**Review**

# Power and Ideology in Everyday Discourse: The Relevance of Critical Discourse Analysis in Pragmatic Linguistics Today

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on what is arguably one of the most compelling and contentious issues in pragmatics today. It explores the relationship between language and concepts of ideology and power in the linguistic practices of contemporary society through a critique of a critical discourse analysis （CDA） approach to linguistic enquiry, as evidenced in a study and brief review of one of its major practitioners, Norman Fairclough. Essential differences with other mainstream linguistic approaches are emphasized in exploring and explaining the social basis of the ideological and power dimensions that underpin discourse in society. It is maintained that the development of a critical linguistic awareness, which informs a capacity to resist and change exploitative and dominating linguistic practices, is an issue which should be of importance to everyone with a concern and interest in the problems of our contemporary society.

**Key words**: power, ideology, critical linguistic analysis, social theory

## 1.　Introduction

Norman Fairclough's *Language and Power*[4] was one of the first seminal texts to focus on one of the most compelling issues in contemporary pragmatics today—that is, the exploration of the relationship between language, power and ideology. Fairclough's aim is the raising of critical consciousness concerning the ideological assumptions embedded in language use in contemporary society, largely through an explanation of existing social conventions which are seen as outcomes of struggles for power.

Evidence is offered, by Fairclough, of a deeper level of pragmatic thinking, which goes beyond the usual interpretive stage of ethno-methodology or descriptive socio-linguistic conventions. He is particularly invigorating in the way he offers credible understandings of the interrelationship of language and social practices.

Fairclough persuasively argues that linguistic texts and socio-linguistic conventions incorporate power differentials, that they arise out of, are the outcome of and also themselves give rise to power relations and struggles. They are embedded, Fairclough convinces us, in the common-sense assumptions which treat hierarchical social relationships of authority, control and manipulation as somehow the 'natural' state of affairs.

These 'common-sense' assumptions, Fairclough rigorously argues, are the ideologies that are imbedded in language, our commonest form of social behavior. And in their recurrent, everyday, familiar, taken-for granted, discoursal nature they legitimize the existing different social relations with their power differentials. In making the distinction between "the exercise of power through coercion and that through the manufacture of consent and acquiescence" (4)[4], Fairclough recognizes that power is not just a matter of language—it is ideology that is the main way consent and acquiescence is manufactured. When Fairclough first published this text which recognized that ideol-

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ogy was "pervasively present in language and should be one of the main themes of modern social science" (3)[4] he not only offered a new linguistic perspective, he also raised a crucially serious social issue. Up to this time, it seems to me, critical, analytical studies of the ideological dimension of language in society were quite limited, and it is Fairclough's pioneering achievement, as exemplified by this study, that questions of power and ideology in language have been, for some years now, among the primary agenda items in pragmatic linguistic studies.

But Fairclough is not just addressing his concerns to other linguists and social theorists. Questions of language, power and ideology are of importance to everyone, he states, with an interest in the problems of current society. And it is in this wider, educational dimension, I believe, where Fairclough's engagements can have the most impact.

Up to now, it cannot be denied that the teaching of language awareness in the majority of educational institutions has been woefully inadequate. Fairclough sees his primary aim and educational objective, therefore, as the raising of educational awareness in educational settings of how language contributes to the exploitation and domination of some people through commonsense assumptions ideologically shaped by power relations. Despite the negative picture of the inequalities in society that Fairclough identifies, it is the nature of his optimism, his conviction that critical language awareness *can* make a difference and his implicit belief in the capacity of people to resist and change existing social situations that makes him such an intellectually exciting linguist and impressive educator. The fundamental step in this transformatory process is the development of a critical linguistic consciousness.

This paper now briefly (i) looks at the differences between critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) and other mainstream linguistic approaches; (ii) describes the centrality of CDA in modern pragmatic linguistic enquiry; (iii) examines the collaborative style of Fairclough's writing; (iv) considers Fairclough's interpretation of the concepts of inequality, domination and emancipation in society; (v) stresses the importance of a practical application of CDA; and (vi) acknowledges some perceived omissions. It concludes with a summary of the personal appeal CDA has for this reader.

