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# Critical Discourse Analysis: Methods and Approaches

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# Today's session

- What is discourse?
- What is critical discourse analysis (CDA)?
- How can you apply CDA?
- What tools are there to help you?

# What is discourse?

1. A stretch of language longer than a single sentence or utterance.
2. A type of language used in a particular context.
3. The worldviews and ideologies implicit in language use as exemplified in (2) above.

# Different layers of discourse

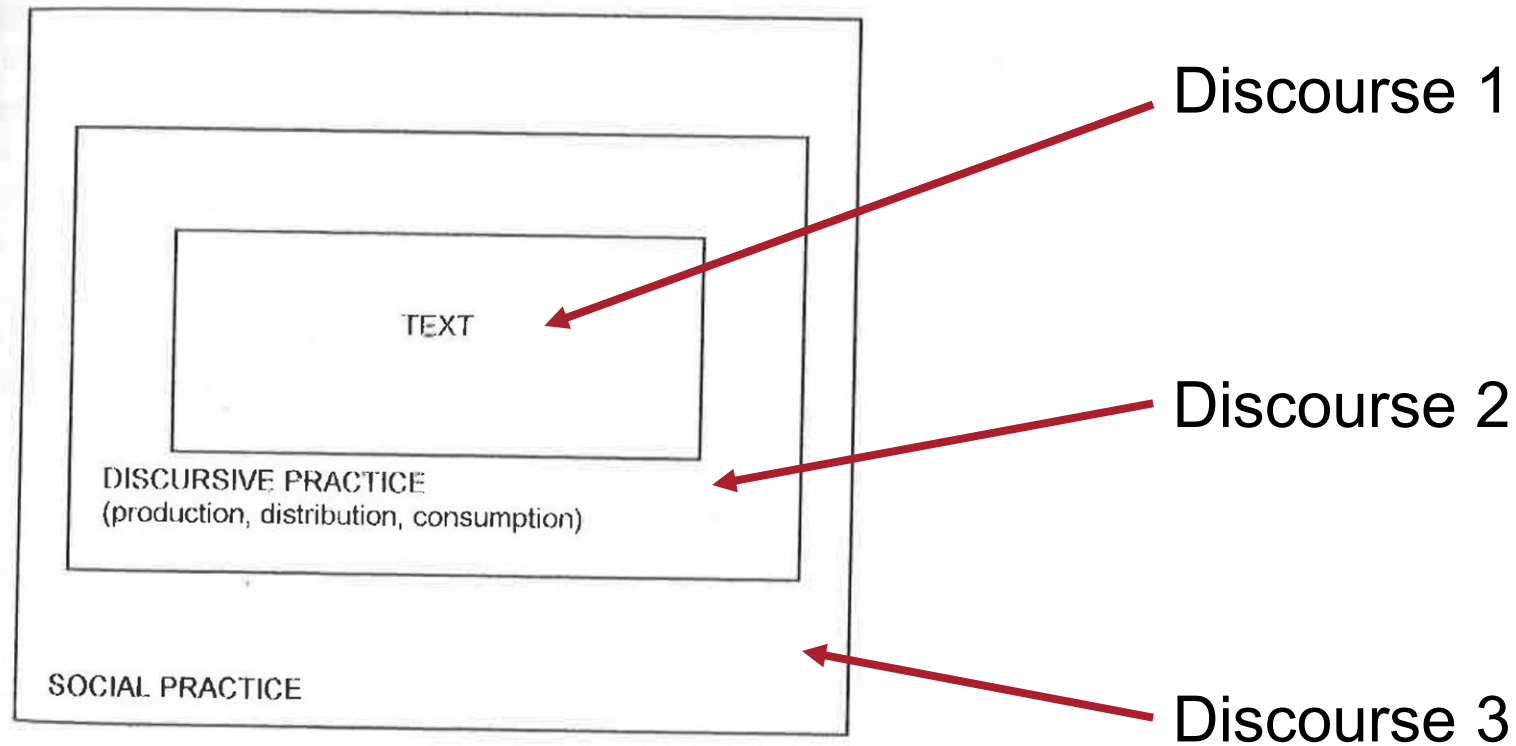


Figure 10.1 A three-dimensional model of discourse (from Fairclough 1992: 73)

