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# Critical Discourse Studies

## Methods

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## INTRODUCTION

I am planning the workshop so that most of our time is spent on theoretical and methodological approaches to ‘doing’ (critically) discursive analyses of texts. During the first day of the workshop I will lay out what CDS is and we will look at its theoretical underpinnings, as well as some common criticisms of the field (and possible responses to them). Leading on from this, the second day will be spent in a more ‘hands’ on way – largely working on analysing texts and assisting you in your research.

Before the workshop, I think it is important for you to get an understanding of where CDS came from intellectually and also, importantly to call for a specific linguistic element to analyses.

This preparatory reading pack includes:

1. The historical roots of CDS
2. A linguistic element to CDS: Systemic Functional Linguistics
3. Questions to consider before the workshop
4. Training texts
5. Reading list



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# 1 THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CDS

Discourse analysis has a family tree that stretches out and back through linguistics and other social, cultural, philosophical and political genealogical branches. Indeed, because discourse analysis' beginnings were as interdisciplinary as the field is now, the history of the subject is necessarily 'messy'. In her book *Tekst, dyskurs, komunikacja międzykulturowa* (1998) Duszak outlines three sources of DA: classic, structural and ethno-methodological, and I will follow a similar separation here.

## 1.1 Ancient influences

Two ancient ancestors of DA are instantly traceable: hermeneutics and classic rhetoric. Essentially a hermeneutic model of text interpretation implies that the meaning of one part of the text can only be understood in the context of the whole and, vice versa the whole can only be understood from looking at its constituent parts. The main concept employed is the hermeneutic circle which sees the researcher move between parts and the whole of the text. Importantly though, because the context (and thus the position of the interpreter) is ever-changing, there is constantly the possibility of further interpretations of texts. Thus from hermeneutics, DA takes the idea that history is important to the understanding and meaning of language use

The legacy of ancient rhetoric in present day DA (as well as stylistics and pragmatics) is the idea of the ability to use language for particular aims (Duszak 1998). Classical rhetoric dates back to Ancient Greece and in particular Aristotle's *Treatise on Rhetoric*. Rhetoric was the quality of being able to inform, persuade and convince an audience through certain structures and modes of speech and text. This included linguistic structures such as metaphor, comparisons, irony, hyperbole and euphemisms, as well as topics of argumentation and certain lexical choices, for example emotive words (van Dijk 2007). The decision over the type of persuasion employed depended on the audience and the content of the speech (Duszak 1998: 22). Thus language was tailored to the social context in which it was to be received. Though initially used as almost a teaching rubric for those wanting to learn how to speak well in public, the concepts and approach to language as a form of persuasion later became tools of analysis of (primarily political) discourse and as such is also an important base for critical





approaches to discourse. The study of rhetoric lost popularity for centuries but was resuscitated in the mid twentieth century when researchers refocused their attentions on persuasion once again. These included Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* (1958) and *The New Rhetoric* by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969: 83), which were later integrated into Reisigl and Wodak's *Discourse Historical Approach* (2001).

## 1.2 Structuralism

Duszak (1998) argues that the influence of structuralism on the evolution of text linguistics was significant and came from a variety of different sources. The formal beginnings of discourse analysis can be traced back to French structuralists and semioticians from anthropology and literary theory. For example, Levi-Strauss's (1973) work on the structural relations of cultures was influenced both by Propp and structural linguistics. Those schools had appropriated concepts of linguistic structuralism from Saussure's work at the turn of the 20th century, especially his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). They also took their influences from the Prague school of structuralism, which itself came originally from philological traditions. Russian formalism was also an initial influential field, in particular Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), which included a structural analysis of a discourse.

