Studying style and legitimation

Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis

Sean Zdenek and Barbara Johnstone
Texas Tech University / Carnegie Mellon University

The chapters in this section all use methods associated with **Critical Linguistics** (CL) and **Critical Discourse Analysis** (CDA) to explore questions about one of the traditional foci of rhetorical scholarship, political discourse. Some of the chapters bring analytical categories from rhetorical studies, such as genre and figuration, into CDA. In this introduction to the section's methods, we sketch the history of Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis and provide an overview of their key techniques, which typically involve looking systematically at one or more of the often unnoticed details of grammar or word choice. These details can help the critic understand not only how texts give presence to a particular picture of the world but also how linguistic choices signal one or more of the authors' possible underlying motives.

As rhetoricians have always known, all discourse – spoken or written, highly planned or completely spontaneous – requires choices about how to present things, and these choices are never neutral. Contemporary rhetorical studies have focused mainly on choices of the more global sort, choices about what persuasive strategies and lines of argument to adopt and how to structure texts. In traditional rhetorical theory, these levels of choice are referred to with Aristotle's terms "invention" and "arrangement," respectively. For various historical reasons, what Aristotle called "style" became identified with the ornamentation of already-planned talk or writing, the flourishes that could be added to make already-persuasive discourse sound elegant. In the 20th century, the study of style came to be seen as less important than the study of invention and arrangement, to the point that some influential approaches to the teaching of writing and to rhetorical criticism ignored sentence-level grammar and word choice altogether. Although this gap was being criticized as early as the 1950s (Bryant 1957; Redding 1957), rhetorical theory has only slowly moved away from an approach to criticism focused more on history and biographical context than on rhetorical texts

themselves (Mohrmann & Leff 1974) and toward a broader conception of style that emphasizes its ideological dimensions and the ways in which it is connected with identity (Hariman 1995; Carpenter 1994; Murphy 1997).

Meanwhile, almost the opposite was happening in linguistics. People whose primary expertise had to do with syntax and semantics became interested in talk and texts, at first in the context of what is traditionally known as "descriptive" linguistic research. Descriptive discourse analysis aims to show how utterances and texts are structured across languages, and to explore what new conceptual tools, in addition to already available models for words and sentences, are needed to understand conversations and paragraphs. Work of this kind is based in the idea that the primary goal of scholarly research is to describe the world, or whatever bit of the world the researcher is interested in.

The beliefs that underlie pure descriptivism have been called into question more and more urgently across the disciplines, under the influence of philosophical relativism and critical social theories such as Marxism. Relativism leads to skepticism about the possibility of "scientific truth" and encourages researchers to take a critical, self-conscious (or "reflexive") stance vis-à-vis their own work and the claims they make. Critical social theory describes the human world as characterized by dominance, exploitation, struggle, oppression, and power. People whose grounding is in theory of this sort attempt to show what is wrong with the status quo. They tend to be interested in the dominated groups rather than in those who dominate them; their research about struggles over power is (at least in principle) meant to help empower the relatively powerless.

Discourse analysis is now often used in the service of critical goals as well as descriptive ones. Two groups of researchers who are particularly identified with this trend have called their ways of working Critical Linguistics, or CL (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979; Hodge & Kress 1979) and Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA (Fairclough 1985, 1992; van Dijk 1993; Wodak 1996). It should be stressed that there is far more research using discourse analysis that is critical in this sense than just the work explicitly associated with these two schools. Critical approaches to texts have a long tradition in North American anthropology and linguistics (Adams 1999), and these approaches have had considerable influence. More generally, discourse analysis is, at root, a highly systematic, thorough approach to critical reading (and listening), and critical reading almost inevitably leads to questioning the status quo and often leads to questions about power and inequality.

Although CDA has become increasingly eclectic, drawing analytical categories and methods from a variety of sources, CL and CDA both have their roots in Systemic Functional Linguistics, or SFL, a theory of grammar developed by British linguist M. A. K. Halliday (1994; Eggins 1994). The influence of SFL continues to be unmistakable (see Wodak 2001: 8), because Halliday offers "clear and rigorous

linguistic categories for analyzing the relationship between discourse and social meaning" (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000:454).

