Discourse and power
Critical discourse studies (I)

Lesson 13
Thu 14 April, 2016
Discourse and power

“Language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimise relations of organised power.” (Habermas, 1967)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JI8AMRbqY6w
What is critical discourse studies?

Critical discourse studies (CDS) is an interdisciplinary research programme that examines discourse as a social practice, focusing on how power relations and ideologies are reproduced (but also contested) through language use.

In particular, critical discourse analysts are interested in analysing hidden, opaque and visible structures of dominance, oppression, discrimination, inequality, power and control as manifested in language.
What is critical discourse studies?

CDS shares the main dimensions of discourse analysis:

- An interest in *naturally occurring language use*.
- Larger units of analysis: texts, discourses, communicative events.
- The study of language in action and interaction.
- The extension to *non-verbal* aspects of communication (multimodality).
- A focus on the *contexts of language use*.
- Analysis of a vast number of *linguistic aspects of text and discourse* (cf. Lessons 1 to 12).
What is critical discourse studies?

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The key difference between discourse studies and critical discourse studies lies in the constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary approach of the latter.

In fact, CDS is not interested in analysing linguistic phenomena *per se*, but in understanding and explaining social phenomena or problems that are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach.

The objects of research do not have to be negative or ‘serious’. Any social phenomenon lends itself to critical investigation, to be challenged and not taken for granted.
Why critical discourse analysis is not a method

It is widely believed that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an explicit method for doing discourse analysis. That’s wrong, because CDA is problem-oriented and multi-methodical!

As van Dijk (2013) explains:

“A good method is a method that is able to give a satisfactory answer to the question of a research project. [...] So, there is no ‘a’ or ‘one’ method of CDA, but many. Hence, I recommend using the term Critical Discourse Studies [...]. Do critical discourse analysis by formulating critical goals, and then explain by what specific methods you want to realize it.”
CDS: current research agenda

The major areas of research in CDS are:

1. Analysing, understanding and explaining the impact of neoliberalism and the knowledge-based economy on various domains of our society.

Example:

CDS: current research agenda

The major areas of research in CDS are:

2. Analysing, understanding and explaining the impact of *globalisation* in most domains of our lives, as well as the contradictory tendencies of glocalisation and renationalisation.

Example:

CDS: current research agenda

The major areas of research in CDS are:

3. Analysing, understanding and explaining climate change and the debates surrounding the production of alternative energy sources.

Example:

The major areas of research in CDS are:

4. Analysing, understanding and explaining the use of digitally mediated communication and its impact on conventional and new modes of communication.

Example:

**CDS: current research agenda**

The major areas of research in CDS are:

5. **Integrating approaches from cognitive sciences into CDS through the development of new theories, methodologies and tools.**

Example:

CDS: current research agenda

The major areas of research in CDS are:

6. Analysing, understanding and explaining the relationship between complex historical processes and hegemonic narratives, particularly in relation to identity politics.

Example:

The origins of CDS

CDS as a network of scholars emerged in the early 1990s. After a symposium in Amsterdam in 1991, Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak spent two days together discussing theories and methods of critical discourse analysis. This is how this field of linguistic research was initially established.
CDS today: main approaches

Nowadays CDS is organised as a ‘school’ which integrates a variety of different theoretical and methodological approaches.

The main ones are:

a) **Discourse-historical approach** (Wodak & Reisigl)
b) **Social actors approach** (van Leeuwen)
c) **Dispositive analysis** (Jäger & Maier)
d) **Sociocognitive approach** (van Dijk)
e) **Dialectical relational approach** (Fairclough)

But there are more (e.g. social media analysis, multimodality…)
Main concepts in CDS

CDS has never been and has never attempted to be or to provide one specific theory or methodology. On the contrary, research in CDS is multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds, oriented towards different data and methodologies.

The **common ground** of CDS includes four key concepts: **discourse**, **critique**, **power** and **ideology**. Their specific definitions are also manifold, but there are some common principles that most CDS researchers adhere to...
Main concepts in CDS: discourse

CDS see discourse (written and spoken) as a form of social practice. Each discursive event is shaped, but also shapes, situations, objects of knowledge, social identities and relationships between people and groups of people.

Discourse is socially conditioned as well as socially constitutive. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.
Main concepts in CDS: critique

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The critical impetus of CDS can be traced to the influence of Critical theory (Frankfurt School, Habermas), which argues that social theory should not only be oriented toward understanding or explaining society, but also toward critiquing and changing it. Critical theories, thus also CDS, want to produce and convey critical knowledge that empowers human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection, by creating awareness in agents of their own needs and interests.
Main concepts in CDS: critique

Researchers (including CDS researchers), scientists and philosophers are not situated outside the societal hierarchy of power and status. Instead, they are subject to this structure, and often occupy rather privileged positions in society.

Therefore, apart from doing social critique, CDS researchers are encouraged to be self-critical and self-reflexive, i.e. to look at himself or herself with the same skeptical eye with which s/he looks at society.
Main concepts in CDS: power

CDS is interested in the way discourse (re)produces social domination and power relations. **Power** is one of the most central and contentious concepts in the social sciences, and one of the most difficult to define.

According to Lukes (2005), power is three-dimensional. **Overt power** relates to conflicts in decision-making situations, and consists in prevailing over others. **Covert power** consists in having control over what gets decided. The **power to shape desires and beliefs** is the power to generate social consensus, thereby precluding conflict and grievances.
Main concepts in CDS: power

Michel Foucault (1975) has been the first to introduce the conjunction of power and discourse. The central concept in his theory is discipline, which denotes the technologies of power developed in the 18th and 19th centuries (bureaucracy, surveillance, confinement, e.g. hospitals and prisons etc.).

According to Foucault, the exercise of power does not necessarily involve violence. Many forms of domination might be exercised within society simultaneously, by various actors and **without subjects being aware of this**.
Main concepts in CDS: power

Pierre Bourdieu (1982, 1991) has also elaborated a theory of the language-power relation. According to it, society is organised in social fields that operate like metaphorical markets in which different kinds of capital (economic, cultural, social, linguistic) are at stake, meaning that they can be acquired through heritage or struggle.

Social actors tend to act in accordance with the rules of each social field. This tendency is called *habitus*: a durable but also evolving system of dispositions which ensures that a social actor ‘moves naturally’ and ‘without intention’ in a social field.
Main concepts in CDS: ideology

Ideology is usually defined as a coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs and values concerning society.

What interests CDS are not the explicit types of ideologies (fascism, communism etc.), but the more hidden ideologies that are inherent in our everyday life, which often appear disguised as metaphors and analogies (for example: ‘life is a journey’, ‘nations are like plants’, ‘love is war’, ‘economy is a competitive race’, ‘immigration is like a flood’ etc.).

Ideologies are constructed, legitimised, reproduced but also contested and transformed through discourse.
A ‘taste’ of critical discourse analysis

How Donald Trump answers a question:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aFo_BV-UzI