## 2.　Differences with Other Linguistic Approaches

At the center of Fairclough's discussion he convincingly distinguishes between a critical language focus and other mainstream approaches and orientations in current linguistic studies.

For Fairclough, and for this reader too, present focuses in linguistic study do not go far enough in exploring "the rich and complex interrelationships of language and power" (2). Fairclough elucidates the tensions between a critical language analysis (hereafter CLA) perspective and other language approaches, through a "critique of the premises and constructs underlying mainstream studies" (vii). Although there are complex and subtle differences between each of the various linguistic orientations described below, Fairclough shows that all of them, from a CLA perspective, share significant limitations, in that they merely *describe*, but do not *explain*, unequal socio-linguistic conventions relating to concerns of power. They are all, in various ways, he believes, found wanting.

First, Fairclough's main complaint with *linguistics* 'proper' (i.e. traditionally studies in grammar, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics) is the narrowness of its conception of language, which, he believes, is limiting because it isolates language from the dynamic, changing, social context in which it is produced (6)[4]. Fairclough criticizes the "idealized, utopian image and prototype social interaction" of the well-known, central pragmatic concept of the 'cooperative principle'[9] on the grounds that it assumes equal control and opportunity for all discourse participants. This, in Fairclough's judgment, contradicts social reality by ignoring the limited and socially-constrained nature for some participants in much of today's social interaction, especially of

the "socio-linguistic order molded in social struggles and riven with inequalities of power" (10)[4].

*Pragmatics*, too, is hampered by its concentration on limited discourse exchanges, particularly its tendency to concentrate on the analysis of single types of utterance. Granted that pragmatics recognizes the interrelationship of language and social context, but it still plays a relatively limited role in language study, and many linguists of the Anglo-American 'school' see it as an additional layer to the study of linguistics 'proper', filling in 'gaps', as it were, left by the more core levels of research in grammar and syntax.

*Cognitive Psychology* and studies of Artificial Intelligence (AI) from computer simulations also come in for criticism from Fairclough. It is acknowledged that these studies have reinforced the construct of comprehension, as the result of interaction between the discourse text and the active, mental processes of matching this with member's resources (MRs)—i.e. the interpreters' mental schemata, resources, linguistic and 'world' knowledge. However, in their interpretation of how people pragmatically work out what is *meant* from what is *said*, Fairclough considers that not enough attention has been paid to the social determinants of the MRs. The commonsense, routine, unselfconscious character and nature of MRs disguises their ideological nature and social origins, Fairclough reasons, and how they potently sustain underlying relations of power and ideology in the comprehension and interpretation of discourse.

*Conversation Analysis*, a prominent approach in the field of *Discourse Analysis*, Fairclough considers, is similarly limited in the scope of its enquiries. Although it interprets conversation as the skilled accomplishment of social actors, when examining the systematic structure of conversation participation (e.g. the actors' control of turntaking, reactions, repair, etc.) it makes too little of the connection between the micro-structures of conversation and the macro-structures of the social institutions in society. For Fairclough, conversation analysis gives him the impression of "a skilled social practice existing in a social vacuum (12)[4]. From the participant's perspective, like pragmatics it also gives the impression of a conversation between equals, and it resists acknowledging the influence of wider social structures. And, in a similar way to sociolinguistics, it only answers descriptive 'what'-type questions, while ignoring socially determined explanations of 'why' and 'how'.

Fairclough acknowledges the influence of a number of significant *social theorists* who have put language at the center of their social criticism, seeing it as the primary medium of social control and power. This corresponds with Fairclough's insights, and Foucault[6] and Habermas[7], in particular, are singled out for "exploring the role of language in the exercise, maintenance and change of power and the central role assigned to discourse in the development of modern forms of power" (12)[4]. Fairclough draws on these social theorists to examine change in contemporary discourse, and relates it to large-scale tendencies in present-day, capitalist society. But these theorists also come in for criticism. Despite their perceived relevance, influence and accurate theoretical reading of social realities it is, ironically, the theoretical nature of their enquiries and their lack of linguistic engagement and analysis that, Fairclough believes, has limited their impact on practical linguistic research.

