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[**CDA is NOT a method of critical discourse analysis**](http://www.aediso.org/debate/115-cda-not-method-critical-discourse-analysis)

***Teun A. van Dijk***

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Contrary to popular belief and unfortunate claims of many papers submitted to discourse journals, CDA is *not a method of critical discourse analysis*. This may sound paradoxical, but I am afraid it isn’t. Think about it. Indeed, what would be the systematic, explicit, detailed, replicable procedure for doing “critical” analysis? There is no such method. Being critical, first of all, is a state of mind, an attitude, a way of dissenting, and many more things, but not an explicit method for the description of the structures or strategies of text and talk. So, in that sense, people who want to practice CDA may be supposed to do so from a perspective of opposition, for instance against power abuse through discourse. Playing with words, then, CDA is DA “with an attitude” as one would say in the USA, that is, with a rebellious attitude of dissent against the symbolic power elites that dominate public discourse, especially in politics, the media and education. In other words, CDA is (any) DA of critical scholars, and hence CDA is rather a social or political movement than a method. Of course, the *kind* of DA they do, should be adequate to realize their critical goals, namely to analyze and denounce domination and social inequality.

Methodologically, CDA is as diverse as DA in general, or indeed other directions in linguistics, psychology or the social sciences. Thus, CDA studies may do so in terms of grammatical (phonological, morphological, syntactic), semantic, pragmatic, interactional rhetorical, stylistic, narrative or genre analyses, among others, on the one hand, and through experiments, ethnography, interviewing, life stories, focus groups, participant observation, and so on, on the other hand. A good method is a method that is able to give a satisfactory (reliable, relevant, etc.) answer to the questions of a research project. It depends on one’s aims, expertise, time and goals, and the kind of data that can or must be generated — that is, on the *context* of a research project.

True, researchers in CDA have often used similar methods, depending on the goals, data and expertise of the researchers. Since many CDA scholars have a linguistic background, they have shown a preference for some forms of grammatical analysis, for instance the use of passive sentences or nominalization as a means to hide or background the agency of the powerful, as is typically the case in work influenced by Systemic Grammar — which however is often limited to the study of clause structures, and less focused on specific discourse structures, and even less on interactional, pragmatic, cognitive, social, political or cultural dimensions of power abuse that need methods beyond those of sentence grammars.

Discursive power abuse can be observed in many aspects of text and context, also beyond grammar. Local and global discourse semantics remains largely unexplored, and in need of application in CDA studies, as is the case for the analysis of implications, presuppositions, disclaimers, levels and types of description, completeness and vagueness, granularity, perspective and point of view and coherence, among many other aspects of meaning. Fortunately, today we know much about the structures and strategies of narrative and argumentation, or about how text and talk is conventionally organized, as is the case for news reports, textbooks or parliamentary debates. But we are only beginning to understand the epistemic structures of discourse beyond topic-comment, modalities and evidentials, as is the case in the analysis of epistemic access and authority in conversation or how a news report or an expository discourse is epistemically organized. Similarly, much CDA analysis is about discourse that formulates opinions and other forms of evaluation, for which we have appraisal analysis, as first (grammatical) step towards a broader sociocognitive study that also examines how attitudes and ideologies are expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication.

Certain cognitive mechanisms can only be studied by experiments, for instance by examining which discourse structures are better recalled by the readers. The social sciences offer a host of methods of fieldwork, ethnography, participant observation and many more that may be relevant for obtaining insight into the social conditions and consequences of discourse and the reproduction of power in society.

All this, and much more can and should be done in CDA. So, there is not “a” or “one” method of CDA, but many. Hence, I recommend to use the term *Critical Discourse Studies* for the theories, methods, analyses, applications and other practices of critical discourse analysts, and to forget about the confusing term “CDA.” So, please, no more “I am going to apply CDA” because it does not make sense. Do critical discourse analysis by formulating critical goals, and then explain by what *specific* explicit methods you want to realize it.