# Example

Delivered in Cardiff  
on 6 May 2026

# Caerdydd Penarth ELECTION NEWS

Election update delivered by Green Party volunteers to local residents

## NECK AND NECK

*Just 3% between Greens and Reform*

### POLLING:

It's between Greens  
and Reform for  
the final seat  
in Caerdydd  
Penarth:

Find Out Now polling (Jan 2026) shows that the final  
seat is between Reform and Greens in Caerdydd Penarth.  
See page four for additional independent polls.



REFORM

GREEN



# What is critical discourse analysis?

- analysis of different ways of representing social realities, based on different communicative practices or activities (adapted from Swann et al 2004: 83-84)
- CDA “is a social scientific theory and method for analyzing and critiquing the use of language and its contribution to forming and sustaining social practices. Of prime concern to CDA is the way that the use of language can contribute to reproducing or transforming social problems” (Farrelly 2019: 2).
- CDA has 3 basic properties (Fairclough 2013: 3):
  - relational
  - dialectical
  - transdisciplinary

# What is CDA? And what isn't CDA?

- CDA uses close linguistic analysis to reveal and address underlying ideological discursive practices. It is “one social scientific route towards identifying and clarifying the causes of, and context for, social problems” (Farrelly 2019: 3).
  - it goes beyond the analysis of texts by looking at the social (and historical) context (see Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach)
1. not just analysis of discourse / texts
  2. not just general commentary on discourse
  3. not just descriptive (Fairclough 2013: 10–11)

# How to do CDA

## ▪ analysis of **texts**

- texts are the language produced as part of a social event; convey something about the people involved in their production but also beyond the identity of the text producer (Farrelly 2019: 5-8)
- central Q: What does a text represent and how does it represent it?
- investigate:
  - exclusion or inclusion
  - representation of social action / actors / of time & space
- focus on (Fairclough 2003, pp. 161, 162):
  - phonological features (the sounds or accent of a spoken text)
  - vocabulary and metaphor
  - commitments in modality and evaluation
  - pronouns (e.g. *we* versus *they* in political speeches)

# GREEN VS REFORM FOR FINAL SEAT

**“Let’s get Tessa over the line!” says Zack Polanski, Green Party Leader**



Green candidate Tessa Marshall says  
“the only way to stop Reform is to vote Green.”

Three major independent polls now agree that the race for the final seat in Caerdydd Penarth is a straight fight between the Greens and Reform.

With Labour fading, voters are being urged to vote tactically for local champion Tessa Marshall for the Greens to stop the Reform candidate - a former Tory MP in Kent.

Green Leader Zack Polanski has called on locals to “help get Tessa over the line” and keep Reform’s divisive politics out of Wales.

A lifelong Cardiff local, Tessa Marshall is campaigning to scrap unfair council tax, for a freeze on private rents and to fix the NHS. “Labour have blown it,” she said. “On 7th May, choose hope and vote Green to stop Reform.”

**INSIDE**

**IT’S GREEN VS REFORM IN CAERDYDD PENARTH**

# How to do CDA

- use ideologies as a reference point
- ideologies seen as a neutral system of thought (van Dijk 1998) or as systems of thought that exert social control (Fairclough 1989)
- **Ideology:** “The system of beliefs and assumptions that underlies every linguistic analysis and every social (and linguistic) event” (adapted from Stockwell 2007: 72).
- **Language ideology:** “A set of shared attitudes and beliefs about language, underpinned by certain social or cultural values. Language ideologies often serve to rationalise existing social structures, relationships and dominant linguistic habits” (Swann et al 2004: 171).

# Language ideology

What sort of language ideologies are out there?

