INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH


HISTORY OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Rebecca Rogers: What do you see as the history of CDA?

Norman Fairclough: I guess that is two different questions. Do you mean the history of this particular network? Or the history of critical work on language and discourse? Because I think they are two very different things.

RR: Good point. Can you talk a little bit about both?

NF: The history of this group, that is now operative internationally that has met here set itself up as a network and I guess the beginning of that was probably the European group meetings that started in Amsterdam I think in about 1991 initiated by Teun van Dijk and attended initially by people like Ruth Wodak, Theo van Leeuwen and myself and Luisa Rojo, and a bit later others but it was a very small group and a group of graduate students was there, too. That group has kept going ever since and has gradually pulled in other people. And that has come to constitute a CDA network ...

Since then it has expanded because various people have started their own networks in

1 Rebecca Rogers conducted this interview on May 8, 2004 at First International Conference of CDA Valencia, Spain.
other places. So some of us are in touch with Jay Lemke and Jim Gee in the States, we’ve been in touch with people in Australia and some of the people in the network do work in Australia such as Theo van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress and it has gradually has become more international. The original groups were European and then they became more international and attended by Jay Lemke from the States and Phil Graham from Brisbane and so on. So that is the way it has developed as a network but I guess intellectually we are, the earlier work done in critical linguistics, the book published by Fowler & Kress & Trew in 1979 and Kress’s work on Language & Ideology at the same time and so that work was a direct feed into the development of this network and then some of us started talking about critical discourse analysis as opposed to critical linguistics in the mid 1980s, something like that. So that is some of that history. But if we think of the critical analysis of discourse in a broader sense you can trace that back as long as you want to really. You can go back to classical rhetoric which was in a sense was a particular sort of critically looking at discourse. Or more recently the work of people like Bakhtin and Volsonov, which I think was very influential for many of us getting into this area. Also, I think importantly, the fact that a critical discourse analysis emerged somewhat earlier than this network in France tied particular to the work of Michel Pecheux but also Dominique (inaud.) was talking about this in his plenary, very much tied to a particular type of Marxism and Althusserian Marxism and with the demise of the popularity of that version of French Marxism, generally, in France, the development has been a common (inaud.) In the sense the opposite from what has happened what happened in the Anglo-world. Whereas in the Anglo-world you have the
emergence of critical linguistics, distancing itself from formal linguistics and that then led to critical discourse analysis. In the French context, what emerged first was this critical approach to discourse and people tended to move away from that. So, for example now, Dominique would not refer to himself as a critical discourse analyst. Other people have distanced themselves from that—Pecheux, for instance. And one could go on, John Reagon (in his speech at the conference) referred to (inaud.) and to Derrida. All of whom have done some form of critical work on discourse.

RR: Can you talk about the emergence of the critical discourse analysis network? What conditions made it possible for that network to emerge? What conditions made it possible for some of this before the network—in the 1970s and 1980s—more broadly for the methodology and theory to emerge?

NF: Maybe we should also think of the network as the fact that it exists as this rather loose network and structure. Very loose in fact. There is no center, no organizers, always casual, it’s always been natural: Who will organize the next meeting? Someone says “I will!” and then maybe they do and maybe they don’t. And that has always been the way its been done. So it has always had this kind of loose structure and I suppose the conditions of possibility for have been the broader emergence of that network that is part of academic life, so in a sense it is a part of that. So it has not been tied to particular institutions or schools, these have developed as a part of that, Ruth Wodak has the most elaborately developed school or institutional base in Vienna, Teun van Dijk
in Amsterdam and me in Lancaster. But, it’s dependent very much on this loose flowing group of people who continually change in their constitution, comings and goings and so on. And that is the way it has tended to develop.

RR: Are there any kind of social conditions outside of academia or particular intellectual traditions that you think have moved this forward?

