination of semantic macrostructures provides a general idea about the main focus of the articles, revealing what aspects of the situation get foregrounded and what aspects are backgrounded or omitted. Such an analysis necessarily has to be complemented by a thorough investigation of linguistic forms themselves.

### **2. Vocabulary**

The analysis investigates how participants in a natural catastrophe, i.e., the natural phenomenon and people or society as a whole, are named and referred to lexically. The focus is on wording, systems of categorization and metaphor. The study draws upon the cognitive theory of metaphor (see chapter three) and van Leeuwen’s (2008) set of categories for investigating the representation of social actors in discourse. Although van Leeuwen intends the categories to classify people as participants in discourse, the categories can also be applied to natural phenomena. A brief outline of his categorical system is provided below.

One of the pairs of categories that can be distinguished is the categories of inclusion and exclusion. Social actors can either be included in or excluded from representations, which can have ideological consequences. Van Leeuwen makes a further distinction concerning the exclusion between suppression and backgrounding. In the case of suppression, the social actor under investigation is not referred to anywhere in the text. In the case of backgrounding, the social actor is not directly mentioned in relation to a given social process, but is included somewhere else in the text and thus the reader can infer who it is.

The categorical system also distinguishes between activation and passivation, as social actors can either be represented as active forces in an activity or as passive

participants that undergo an activity. Another distinction is made between generic reference, when social actors are represented as classes, and specific reference, when they are represented as specific individuals. If social actors are referred to as individuals, the term individualization is applied. If they are represented as groups, then assimilation is used. As van Leeuwen (2008, 37) points out, since western cultures put an emphasis on individuality, the study of these two categories plays an important role in critical discourse analysis and the investigation of ideological underpinnings.

Another significant distinction exists between nomination and categorization. While in the first case, social actors are referred to “in terms of their unique identity by being nominated,” in the second case, they are referred to “in terms of identities and functions they share with others” (van Leeuwen 2008, 40). There are two sub-categories of categorization: functionalization and identification. If social actors are represented with reference to what they do, for instance their occupation or role, we speak about functionalization (e.g., teacher, interviewee). If they are represented in terms of what they are, we speak about identification.

Van Leeuwen also distinguishes between the categories of personalization and impersonalization (cf., dehumanization in Chovanec 2010). Social actors can either be represented as human beings, or by other means that do not include the semantic feature ‘human,’ such as abstraction (e.g., when ‘immigrants’ are referred to as ‘problems’) and objectivation (e.g., the employment of metonymy in reference to ‘Europeans’ in terms of their geographic place – ‘Europe’).

Finally, the notion of overdetermination “occurs when social actors are represented as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice” (van Leeuwen 2008, 47). An example of overdetermination is symbolization, when fictional social actors represent social actors in non-fictional practices (e.g., the heroes of Westerns are employed to refer to doctors or politicians).

### 3. Grammar

Drawing upon Halliday (1985), the main interest lies in the investigation of the system of transitivity, which is a part of the ideational function of language and thus concerns representation of experience. More specifically, transitivity refers to the representation of processes as expressed through the grammatical structures of a clause.

Processes consist of three components: participants, the process itself, and circumstances (Halliday 1985). Six main types of processes can be distinguished: material (processes of doing), mental (processes of sensing), relational (processes of being), behavioral (processes of physiological and psychological behavior), verbal (processes of saying), and existential. The main participant roles include the actor, i.e., the active participant, who is the doer of an action, and the patient, i.e., the affected participant, who has something done to them.

By using a particular transitivity pattern, we represent our experience as being of a certain type. As Fowler (1991, 71) points out, transitivity offers choices and makes it possible to analyze the same event in different ways. The particular choice made by the discourse then indicates a particular world view and may be ideologically significant.

Drawing upon Fowler (1991, 77), the analytical part of this book also focuses on syntactic transformations of clauses, particularly passive constructions and nominalizations. These two transformations are significant since they allow some parts of the clause to be deleted. They both make it possible for the actor to be deleted (e.g., 'The girl was shot in Central Park', 'Shooting in Central Park') and therefore leave responsibility for the action unspecified. Apart from the actor, nominalization deletes other participants, an indication of time and thus history, and modality. It turns processes into things, which can then be categorized, and consequently tends to lead to simplification (Conboy 2007, 65).

#### **4. The narrative structure of victim stories**

The analysis investigates the way the narratives of personalized victim stories are constructed. It examines what character roles are ascribed to the participants and how the narratives are structured and developed, aiming to reveal any recurring patterns. In addition, the analysis pays attention to the types of victim stories selected by the newspapers.