- Language ideologies reinforcing the hegemonic patriarchy (related to speakers):
  - Speech associated with non-hegemonic sectors of society (anyone who isn't White, male, middle-class and heterosexual) is inferior/inappropriate in certain contexts.
- Language ideologies relating to language itself (often at the level of the polity):
  - Ideology of the standard (also reinforces the patriarchy).
  - Linguistic assimilationism (France)
  - Linguistic pluralism (India, South Africa)

# Example: Interview data from Andorra (Hawkey 2024)

- We're going to look at some (translated) interview data from fieldwork undertaken with members of the Portuguese migrant community (children of economic migrants) in Andorra.
- Now that I've given you some brief context, I want you to have a look at some of the following extracts and think about the following points:
  - What (language) ideologies are witnessed in the extracts?
  - What dialectical relations are foregrounded? Who (or what) is positioned in opposition to whom (or what)?
  - What transdisciplinary angles may provide useful insight into the understanding of the text?

# Example: Interview data from Andorra (Hawkey 2024)

- You say, "Wow! I'm worth something because I have five languages!" But when you're young and you're here, you don't think about it because it's normal to at least speak four. I've got Portuguese as a bonus, but everyone speaks the other four. [Miriam, 21 years old]
- Normally, everyone will serve you [in shops] in Spanish. I know the official language is Catalan, but Spanish really runs deep here. If you go to a really fancy boutique, they may possibly speak to you in Catalan. [Dani, 25 years old]
- There are some parents who speak Portuguese at home with their children, who teach them how to cook the traditional dishes, teach them the culture. And those kids are going to be more likely to be involved in doing things like folk dancing, and traditional things like that. Because when you learn "they used to eat this, they used to do this, they used to dance like this", I feel like I'm honouring my grand-parents. Whereas there are other families who don't speak Portuguese at home, who don't know anything about the food or the customs. They don't want to go back to the towns where they're from and don't pass on the culture" [Catarina, 22 years old]

# Example: German norms prescriptions by 18<sup>th</sup>-century grammarians (Havinga 2018)

Background: connection between language and the ability to think and progress in the Enlightenment; translated passages from grammarians:

- The certainty of language is the characteristic of a wise people. [...] A proper instrument, yes an inexhaustible benefit to all good businesses, arts and sciences; and the uncertainty of it is the opposite. (Antesperg 1747: preamble §. XI)
- Thus [through grammars] the pure German way of writing, poetry and eloquence will soon [...] reach a manly age in Austria. Thus, we will [...] in our own language become wise, swift, modest, and adepts and enthusiasts for good arts and sciences like other civilized people [...]. (Antesperg 1747: preamble §. XXVIII)
- The more proper, and so the more words a language has, the more complete and better the people by whom it is spoken can think. Consequently, a great many people should correct the mistakes of their language [...] and work hard on keeping it correct. It is a sign that nescience, incorrect thoughts and small minds are in a country, where the previous sentence is not obeyed. (Gerlach 1758: 2f.)

# Tools to help with CDA

- tools for qualitative data annotation & analysis, e.g. [NVivo](#), [MAXQDA](#), [AtlasTI](#)
- corpus linguistic tools, e.g. [AntConc](#), [Sketch Engine](#)
- Further reading (in addition to references):
  - Barlett, T. (2014). *Analysing power in language: a practical guide*. London & New York: Routledge.
  - Machin, D. & A. Mayr (2023). *How to do critical discourse analysis: a multimodal introduction*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
  - Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (eds.) (2015). *Methods of critical discourse studies*. London: SAGE.

# Any questions?



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- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London & New York: Routledge.
- Farrelly, M. (2019). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Havinga, A. (2018). *Invisibilising Austrian German: On the Effect of Linguistic Prescriptions and Educational Reforms on Writing Practices in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Austria*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Hawkey, J. (2024) La política lingüística i les experiències d'integració de les persones amb orígens migratoris: el cas de la comunitat portuguesa a Andorra. *Revista de Llengüa i Dret* 81: 51-68.
- Stockwell, P. (2007). *Sociolinguistics: A resource book for students – second edition*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Swann, J. et al (2004). *A dictionary of sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh: EUP.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1999). 'Critical Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis'. *Discourse & Society* 10.4: 459–460.