NF: Well, yes. If we think of the intellectual traditions. I think one needs to be careful here. I think the thing I want to say is that CDA is not a unitary position neither theoretically, methodologically, or intellectually. Different people draw on different traditions. But having said that, there are certain traditions that one can see that have been more or less important for people. One is certainly ideology critique and the Althusserian work is reflected in the early Fowler and Kress’s work in critical linguistics. So ideology critique in those works forms the Frankfurt school as far as Althusser and so on. So those traditions are important. And behind those, Marxism. And then I guess for quite a number of us, Habermas, more recent Frankfurt school work and Habermas particularly because his distinctive way of approaching critical theory has been, in a sense, to revise historical materialism and look at communication alongside of the labor of speakers in a basic sort of anthropological premises of human existence, so communication of language, and discourse as distinct. This has influenced Ruth Wodak and me and others. Then I suppose for me, and say for, I would think Gunther Kress for instance, Bakhtin’s work, dialogical view of language, Bakhtin’s work on genre, back in
Voloshinov tradition has been influential. For some of us Foucault, particularly in the area of discourse, which in one of my books, *Discourse and Social Change*, I was arguing that what one ought to be trying to do is specifically set up bridges between the non-textual and more oriented to knowledge systems types of discourse analysis and traditions of linguistic text analysis. So these are some of the influences but I think I should stress, if you think of Teun van Dijk, he has been quite influenced by work in cognitive theory whereas many other people in the area haven’t. So there is quite a bit of diversity in terms of the work that people draw on and it has been changing as people go along. So my recent work has been drawing on work in the political economy, for example.

**PERSONAL HISTORY WITH CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

RR: Can you talk through why you thought to bring together these ideas?

NF: I started in linguistics, the appointment that I first had at Lancaster was a very strange one in a sense because I was appointed to teach varieties of English and writing systems and was forgotten about as soon as I got there and thank God because I didn’t know anything about writing systems. I started off doing that and teaching formal linguistics. I taught Chomskyan grammar and so on. Then I got quite involved politically in the 1970s and gradually became dissatisfied with the gross gap between my political interests and my academic ones. So I gradually moved first towards social linguistics and then came across—I can’t remember in which order—the critical linguistics work of the
late 1970s and also very important Voloshinov and the Marxist Philosophy of Language. And so it emerged out of that. And I suppose I started putting this together in the 1980s. So for me it was very much a matter of trying to develop some academic work that was a way of developing my political commitments in academic terms.

RR: And what was your first project?

NF: My first project in a sense was to try to work out some of these ideas in a very theoretical way. So I wrote some papers in the mid-1980s—I wrote a paper on critically descriptive approaches to discourse analysis—that was published in *Discourse & Society* in 1985. That was probably my first significant publication. Actually, I did some early work on the Falklands War with an Argentinean student who was working with me in those days. And then the first book was *Language and Power* which was published in 1989. Again, the concern was to develop a synthetic theoretical approach to language and power and it was applied to many different materials. It wasn’t a project on any particular research problem. It was an attempt to develop a particular approach to questions of language and power, across a range of media, interviews, doctor–patient interview materials, there might have been some educational material, I can’t remember. But it was quite a diverse discussion.

RR: How was your work received in 1985?
NF: How was it received?

RR: Yeah.

NF: Very generously (laughs). In what sense?

RR: I don’t know who the editor was then?

NF: Teun van Dijk. Teun van Dijk was already oriented towards these ideas so it was not alien to him then. Because I guess his own work, I am not sure of the timetable of his work, his orientation towards this work must have already been developing.

**CDA AS APPROACH, STANCE, METHOD(S)**

RR: Can you talk about the various approaches to CDA? And, then, how your own approach fits into the various traditions?

NF: Again, I want to complicate that because I think it is risky classifying too sharply between different approaches. I would not ... I find it difficult to say what my own approach is because it has changed so much. I think the different approaches have fed into each other. So I don’t think one can say there is this approach and that approach and that approach. There are differences and some of them are clearer than others. Like
I’ve already said, Teun van Dijk has always been (always, I don’t whether that is quite true, he will tell you) but as long as I have know him has been focusing on the cognitive interface between the textual and social and that has been the distinctive feature of his work. I suppose to some extent in Ruth Wodak’s work at certain stages. Ruth Wodak on the other hand, a noticeable feature of her work has had a consistently historical approach that she has tended to collect bodies of material looking at racism that span decades looking at continuities and differences. So there are differences. Some people have been more closely to SFL (systemic functional linguistics) like Theo van Leeuwen’s work came out of—his own particular approach—I am sure he would accept me saying that—is his own particular adaptation of, what is the word I am looking for? Developing a type of systemic linguistic framework without regard to the orthodoxies of systemic linguistics. So I think his work has been rather unorthodox. But nevertheless, has taken strong influence from that tradition. Similarly, Gunther Kress, and his critical linguistics work is very strongly attached or drawing upon the work of Michael Halliday and others in systemic linguistics which and lot of us have seen as a linguistic theory that has been exceptionally compatible with what we are trying to do. Because it is a socially oriented linguistic theory. It had a strong point of reference outside of linguistics itself in the work of Michael Bernstein. It was oriented to text. It was oriented to choice and toward the social conditions of choice and text. And in all of these ways it was an approach that many critical discourse analysts found very fruitful. But that is much stronger in the work of Theo van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress and to a lesser extent in my work. It is not really so strong in Teun van Dijk’s work. Ruth Wodak’s more recently has been more
oriented to or getting more into a systemic approach but I do not think early on she
was. So there are these sorts of differences.