SFL proposes that sentences take the forms they do for reasons that are neither arbitrary nor the result of innate mental structures, but rather for reasons connected with the functions utterances serve. One of these functions involves representing the world, or "ideation." In addition to representing the world, every utterance must also claim or signal something about who its speaker, its audience, and other participants in the communicative event should be taken to be (this is its "interpersonal" function) and how it is to be understood in the context of preceding and following discourse (its "textual" function). Halliday identified aspects of grammar that can serve each of these functions.

To give just one example of how choices among grammatical possibilities can make a difference, let us take a brief look at one of the key grammatical resources for ideational (world-representing) work, namely *transitivity*. A transitive clause is one that has a direct object. *Pete rides his bike to campus* has the direct object *his bike*, so it is a transitive clause. *Pete rides to campus*, on the other hand, is an intransitive clause, because it lacks a direct object. Speakers and writers can sometimes choose whether to use a transitive or an intransitive clause, and the choice can have ideational force. A child whose mother has just asked what happened to the glass bowl that was on the sideboard could say either "I dropped it" (transitive) or "It fell" (intransitive). Alternatively, the child could say "It got dropped," using a passive-voice construction. The transitive choice makes the responsibility for the accident clear; in the intransitive choice and the passive-voice choice, responsibility does not enter the picture.

CDA is not a set of tools or a methodology per se (see Fairclough 2001:121; Meyer 2001:14) but "a complex cluster of practices and approaches at the crossroads of several disciplines" (van Noppen 2004:108). Indeed, the theoretical foundations of CDA are rich, varied, and selectively applied among CDA practitioners. Yet despite the multiplicity of both approaches and underlying social theories, proponents tend to share a set of assumptions about discourse, readers, texts, and social reality:

–   CDA "starts from prevailing social problems, and thereby chooses the perspective of those who suffer most" (van Dijk 1986:4). Critics advocate for those with limited power, limited or non-traditional forms of agency, oppressed groups, "the losers" (Fairclough 2001:125), and those deemed outside the mainstream.

–   CDA is "emancipatory" (Fairclough 2001:125) and works for social change and social justice. "CDA scholars play an advocatory role for groups who suffer from social discrimination" (Meyer 2001:15).

– Problems of interest to CDA critics therefore intersect with areas where power and ideology are likely to circulate discursively (albeit not always visibly): "Gender issues, issues of racism, media discourses or dimensions of identity have become very prominent" (Wodak 2001:3). Popular also are studies of political discourse and economic discourse (especially globalization and economic change), advertising, institutional discourse (bureaucracy, governance), and education and literacy (see Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000:450–1). This list is by no means exhaustive: "What is problematic and calls for change is an inherently contested and controversial matter" (Fairclough 2001:125).

– Social problems may become naturalized, sedimented, conventionalized, invisible. The challenge for the CDA critic is to "'demystify' discourses by deciphering ideologies" (Wodak 2001:10). CDA "endeavours to make explicit power relationships which are frequently hidden" (Meyer 2001:14). "[D]iscourse is an opaque power object in modern societies and CDA aims to make it more visible and transparent" (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000:448).

– Power, ideology, and history are key terms in CDA (Wodak 2001:3). Ideology "refers to social forms and processes within which, and by means of which, symbolic forms circulate in the social world" (Wodak 2001:10). CDA critics are particularly interested in the link between hegemonic ideologies and language. Power is typically defined, in keeping with Foucault's work, as both repressive and productive – and also "entwined" in language (p. 11). According to Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen (2000:451), "A fundamental aspect of CDA is that it claims to take its starting point in social theory." In their review of CDA, they list a number of social theorists who have been influential to CDA critics, including Foucault ("orders of discourse," "power/knowledge"), Gramsci ("hegemony"), and Althusser ("ideology," "interpellation"). The focus on history is reflected, for example, in Ruth Wodak's "discourse-historical" approach (Wodak 2001; see also Krzyżanowski 2005 and Oberhuber 2005), which is "intent on tracing the (intertextual) history of phrases and arguments" across a wide range of discourses and practices (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000:450). Also popular are theorists who have made explicit the link between discourse and power, such as Laclau (p. 450; see Jäger 2001:42).