## 3.　Critical Language Study

The strength and validity of a critical language approach as proposed by Fairclough is a result of the way it is able to unite complex, wide-ranging, interpretative social theories and insights with a critical linguistic analysis of specific discoursal exchanges. It thus goes beyond the approaches referred to in the previous section; it is not a complement to them, nor another branch or sub-division of linguistics, but, in its own right, an alternative orientation to language study—and such a critical approach to language study must be central to, not additional to, linguistic or social theory studies. Favoring 'Hallidayan' systematic-functional grammatical principles (rather than a trans-

formative, formalist 'Chomskyan' approach） Fairclough argues persuasively for the centrality of CLA or CDA as the core of a social analysis of language. Although he claims not to be offering an alternative to mainstream linguistics, Fairclough's work does, in fact, complement certain current proposals in systematic linguistics, also cross-disciplinary trends in discourse analysis, as well as insights from continental pragmatics, all of which offer alternative approaches to mainstream Anglo-American linguistics.

## 4.　Style

Fairclough states that the assumed readers for his text are students and teachers in higher education and "others in a position to act as educators in a broad sense" (4)[4]. Consequently, in writing for those who may not be linguistic specialists, Fairclough has made a commendable effort to make the text accessible and reader-friendly. Treating his readers as intelligent partners, he is neither simplistic nor condescending the points he makes are coherent and well substantiated. Throughout his sustained argument he convinces the reader that he not only knows, but *cares* about his topic, and I think that this engaging stylistic trait is one reason Fairclough has found so many admirers. When using first person singular and plural, 'I' and 'we', rather than the more traditional impersonal, academic, third-person style, his purpose seems not to be manipulative; he is not trying to claim a spurious reader solidarity in an attempt to convince and persuade, but, rather, to stress the collaborative nature of the undertaking, treating the reader as partner. In engaging us directly in this way, I think he succeeds, and the result is both instructive and stimulating.

## 5.　Inequalities, Domination and Emancipation

Fairclough openly and unequivocally acknowledges his own political position and social values. For him, an awareness of *unequal* relations of power in society involving hierarchical dimensions of *domination* and subordination, and a consciousness of "how language contributes to the domination of some people by others is the first step towards *emancipation*" (1)[4]. Fairclough is committed to the "emancipation of the oppressed" (5)[4], of the underprivileged, and of unequal and dominated groups and individuals in our society. In considering how CLA/CDA can contribute to struggles for social emancipation Fairclough convinces us that critical linguistic efforts should concentrate on those areas, discourses and texts where participants are most at social risk. Thus, not all areas of linguistic research, in his view, have equal social significance. The sites of inequality and domination are those that affect socially vulnerable lives, where opportunities and potentialities—in terms of class, race, gender, inequality, and injustice socially, mentally and physically challenged groupings, for example—are jeopardized. All these sites or areas have, as Candlin too recognizes, the "greatest meaning potential" (quoted ix)[4].

## 6.　Practical Application

Fairclough stresses the importance of being actually involved in doing critical language analysis, rather than just reading about it, and his invitation to readers to comment on the textual examples he provides throughout the book reflect the practical, involved, hands-on approach of CLA. The inclusion in the text of practical examples for readers to work through makes his thesis and argument easier to comprehend and accept. His own explanations and interpretations of these act as a further stimulus for thought. It is important to acknowledge that there are no definitive, uncontestable 'right answers' in interpretation—different readers will have different opinions, depending, as Fairclough states, on the MRs they bring to the interpretive task.

By making explicit what is implicit, Fairclough's text can be regarded as a careful, practical guide on how to analyze social interaction, exploring linguistic texts based on critical language principles, which reveals the hidden connections between language, power and ideology.

In his book Fairclough provides an exemplary, explanatory model of linguistic features in critical analysis. At no time does he claim that his approach is a full-fledged linguistic theory, but it is important to note that in undertaking CLA, he nevertheless presents and recommends a logical, systematic, analytic procedure and methodology, focusing on different stages—describing, producing, interpreting and（most significantly）explaining linguistic, social determinants and effects.

