

# Reassessing the 'critical' in CDS

## One-day symposium

21-22 March 2023, USI - Università della Svizzera italiana (Lugano, Switzerland)

Organisers:

Samuel Bennett (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

Dimitris Serafis (USI - Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano)

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) - or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) - was launched as a scholarly research project when, back in 1991, scholars including Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, Theo van Leeuwen, Ruth Wodak, among others, gathered to outline ways of doing discourse-analytical research with a view to unraveling how opaque ideological beliefs penetrate public text and talk, ending up (re)producing power inequalities and problems in society/ies (see Wodak & Meyer 2016: 4).

As van Dijk (2001) summarizes it:

... [CDS] is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. (van Dijk 2001: 352)

As it transpires from van Dijk's (2001) words, among the distinctive features that constitute the core of this scholarly way of doing discourse-analytical research lie "[its] constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary approach" and a conscious "critical investigation" of every social phenomenon (Wodak & Meyer 2016: 2-3 and references therein). At the same time, the rapid rise in popularity of CDS outside of linguistics has arguably diluted the field's reliance on its foundational concepts.

This way of doing research was soon criticized as being 'activist' or 'ideological', raising at the same time a mostly methodologically-oriented criticism against CDS, regarding the analysis, the collection and use of data, and the proper discussion of the terms employed (see e.g. Widdowson 1995; Žagar 2010). In this regard, CDS practitioners have spent several decades trying to reinforce the methodological and analytical tools of the field (see e.g. Reindorf 2019); a direction which was also reflected in the leitmotif of CADAAD 2020 "Reconciling rigour and context in CDA" (ultimately, the conference was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic). All in all, this concerted effort on honing and developing CDS methodologies has resulted in several publications that synthesize new methods and tools from several disciplinary areas such as corpus linguistics (Baker et al. 2008, 2013), cognitive linguistics (Hart 2011) multimodality (van Leeuwen 2008; Machin 2013, 2016), argumentation studies (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012; Boukala 2019; Serafis forthcoming) that could fertilize CDS, adding rigour to the relevant set of approaches.

While this emerging mosaic of approaches can be seen as having strongly enforced the analytical and methodological power of the field, there still remains "a certain gap in CDS theory", which, in its turn, has led to CDS practitioners having to "rethink CDS theoretical foundations" (Krzyżanowski & Forchtner 2016: 256). Indeed, van Dijk (2008, 823) has claimed that there is a "lack of theory about the norms and principles [of CDS]' own critical activity, leading Forchtner (2011) to state that "[h]ow CDA validates and grounds its own critical standards is therefore not easy to answer".

It should be noted that there have been two excellent special issues of journals on related topics. The first was a special issue of *Discourse & Society*, entitled “Theories and concepts in Critical Discourse Studies” (2016, guest edited by Michał Krzyżanowski and Bernhard Forchtner), and some of the articles therein did look at critique in CDS. The second was a 2018 special issue of *Critical Discourse Studies* (guest edited by Phil Graham) on Ethics in CDS. To this we should like to add Benno Herzog’s important contributions on the role of immanent critique in CDS (2016, 2018), as well as Forchtner’s intervention that centred on the role of the Frankfurt School in the Discourse Historical Approach.

These interventions notwithstanding, whilst methodologically CDS is more rigorous now than before, there has been little concerted focus on the ‘C’ in CDS. As we see it we still need to systematically address the theoretical heterogeneity of the field, and in particular we feel there needs to be reassessment and open discussion on the ‘critical’ in CDS. It is towards filling this gap that the proposed symposium aims to contribute.

We do not mean here to be prescriptive in what we understand the ‘critical’ in CDS to be and it surely extends past recourse to Critical Theory or critical theories. It also leads us to questions of critique (Herzog 2016, 2018; Wodak 2001), questions whether a lack of immanent or prognostic critique precludes research from being designated as works of CDS. It also brings up the question of CDS as an institutional(ised) field within the structures of modern neoliberal academia (the fight for funds, positions, employment precarity, journals, unpaid labour, separation of CDS from Discourse Studies (see Johnstone 2008)). Going further, there is a real need to question and problematise CDS’s reliance on European theorists (Marx, Gramsci, Habermas, Foucault) and its overall ignorance of other epistemologies from the global south (Bennett 2021), not least due to the fact that CDS is now being used extensively outside of Europe (e.g. in Latin America, Africa, and Asia). Lastly, there is a need for us to revisit CDS researchers’ distance to/from the data as another element of the ‘critical’ and a concomitant need to consider the role of self-reflection as scholars and scholar-activists doing research.