In terms of my own work, I think that I have increasingly focused on questions of
social change. That was already there in the *Language and Power* book and then I did a
book on *Discourse and Social Change* in 1992 and ever since then my main focus has
been on looking at the major social changes of the epoch. Things people talk about as
globalization or knowledge societies, knowledge based societies, information societies,
transition is a current concern. In terms of the question of what particular importance of
efficacy—more generally—has discourse as a moment of research has in these
moments of social change? Another distinctive element of my framework, has been the
centrality placed on, one can say that if you are doing CDA that everyone has this
problem of mediation. That is, how do you move from the social analysis to textual
analysis? But I think my approach to that has been centered on the idea of the concepts
of order of discourse and interdiscursivity. Order of discourse in the sense of particular
articulations of discourses, genres and styles that are relatively stabilized around
networks of social practices such as the field of media or politics.

And interdiscursivity as a way of looking at a more concrete level, at the way in
which particular texts or conversations, or interviews, draw upon and potentially
rearticulate these more stable combinations of discourses, genres, and styles. So that,
for me, has been the mediating element. On the assumption that you are talking about
discourses, genres, and styles, you are talking about entities that are already half
linguistic and half social. So it is a way of moving between social analysis, political
analysis, political-economic analysis, and linguistic analysis, and semiotic analysis between texts and interactions. So what have we gotten to? So, yes, I have applied that sort of approach to various things. I did a book on the language of New Labour in Great Britain in 2000. We set up the language and new capitalism website. People like Phil Graham ...

RR: You were talking about the website.

NF: So that for me was part of this developing work. I mean, the names that I and others have used here are varied. People have talked about globalization about new capitalism. The work I am doing now is specifically on transition in Central Eastern Europe. And which is obviously a process of the introduction of a new capitalist market economy and western democratic styles of political life. But it tends to involve all of these issues like knowledge based economies and information societies because these things are being promoted at the same time. As part of the transition toward capitalism. And so that is sort of a summary of some aspects. You should probably ask me another question [laughs].

RR: Can you talk a bit about the orders of discourse – of genre, discourse and style. Can you explain each of these concepts?
NF: Genre, discourse, and style? Well it is a way of identifying the main ways in which the semiotic—using that term in a very general way to mean any moment or element of the social—what people call discourse in the abstract sense. It is a way of asking or answering a question, in what main way does the semiosis figure into the processes of the social? And what this particular schema says (discourses, genres, styles) is that it figures first in representations of the social. And the term discourses is used for different representations from particular positions or social fields or organizations of particular areas of social realities. So discourse is used in a very familiar sort of sense. It is very similar to how Foucault uses discourse.

Genres are seen as ways of acting or ways of interacting with a focus on semiosis because, of course, action is not entirely semiotic in character. So whereas with discourses we are talking, for instance, about different political discourses—social democratic, conservative, labor, or whatever. In the case of genres we are talking about interviews, lectures, and newspaper articles. So there are different more or less stabilized ways of acting and interacting in a semiotic aspect.

The concept of style is probably the least familiar in the sense in which I use it. It is a familiar term and lots of people use it in other ways. However, I am using it particularly for the dimension of the semiotic—as a moment of the social—that has to do with identity. So for me, styles are particular ways of being, or particular identities in the semiotic aspect. So I am talking here about—since my interest is in change—about changing styles of political or managerial leadership or whatever it may be.
Which again, I would say, is not *just* a matter of semiosis but a complex interplay between semiosis and embodiment if we can think of it in those terms. Even that is complex because embodiment, you can see, is partly semoitized but I don’t think is reducible to the semiotic. You can’t reduce a body to semiosis but you can’t separate it, either. And I think that is an important thing to add. The approach that I have adopted is very much a *dialectical approach*. That is, it sees relationships between semiosis or discourse in this abstract sense and other elements of the social in a way that recognizes that they are different from one another so you can’t reduce everything to semiosis. And conversely you can’t reduce semiosis to other things. If you are investigating whatever area it may be—schools, or political parties, or government, or economies—you are immediately confronted with the fact that partly that the research topics and the objects that are emerging are semiotic in character, but they are not simply semiotic. And to say that they—as some people have tried to say that they are—is for me, quite reductive.