– CDA is aggressively interdisciplinary and pluralist in both method and theory (Wodak & Weiss 2005:124). Fairclough (2005:53) has argued that interdisciplinary research should seek to transcend the particularities of each discipline through "dialogue." Wodak and Gilbert Weiss (2005:123) concur: "We believe that the interdisciplinary approach allows for some innovative and creative proposals, which the perspective from inside one traditional field might restrict."

– Social and linguistic categories are "basically not compatible" (Wodak & Weiss 2005:124), and need to be translated so that they can be channeled into a

common framework. Even when linguistic categories are identical in name to
social categories, meanings may differ. How to move back and forth between
macro views of society and micro views of discourse is the so-called "media-
tion problem" (124): "No such uniform theoretical framework of mediation
has been proposed in CDA to date" (125).

– Discourse is a form of social practice. Accordingly, discourse is not merely
   a reflection of society but shapes and is shaped by it. This view is referred
   to as "dialectical" (Fairclough 2005: 66). "It is an important characteristic of
   the economic, social and cultural changes of late modernity that they exist as
   discourses as well as processes that are taking place outside discourse, and that
   the processes that are taking place outside discourse are substantively shaped
   by these discourses" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 4, qtd. in Blommaert &
   Bulcaen 2000: 448).

– The dialectical view entails a dynamic relationship between structure and
   agency (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000: 452). CDA avoids structuralist determin-
   ism by inscribing in local practices the power to shape (and potentially resist)
   hegemonic structures of control and domination. A slightly different way of
   putting it: "readers/hearers are not passive recipients in their relationship to
   texts" (Wodak 2001: 6).

This list of common features in CDA is not exhaustive, and many of these fea-
tures are shared by other approaches taken in this book and in rhetorical studies at
large, but it does begin to suggest the contours of a CDA-inspired way of analyzing
discourse.

In their chapters in this section, Andreea Deciu Ritivoi and Christopher Eisen-
hart show how transitivity can function in a constitutive, ideational way, to shape
the world readers are meant to imagine. Eisenhart shows, for example, how the
report about a review of a botched law-enforcement operation sometimes repre-
sents the review process, rather than any particular human agents, as the producer
of the report: "the Review made factual determinations;" "[human agents'] exper-
tise enabled the Review to conduct a comprehensive examination." Ritivoi shows
how the would-be leader of a government in exile makes dissent among members
of the group he represents invisible via passive-voice constructions: "The following
lists of members was agreed on"; "It was decided that all the members would."

These chapters, and the other two in this section, also explore other aspects
of grammar and vocabulary choice suggested by CL and CDA: modality, naming,
nominalization, and tense and aspect, as these resources are deployed to shape
depictions of agency, responsibility, time, identity, and, most generally, political
and rhetorical legitimacy. In addition, Eisenhart and Susan Lawrence bring ana-
lytical categories and categorization schemes from rhetorical studies to the CDA
table. Bringing to bear rhetorical genre theory, Eisenhart shows how the rhetorical

exigencies created by the immediate purposes of official government reports shape the ideational work that texts of this sort can do in shaping events for subsequent rhetorical deployment. In her study of amnesty hearings during South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process, Lawrence uses the traditional rhetorical notion of figuration to describe patterns of intertextuality linking an individual's testimony with the law that stipulates the intended scope of the testimony. She shows how the language of the actual testimony reflected the language of the law not just by repeating it, but also through metonymy, hyperbole, synecdoche, and metaphor.

Challenging an Aristotelian distinction between rhetorical (political) and arhetorical (natural) futures, Patricia Dunmire explores representations of the future in deliberative discourse. Analyzing the construction of natural futures in a government report on sea level rise, Dunmire shows how nominalization and modality play a role in the rhetorical construal of future outcomes of action and inaction. Analyzing the construction of political future in a US national security report and proposal, Dunmire illustrates how tense and aspect construe future risks and outcomes with relative certainties and in relative proximity and distance.

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