In reaction to structuralist approaches, Chomsky's generative approach came to dominate linguistic study and further disconnected language from context. In terms of analytical orientation, linguistics ceased to be about interaction and relationships between participants in communicative events or, as DeBeaugrande (1997) argues, by breaking down linguistics into (some-times single) syllable sounds, language was simultaneously disconnected from discourse. To this can be added a commensurate disconnection from context and all that this comprises: intention, gender, time, place and power relations – elements which are now considered vital in CDS. The focus on grammar and the search for rules within structuralist and generative approaches was unrealistic, and even exclusionary (ibid.). DeBeaugrande termed syntax "home-work linguistics" because it often works with invented data and relies on the intuition of a native speaker for intuition. This was compared to "fieldwork linguistics", which would include present-day discourse analysis as well as its precursors such as language ethnography, tagmemics and socio-linguistics.





By the late 1960s there was a realisation that language could not be wholly reduced to invented sentences and rules. Within generative semantics, Ross (1972), MacCawley (1976) and George Lakoff (1971) all proposed that grammar could not be described in isolation and Robin Lakoff (1972: 907) added to this anti-generativist literature that “in order to predict correctly the applicability of many rules, one must be able to refer to assumptions about the social context of an utterance, as well as to other implicit assumptions made by the participants in a discourse”. Phenomena such as pronoun use, cohesion, coherence, pre-supposition and anaphora were studied and this focus was later developed independently into text linguistics (DeBeaugrande and Dressler 1981) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1978, 1985, 1994; Martin 1992), both of which are used in CDS.

Thus, whereas previous accounts pointed towards sub-sentence level rules as the precursor to communication, discourse analysis took the approach that “the text is the father to the sentence” (Enkvist 1997: 199) and that text strategies, and the contexts in which and from which they are deployed, come before syntactic formation (Ibid.). To these discoveries and proposals, should be added Labov’s (1972) work on conversation and the importance of shared knowledge for interpretation. This burgeoning canon of linguistic investigation, along with the emergence of context as a major factor can be seen as a response to other linguistics subfields that had dominated since the end of the nineteenth century.

### 1.3 Ethno-methodology

The third historical source of DA comes from research into spoken language within linguistic anthropology and increasing interest in the ethnography of languages and communication. From the early 1970s onwards socio-linguistics began to take hold as a formal academic discipline, in part as a reaction to Chomsky’s generative grammar, that explored how naturally occurring language varied depending on social, regional and economic contexts and statuses.

Conversation Analysis (CA), which originated in sociology, is a further important influence on the development of DA. Garfinkel’s (1974) study proposed the usefulness of the investigation of conversational data in order to be able to understand participants’ “common-sense





method-ology” when communicating. This breakthrough work was then taken on by Cicourel (1973) and Sacks, Schlegoff and Jefferson (1974). CA also takes influence from symbolic interaction which proposes that actors are shaped by their interactions (Goffman, 1959).

Within linguistic philosophy and pragmatics too there was work being done on the pragmatics of speech acts and communicative co-influence that would influence the study of spoken, and later written, discourse. Searle (1969) devised his speech-act theory, which held that texts were “negotiated communicative achievements of the participants” (Kaplan and Grabe 2002: 194). Grice (1975) proposed his conversational maxims as a way of explaining and predicting implicatures in speech interaction. Earlier, Austin (1955) had worked on performative utterances and illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts.

Taken together, the developments in written (largely in Europe) and spoken (largely in the US) analysis complemented each other well. The late 1970s and early 1980s was characterised by a re-evaluation of “ways of perception” and “interpretation of rules” which regulate the creation and social functioning of texts (Duszak 1998: 27). The work laid the ground for new thinking on the strong connections between language, thought and action and the idea that language should be treated as a form of social activity which allowed for the creation of reality outside of language.

Although obviously varied in their approach, Van Dijk (2007: xxii) notes that there were some key methodological similarities in the subjects and researchers who, maybe unknowingly were creating a new field. These include:

An interest in naturally occurring language

An interest in the study of language as interaction

A move above the sentence level

A focus on the social, cultural and cognitive role of language



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Both directly and indirectly, the emergence of DA can be said to have influenced the ‘linguistic turn’ that came about in subjects such as law, history, politics, media studies, literature and so-cial psychology.