On the other hand, the relationship between semiosis and the other elements is such that they are not discrete from one another. There is a—as David Harvey puts it in his book *Dialectics of Discourse*—there is an internalization of the semiotic in other social elements and vice versa. So any organization, well, one can think of any organization as always starting with a discourse, an imaginary discourse which is then enacted, inculcated, materialized in a material environment, infrastructure of the organization, the procedures of the organization, the subjects, the identities that are involved in the organization and so on. And similarly if we start from texts, we have to
say yes texts are not reducible to anything else but as soon as you start analyzing texts, everything is in there, institutions are in there, relations of power are in there. So we have to see these things as different and yet as not different. So there is a sort of paradox there. That is what I mean when I talk about being dialectically related.

RR: Can you talk about the issue of methods of analysis in general? A thread through the conference has been problematizing methods. Can you talk more generally about how you see the role of methods?

NF: My view of methods is that you find a research topic, as I was saying earlier, you apply a set of theoretical resources to that research topic to produce coherent objects of research and in light of the objects of research that you select appropriate methods. I think that is taking the approach that Bourdieu takes, basically. So I would not want to talk about the methods of critical discourse analysis. If we mean by that how it collects data, how it analyzes data, and so it is appropriate for CDA or work with CDA in certain circumstances to do what some people have begun to do, that is, to actually move into forms of ethnographic work and in a sense to bring the resources of critical discourse analysis into ethnographic work. If you are addressing research questions that are to do with the work I am doing in transition, for example. How are these new discourses that are being re-contextualized in transitional countries actually being operationalized in social life? And that is a dialectic from discourses, to ways of acting and to genres, to
ways of being and to styles, as well as to more material aspects of life. Now to answer that question you have to go looking, for instance, in a country like Romania where I am working, at policy texts or the way in which the Romanian government is enacting policies of e-government by constructing government websites to really know what the effectivity these discourses are having, one has to start looking in localities and companies and so on. Like any country that is a recipient of aide from the World Bank, it is increasingly subject to these processes of monitoring against increasingly more specific set of benchmarks to actually see where these things are happening in practice. But all of this says that we have to investigate these issues, have to move into an ethnographic way of working that is trying to get some close touch with insider perspectives and experiences in particular localities or companies or government offices.

RR: Can you comment on, in any way that you would like to, how you see CDA and ethnography working together? Conceptually or empirically or with an insider perspective, along those lines.

NF: Yeah, there is quite interesting range of ethnographic studies of transitional societies which have been carried out by people like Michael Burawoy. One can, right, I think the same applies there as to other social research. One can read that work and say, yes, this is very interesting because it does start to address what is happening in reality on the ground on. It also addresses the important question of what potentials
there are for people to be resistant from processes that are introduced from on top in transitional societies and economies. That is one important argument for ethnographic studies. But one also reads these papers and my reaction to them is that they are using, of course, interview material, maybe documents, they are using a lot of discourse materials but they are doing very little analysis. So we can actually contribute to the work that is already going on in a sense by saying what else can you find out if you have the resource of critical discourse analysis to analyze in a much more fine-grained way. At the moment what is being said about these materials is mainly thematic. Which is interesting enough but I think there is a lot more to say. And partly things to say in a more fine-grained way about the very nature of appropriations and resistances in these local contexts as manifested in the interdiscursivities of talk. So bringing talk into that whole process of what resources people can draw together for a basis for—I don’t know—combating the intent to impose waste dumps (I am thinking of one example) in Hungary which was to be used for dumping wastes, essentially. There was a campaign around that and a successful one. And there was some good ethnography done on it but I think it could be developed if there were better resources for analyzing the interview material, recordings of meetings and so on.