It can be fairly said that Fairclough in this approach is engaging in deconstruction—but it is not a negative, intellectually vandalizing, subversive, demolition job. CLA implies and involves building and architecture—Fairclough erects a framework or edifice, which, in its explanatory function, coherently conflates and connects the macro-social interpretation with the micro-linguistic analysis, offering a synthesis of social theoretical concepts within a critical-discourse, analytical framework. It is this elision of two levels of interpretation which crucially distinguishes a CLA/CDA approach to language study, and which, for me, offers its most significant, socially just, potential achievement.

## 7.　Omissions

At several points in this study Fairclough refers to prominent social theorists, such as Bourdieu[11], Foucault[7], Habermas[10] and Bakhtin[1]. But the references are insufficiently detailed; Fairclough has too little to say about the significance of their macro-social insights, or how their observations might link with the type of micro-critical analysis that he advocates. Little attention is paid to how their sometimes ambiguous and often contradictory social criticisms are distinguished from each other. Other important theorists who have pertinent insights into the interrelationship of discourse and language are completely ignored—critics such as the self-proclaimed 'intellectual terrorist' Baudrillard[12] with his pertinent analyses of media, information, and the semiotic aspects of commodities and consumption, or Lyotard[2] whose disparate reflections on the paradoxes of discourse, problems of injustice, decision-making, and social judgments and legitimation might justifiably have expected inclusion. I am puzzled by these omissions, and by Fairclough's failure to engage with the overlaps, connections, contrasts, diversifications, similarities and differences of the master ideas of the social theorists he does refer to. By failing to do so he weakens his case, I believe, in illuminating contemporary socio-linguistic argument. It is a bit over-simplistic and stretches credence to ask the reader to accept the complex beliefs of such writers when these are reduced to sound bites of a couple of lines each. This absence of providing corroborating, persuasive examples in the work of the social theorists with whom he clearly feels a strong affinity strikes me as the one serious omission in *this* study. Fairclough, I am happy to report, remedies this in a later book[5].

## 8.　Conclusion

Fairclough's work, in its attention to language as social practice dealing with the social conditions of discourse production and its hidden power, ideology and domination dimensions, was a forerunner of a now-prevalent linguistic emphasis. It has today clearly found its audience and has changed the nature of important aspects of pragmatic enquiry. While Fairclough energized a new approach to the study of pragmatics it would be naive to expect CLA, in itself, to begin to restore social inequalities or injustices. However, a widespread understanding of critical language analysis and the power dimensions hidden in language can be an important first step in contributing to a more informed, critical awareness of the realities of the social order, contributing to opening opportunities to dominated groups and individuals in our society in accessing and participating more fully in various, decision-making power forums. As Fairclough says, the first step in such social emancipation is the awareness gained through an analysis of discourse in contemporary society. Candlin's wise words in the preface to this text, which perceives ''a reconciliation of the psychological and social with the textual, which radically alters the map of conventional linguistic study''

（viii)[4] recognizes, pays tribute to and acknowledges the significance of Fairclough's contribution to this debate and the importance of his central concerns.

The interpretive and social explanatory emphasis of CLA, which Fairclough espoused, is now of primary concern in pragmatic linguistic enquiry. But, from a personal perspective what I personally like about his work is not just the effective sustained manner in which the writer argues his case （even though, at times, he does get a *little* repetitive), but also the intellectually affective way in which he involves his readers. In confronting matters of grave, social concern, Fairclough has the ability to make us feel like caring participants in his endeavor. This is far preferable, in my view, to being disinterested readers of some linguistic text, bereft of any robust personal opinion or commitment. Despite this, Fairclough never seems polemic or disputatious in tone—although his views must seem challenging and provocative to those readers satisfied with the acceptance of the status quo. Fairclough manages to make an armchair, would-be radical like myself, with little overt, activist social participation since student days, feel like he wants to be a fellow-traveler in acts of social defiance and liberation. I cannot help but admire someone who has contributed to our sociolinguistic understanding, in the way Fairclough has, who has objected to the way things are in aspects of our class-divided, power-ridden, consumer-addicted, corrupt, self-serving society, who has refused to compromise on fundamental social injustices, and a scholar who in his long-term commitment to social justice, has refused to safely, timidly and apologetically shuffle through a disputative, confrontative and contentious academic life.

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