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## 2 THE LINGUISTIC ELEMENT OF CDS: SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Because of the so-called linguistic turn in political and social sciences, it might seem that dis-course analysis is being done by almost every qualitative researcher. Herein lies one of the major criticisms made against the field: The simple case is that a large number of dis-course-analytical studies are not linguistic and are methodologically weak – they are therefore seen as not robust enough, and are open to criticisms of cherry-picking and ideological bias. I will cover these and more criticisms in a lot more detail during the workshop, but I do agree with this initial claim and I would only say here that ‘doing’ CDS well means ‘doing’ linguistics well.

Many, if not all of the key CDS theorists came from a background in linguistics. Here I would suggest that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is best suited to CDS research and has been the foundation for many of the main CDS approaches - Fairclough draws widely from Halliday’s SFL for his approach to discourse analysis and it is also the basis of van Leeuwen’s social-actors analysis approach (1996). In turn, these have informed the widely used Discourse Historical Approach of Reisigl and Wodak (2001), Krzyżanowski (2010), and Bennett (2018).

SFL is a theory of language production and use based on the idea that all texts and utterances are functional and thus meaningful. Language can be said to be functional in two ways:

1. “because it asks functional questions about language: systemicists ask how do people use language?”
2. because it interprets the linguistic system functionally: systemicists ask how is language structured for use?” (Eggins 2004, 2)

SFL regards language as a societal phenomenon (Halliday 1994) and investigates the relationship between systems of grammar and the social or personal needs that language serves every human. “[P]eople negotiate texts in order to make meanings with each other” (Eggins 2004, 3). These meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged:





We use language to interact with one another, to construct and maintain our inter-personal relations and the social order that lies behind them; and in doing so we interpret and represent the world for one another and for ourselves. Language is a natural part of the process of living; it is also used to 'store' the experience built up in the course of that process, both personal and collective. It is (among other things) a tool for representing knowledge or, to look at this in terms of language itself, for constructing meaning. (Mattiessen and Halliday 1997: iii)

To answer the two questions proposed above, we need to study “authentic, everyday social interaction” rather than a) specifically constructed texts, à la syntax, or b) literature and film.

The process of using language is a semiotic process, that is, a process of making meanings by choosing one lexical option over another (Halliday 1978). Identifying systems of lexical choice involves recognizing that words encode meaningful oppositions and the process of choosing a lexical item is a semiotic process that is ideological and contextual. When analysing discourse from the perspective of CDS, we need to look at language use attitudinally, i.e. the positive, negative or neutral appraisal of a lexical item, and oppositionally, i.e.: what choices could have been made AND what choices were made.

Halliday's SFL can be divided into four criteria: Context, semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology-graphology. Here we can see how it aligns well with analysis in CDS. Within CDS, we generally study the first three elements, and only rarely the fourth (although there may be times when, for example, intonation could be analysed. Context for Halliday included three phenomena. Genre – “describe[s] the impact of the context of culture on language, by exploring the staged, step-by-step structure [that] cultures institutionalize as ways of achieving goals” (Eggins 2005, 10). Register affects type of language used and can be broken down into mode (the type of text construction – written, oral etc.), tenor (the relationship between those involved in communication), and field (the subject of the text). Finally, context also includes ideology (the speaker's own perspectives, and values etc.). As Eggins notes, “to use language at all is to use it to encode particular positions and values” (Ibid.: 11)

When we look at the main tenets of SFL and compare these to CDS, we can clearly see how the former led to the latter - in particular the cross-overs regarding ideology and context. But





more than this though, it should also be clear that integrating SFL into CDS adds another level of robustness to analyses. It also sits well within CDS' call for the interdisciplinary use of grand, middle range, and linguistic theories when trying to sufficiently explain complex social phenomena.