**CONTEXT**

RR: Can you talk about your views on context?
NF: I find the idea of saying let’s talk about texts and contexts problematic and I would just assume not start there. I would start with social events and social practices, and social structures. I would be interested in understanding the dialectical relations between the diverse elements of the social on all of these levels. The social events, the concrete level of actual happenings, social practices in the sense of more a level more intermediate and the more durable ways of acting socially and then abstract social structures. Now each of these levels one would find elements of semiotic or linguistic or discoursal and other elements that aren’t. So I am interested in looking at those interconnections between the semiotic and other elements all the way through. So, in a sense to say to address those questions by saying this is the text, what about the context doesn’t make a lot of sense to me anyway. Because I don’t want to start with the text anyway. I want to start with the event. So, of course, you can cast the way I approach this in terms of the notion of context, I tend not to because that does then tend to suggest a non-dialectical divide between the texts and the contexts and I do not want to see that divide.

RR: Another set of your terms that have been taken up pretty readily are local, institutional, and societal. How do you see those in the conversations about social practices and social events?

NF: Local, institutional, and societal. I think there is a bigger set of terms needed. This is a sense of scale. I guess these days, in talking about scale I would talk about I think we
need to start talking about global, macro-regional, national, as well as local. These are of distinctions of scale. In a sense, institutional is rather different. It is not scale in the same sense. You can have an institution at a national level, or a local level or a global level. So I think one point, you are right, I did talk as if these were different levels but I don’t think they are now. I think the issue of scale is important. One needs to go beyond the societal to bring in the global that is maybe always in quotes, the macro-regional in the European Union type of structure and I suppose the question of institution is more linked now, for me, to this other scale of events, practices and structures. The question of institutions, for me, comes up on the level of what networks of social practices achieve a kind of durability. And at that point one can talk again at diverse levels about social fields in a Bourdieuan sense, one can talk institutions or particular organizations.

RR: Can you talk about those networks of patterns at the global level and at the local level as well? Do you see the patterns crossing those terrains?

NF: Yes, what is of interest here is the interconnections between these levels. Some people would see what is changing is the emergence of the global level. I don’t agree with that. It is not my idea. There are a lot of people in geography and sociology inspired by geographical theory would say that there has been a global level for a very long time. What is significant is the different relationships between these social levels. And the relationships between levels is changing and maybe that is what is implied. If we go back to some of the ethnographic work I was talking about—some of what has been said
there is that—also the level of local communities people are mobilizing global resources to fight local battles. So you find, for instance, people in this Hungarian case I was referring to, they are drawing on or setting up their own global networks with environmental groups all over the place to in a sense to match the global networks of the opposition. So that sets up new connections, new flows which are a part of discourse.

**CHANGES IN APPROACH**

RR: Can you talk about your thinking as you have moved from one project to the next? How have your questions developed?

NF: Yeah. I’ve said in the plenary here that the way I tend to see this has been embarking on a research topic, one has to undergo a process of constructing objects of research that are coherent on the assumption that the research topic, something I take from Bourdieu. So what is transition? For some people it is ideological work, a discourse to give some sort false impression that everyone will move quite happily from socialism to capitalism but it doesn’t happen that way it all. So if you are working with the topic like transition, obviously taking the problem as they are presented at face value (the knowledge economy or information society or whatever). So the approach is to I guess bring together if we are talking about my own work, my current understanding of critical discourse analysis as a framework and bring that into dialogue with a certain range of relevant social theories and social research and try in that way to develop a
methodology and a certain set of research objects and a particular set of questions and particular methods of data collection, selection, and analysis. As I said in the plenary lecture what I am doing at the moment is working particularly with some of the recent work in political economy because that strikes me as interesting from a number of points of view. First of all, it does, I think, provide a useful theoretical framework for generally framing the process of transformation that have been happening and are happening in this region. But also interesting because of the way in which the political economy itself has been changing in a more cultural direction. So I have worked with a colleague of mine at Lancaster—Bob Jessop—whose work now actively incorporates a version of my work and so it is a dialogical situation. He works with the political economy and tries to incorporate critical discourse analysis. I am trying to do critical discourse analysis in a way that works with his and others’ more cultural version of cultural economy. And that is a way of working—a transdisciplinary way of working where instead of wishing away disciplinary differences, to gradually through theorizing through research projects, to develop theoretical and methodological resources that can cut across disciplinary areas and what I tend to call this transdisciplinary, a rather distinctive way of working. Because what we are trying to do, I think, is use the dialogue to develop the theories and the methods of the disciplines that are coming into the dialogue.