With this in mind we intend to organise and host a one-day symposium on “The ‘critical’ in CDS”, inviting a range of CDS scholars to discuss these and other issues. Below are the proposed panel topics:

- Panel 1: Defining the ‘critical’ in CDS
- Panel 2: Different forms of critique in CDS
- Panel 3: Alternative epistemologies: Decolonising CDS
- Panel 4: The individual in CDS (researcher distance to/from the data)
- Panel 5: Round-table discussion

Each of the panels 1-4 will consist of 2 30minute papers, followed by a 30-minute discussion with an invited discussant and with contributions from other symposium participants. Panel 5 is a round-table with 3 discussants, which aims to bring the symposium together and draw out the key points, all the while directing future work in CDS.

In order for the symposium to reach as wide an audience as possible, the symposium will be live-streamed and comments/questions will be encouraged from those watching online. This will enable, e.g. PhD Students and other interested researchers, to benefit from the panels too. In-person attendance of non-participants is also encouraged, although no funding is available to cover costs.

Following the symposium we envisage a production of a special issue in a Q1-ranked peer-reviewed journal (such as *Discourse Studies*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, *Journal of Language and Politics* or *Discourse & Society*) or an edited volume with a major academic publisher, such as Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture series (John Benjamins), Bloomsbury Advances in Critical Discourse Studies series (Bloomsbury) or Routledge Critical Studies in Discourse series (Routledge).

## References

- Baker, Paul, Gabrielatos, Costas, KhosraviNik, Majid, Krzyżanowski, Michał, McEnery, Tony, and Ruth Wodak. 2008. "A Useful Methodological Synergy? Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics to Examine Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press." *Discourse & Society* 19(3): 273–306.
- Baker, Paul, Gabrielatos, Costas, and Tony McEnery. 2013. *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: The Representation of Islam in the British Press*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bennett, Samuel. 2021. "'Britain Has Always Been a Safe Haven": Mythopoetic Legitimation in UK Immigration Policy'. Plenary Lecture presented at *Approaches to Migration, Language & Identity*, University of Sussex, June 9.
- Boukala, Salomi. 2019. *European Identity and the Representation of Islam in the Mainstream Press: Argumentation and Media Discourse*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fairclough, Isabella, and Norman Fairclough. 2012. *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. London: Routledge.
- Forchtner, Bernhard. 2011. "Critique, the discourse–historical approach, and the Frankfurt School". *Critical Discourse Studies* 8(1): 1-14.
- Graham, Phil. (ed). 2018. "Special Issue Introduction on Ethics in CDS". *Critical Discourse Studies* 15(2): 107-110.
- Hart, Christopher. (ed.). 2011. *Critical Discourse Studies in Context and Cognition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Herzog, Benno. 2016. *Discourse Analysis as Social Critique: Discursive and Non-Discursive Realities in Critical Social Research*, London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Herzog, Benno. 2018. "Discourse Analysis as Immanent Critique: Possibilities and Limits of Normative Critique in Empirical Discourse Studies." *Discourse & Society* 27(3): 278–292.
- Johnstone, Barbara. 2008. *Discourse analysis*. (2nd edition.) Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał, and Bernhard Forchtner. 2016. "Theories and Concepts in Critical Discourse Studies: Facing Challenges, Moving Beyond Foundations." *Discourse & Society* 27(3): 253–261.
- Machin, David. 2013. "What is Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies?" *Critical Discourse Studies* 10(4): 347–355.
- Machin, David. 2016. "The Need for a Social and Affordance-Driven Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies." *Discourse & Society* 27(3): 322–334.
- Serafis, Dimitris. Forthcoming. *Authoritarianism on the Front page: Multimodal discourse and argumentation in times of multiple crises in Greece*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- van Dijk, Teun A. 2001. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Deborah Tannen, Deborah Schiffrin, and Heidi. Hamilton, 352–371. Oxford: Blackwell.
- van Dijk, T. A. 2008. Critical Discourse Analysis and nominalization. *Discourse & Society*, 19(6): 821–828.
- van Leeuwen, Theo. 2008. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Widdowson, Henry G. 1995. "Discourse Analysis: A Critical View". *Language and Literature* 4(3): 157–172.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2001. 'What CDA Is about: A Summary of Its History, Important Concepts and Its Developments'. In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 1–13. London: Sage.
- Wodak, Ruth, and Michael Meyer. (eds). 2016. *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd ed. London: Sage.
- Žagar, Igor Z. 2010. "Topoi in Critical Discourse Analysis." *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 6(1): 3–27.