Halliday's work on SFL is extremely complex and detailed, and I don't think that CDS researchers necessarily have to engage deeply with the theory. However, its main hypotheses should be taken into account, as should a focus on lexico-grammatical structures and strategies. As Halliday himself noted (1994, xvi):

[I]t is sometimes assumed that (discourse analysis, or 'text linguistics') can be carried out without grammar - or even that it is somehow an alternative to grammar. But, this is an illusion. A discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all, but simply a running commentary on a text (Halliday 1994, xvi).



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### 3 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

In preparation for the opening sessions of the workshop, it would be great if you could find time to think about your answers to the following questions.

How do you use (or plan to use) CDS approaches in your own work?

What challenges have you come up against (intellectually or institutionally)?

What doubts do you have about ‘doing’ CDS?

What do you feel your key knowledge gaps or weaknesses are?



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## 4 TRAINING TEXTS

By way of some very initial analytical practice, take some time before the workshop to read through these two case studies and use what you know – be it as discourse analysts, sociologists, political scientists, or instinctively as language learners and teachers who know how languages are constructed. I do not expect ‘gold-standard’ discourse analysis at this early stage, but try to get used to closely analysing texts.

You might want to look at:

- Lexical choice: Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives
- Intensification or mitigation strategies
- Modality
- Grammatical constructions (e.g. passive voice)
- Argumentation schemes
- Metaphors

### 4.1 Case study: Newspaper articles - Good and bad migrants

These are two excerpts from a local newspaper in the UK and are about two different non-nationals residing in the area. Read both excerpts closely and try and work out how each actor is being discursively constructed. Consider the characteristics they are reported as having and the actions they have taken. How do the two articles differ?

#### (1) **'Perfect citizen' faces being kicked out**

The Home Office faced mounting anger last night over plans to deport a "model immigrant". Mohammed Samad, 23, faces being sent back to the civil war-torn island of Sri Lanka after immigration officials detained him without warning on Tuesday morning.

The move has sparked fierce criticism from human rights experts, MPs and Mr Samad's supporters who have described him as a "perfect British citizen".





Mr Samad, of Hurstpierpoint, fled Sri Lanka after being badly beaten by Tamil Tiger rebels in 1999 and has raised his baby boy Oscar with wife Sarah, 21, and held down a long-term job as a groundsman at Hurstpierpoint College.

He has paid his taxes in full and become a hugely popular member of the community and a key player for Henfield Cricket Club. But he has failed to gain asy-lum status.

Mid Sussex district councillor Christopher Maidment said: "It is absolutely outrageous and goes against every single human rights law ever created." "How the Home Office can send this man, who has worked hard to support his family and pay his taxes since arriving here, back to Sri Lanka is beyond comprehension.

"If there was a mould of the model immigrant it would be made out of Mohammed Samad."

(Brighton Argus 11 April 2007)

(2) **Home Secretary will consider case of Hove killer driver**

Mid-Sussex MP Nicholas Soames said he is "outraged" that Delshad Aziz was jailed for just nine months and was not recommended for deportation. Anthony Edney, 44, died after he was knocked off his scooter by a borrowed van driven by Aziz in Hove in May last year.

Mr Edney was on his way home to Portslade when Aziz pulled across a busy junction on the Old Shoreham Road, Hove, without seeing him.

The Iraqi asylum seeker had no driving license or insured and had previously been banned from driving for having no insurance. Aziz was working illegally, living of benefits and had been jailed for 12 months for trying to enter Britain by deception in 2005.

Mr Soames promised to take up the case after Mr Edney's family were left stunned by the nine months prison sentence Aziz was given after admitting causing death by careless driving while uninsured.

Mr Soames said: "The full scale of what happened is simply outrageous. It was a catastrophe not only for the family but for British justice"

(Brighton Argus 21 April 2010)





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