RR: Your new book that came out.
NF: *Analyzing Discourse.*

RR: I am sure you are aware that there are a group of people following your work very closely and how your social theorization and how that is combined with your particular methods and how you are theorizing your methods. And in the new book you were very clear about what genre, discourse, and style means, more so than in your book *Discourse in Late Modernity* or some of your earlier books.

NF: I didn’t know that [laughter]. I am sure you are right.

RR: What are the linguistic textual aspects of this particular order of discourse. So in the newer book you are very clear about what those are. Which, on the one hand, makes it very possible for discourse analysts with critical perspectives to look at particular aspects of texts and is very grounded in the work of Halliday. Can you talk about some of the linguistic aspects of your work?

NF: I see what you mean. The more recent book is a book about textual analysis. So the link between categories like genre, discourse, and textual analysis is more explicit. In terms of that, that book does draw on—as I tended to draw a lot on Michael Halliday for the systemic linguistic framework for reasons I went into earlier on. On the other hand, it does attempt to begin to do other things as well. The way I see it in the long term, is that the transdisciplinarity I’ve talked about also should begin to penetrate one’s
linguistic analysis as well. That is, one should be trying to operationalize what people like David Harvey have said about in terms of space and time in one’s analysis of spatial and temporal analysis of texts or series of value or ethics or—trying to look at ethics in texts—and try to develop transdisciplinarity in that way. That book is really only a beginning in that sense. I try to do that in the case of space and time and Harvey’s idea of space-times and I do it also, for instance, with respect to the distinction in Laclau and Mouffe’s work on difference which is centering the problematic, if you like, of texts as constantly doing classificatory work. Texts are constantly setting up differences—classificatory boundaries—and simultaneously subverting differences. That is taking a very abstract view of the logic of the political from Laclau and Mouffe and saying this not just political logic but as a more general social logic. But it is a logic that is operative in texts, too. So if one is seeing texts—as themselves crucial elements in social processes in processes of social change—then this question of classification and of continuities in classification and changes in classification becomes very important. It is a preoccupation that one can link to Bourdieu’s work, Bernstein’s work, all of which have been concerned with issues of classification. Quite simply, what we put together and what we set up for one another, that can be who we put together—what areas of social life we put together. So that is one particular case where I have tried to operationalize the textual analysis—it is a very simple idea—the perspective that originates from outside textual analysis. That gives a prominence and salience to looking at things in texts that people have looked at before but not given prominence in terms of social processes and aspects of social change.
RR: In what ways has your framework helped you to understand social problems in more detail?

NF: Social problems? I mean I think what I have done in that book (Analyzing Discourse), the way the book is organized is, I have tried to develop aspects of textual analysis in conjunction with their potential applicability to social problems. So each chapter introduces a certain range of resources for analyzing texts and a parallel range of social issues are addressed. It is showing how a range of social issues can be productively addressed through close textual analysis. So that is the rhetoric toward social research is that you can do what you are trying to do in a sense in a fuller way—in certain ways—a more enhanced or enriched way by bringing in textual analysis in whatever it is you are doing, or governance, or hegemony, or public space, and so on.

CDA IN EDUCATION

RR: How do you teach?

NF: Well, how I teach. I guess the way I prefer to teach these days is to teach groups of not linguists or people with a particular background in discourse analysis, so that is the first thing to say. So my preferred groups for teaching are people doing research in various social science disciplines. And I suppose, how I teach, given these favorable
situations, is to always try to mix in, I think you have to have a fairly substantial 
presentational element to just bring people into the framework because very often 
person’s knowledge is very diverse. But also include an element where one is trying to 
bring—or get people to bring—their own more or less developed research interests or 
potential research interests into the class and to begin to think about their work with 
others in class about how these might be developed in research projects. So I think I like 
to teach with an orientation to people actually using CDA in their own research.

RR: If students do not have a background in discourse analysis or linguistic analysis, is 
that a problem for you or open up other possibilities?

NF: That is what makes it interesting. I think this work is most useful when it is carried 
out across disciplines. For me the most fruitful sorts of groups are groups that are very 
diverse in terms of their backgrounds. Ideally, I guess some of them would have a strong 
background in discourse analysis whereas others come with strong backgrounds in 
sociology or political science or whatever. And if you have long enough with a group like 
that, I did a seminar for four days in Australia, four intensive days, and that was even 
long enough for people to start to know what their particular strength was and a lot of 
them learned from each other.

RR: Do you attempt to bring out particular textual analyses for people in political 
science, say, who do not have a background in linguistics?
NF: That is why I think you can’t get around schematically presenting frameworks for
them to start thinking about or get them to read stuff in advance. So there has to be a
strong input in that context or people are just floundering. But on the other hand, a
strong element of … also a strong element or give people plenty of space to start
thinking how they can start using these particular kinds of approaches. So, ideally, very
often people go away not at all sure what they are going to do but at least have lots of
questions in their heads and a sense of how they will approach them.

RR: I think the sense is that when people become interested in this type of analysis, they
want to know how to do it. I think that is the danger where people hang on to a
particular approaches or particular methods. And I wonder how much of it is a newness
to it, or that there is right way to do it and how you get around some of that.

NF: Yeah, That is difficult to get around. Someone who is a sociologist doing a PhD in
whatever it may be might decide to use critical discourse analysis but is also
simultaneously reading a lot of social theory and doing other things and doesn’t have
time to survey the whole field of CDA even and certainly not the resources that can be
built on from textual analysis, with linguistics and so forth. I don’t have a magical
answer. All you can do is keep saying that the idea is not to learn a method and say that
is the method. It is more of a way—or more getting over to them—that the nature of
the enterprise is taking a particular, or adopting a particular take and focus on social
issues and then selecting your methods, including the decision of whether to use CDA. If you make that decision what particular methods of, say, textual analysis to use. That is a contingent question on the question you are asking. You are not applying the method of CDA. Because there is no method of CDA. I say that to a certain extent that is not quite right. And if work from the framework I am using, there are certain elements to the method like you are doing a discursive and a linguistic analysis. So that version of CDA does have a relatively stable methodological elements. But it certainly does not say how to go about analyzing the language of text. So there is no method in the sense that there is a checklist that you have to go through, and if you don’t like that particular method or find methodological constraints in that version, you can go somewhere else.

RR: So do you ever worry with, say, the people you are working with in political science or psychology that while they are bringing these different disciplinary background to a social problem and they will present their work as critical discourse analysis where there is not much textual analysis here?

NF: It doesn’t worry me so much that, say, a sociologist says, “I am using critical discourse analysis,” and then one discovers that there is very little textual analysis. I think one could say, “Well yeah, you have productively used critical discourse analysis because it has gotten you thinking about discourse in a way you might not have otherwise. Though what I would personally do would be extended in these ways.” But what is more worrying is when people present the particular set of methods of analysis
as if that is CDA. They have decided that CDA is some normative thing and you either get it right or wrong.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

RR: Can you talk about future directions for CDA?

NF: I wouldn’t like to speak on behalf of CDA. I mean what is interesting now is that it is being taken up so widely and in so many different disciplines that it has now become something thank goodness that it could not be controlled even if someone wanted to. And I don’t think people want to. So I think it will go in all sorts of directions. That is good and it will mean that it will end up in all sorts of unrecognizable forms. But if it continues with the basic sort of orientations toward language as part of the social order, than that is fine. So, yeah, I mean, I don’t all I can say about future directions for CDA generally is that it is obviously a greater disciplinary diversity. I mean there are people from goodness knows how many disciplines very often working on their own, working on particular research projects without anyone in their institutions who can supervise them and there are thousands of these people probably all over the place. It is difficult for them to do but people are doing it in that way.

It is good to pull some of that together. This new journal that we started, Critical Discourse Studies, part of the point of that was—not to pull it together in the sense of normalize it—but give people a space where a lot of different kinds of work has a home without impose any—I suppose trying to get people to address—or not to ignore issues
that are coming up in the field. So, I suppose what we are saying in the journal, you may not be doing much textual analysis but at least maybe you should be aware that whether you do or not is an issue. So if you decide not to do a lot of very detailed textual analysis, at least that is something to give a rationale for.

RR: It is a tension, isn’t it – with this conference and the journal and your point about normalizing and institutionalizing CDA?

NF: Institutionalization means various things. We have conferences. We have journals. These are marks of institutionalization. We have posts in CDA. Probably most people are doing CDA are not in CDA posts. But, on the other hand, we are talking about this network structure and when you think of institutions you think more of hierarchy. We don’t have a hierarchy. So, of course, there are of course certain elements of institutionalization but it is a very loosely institutionalized structure. As I said, people are working in all sorts of different disciplines and departments but it is not pulled together in a hierarchy.