

Book Review

Language and Globalization

By Fairclough, Norman

London: Routledge, 2006.

Critical Discourse Analysis

By Rahimi, Ali and Sahragard, Rahman

Tehran: Jungle Publications, 2006.

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Just when we thought that Critical Discourse Analysis had run its course and consigned itself to academic isolation, two new books have arrived on the scene that show renewed vitality for the approach. Although both aspire to address current issues, their approaches are quite distinct.

The term “Discourse Analysis” was first used in 1952 by the linguist Zellig Harris and subsequently developed into a viable sub-discipline. It has spawned many important developments in linguistics and sociolinguistics, not the least of which is corpus linguistics. Discourse Analysis was used in many fields with the goal of studying how language behaves naturally in context.

Simultaneously, many fields in the social sciences and humanities were rocked by the social turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. Such thinkers as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida in France, Germany’s Frankfurt School and the numerous post-colonial scholars in newly freed colonies around the world assumed the goal of revealing the covert patterns of domination in society. The term “critical,” first used by Max Horkheimer in 1937, became widely adopted as a mantle for this new movement in academia. The volume of literature was vast, ranging from the highly abstract to the popular. I still recall with exhilaration one of the more popular examples, the slim volume by Mattelart and Dorfman called **How to Read Donald Duck** (1971).

Enter the eminent British linguist Norman Fairclough. In 1989, he broke new ground with his **Language and Power**, in which he affixed the designation “critical” to “discourse analysis.” He found that there was insufficient awareness of social context and social constructions of power in the standard approaches of discourse analysis, and an equivalent inadequacy among critical theorists to use the methodologies of linguistics. Thus was born Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA), the contribution by linguists to movements for social justice.

Fairclough’s contributions to CDA (1989, 1992, 2003) have been immense. As one of the founders of the field, he has inspired many scholars and had a hand in some of its greatest accomplishments.

Some of the key concepts that he and others would use in CDA were based on a few key assumptions. Primary among these is that social networks are both products of genres of discourse and active shapers of that discourse. The notion of “genre” in this case also includes forms of mediation (ranging from television to websites) as well as communicative frames. To reveal these social networks, CDA analyses examples of discourses, called “texts,” and situates them within “genres.”

The book currently under review shows that Prof. Fairclough, although retired, continues to enrich the field in new ways. With his latest, he tackles the enormously complicated and contentious subject of globalization. (Throughout the book, this British academic consistently uses the American spelling “globalization.”) While I applaud the effort and largely agree with his perspective, I must say that this contribution is not especially successful.

The book begins with Fairclough restating some of the key premises of CDA and stating how he will apply these assumptions in the analysis of texts of globalization. He makes an important distinction, based on the work of Manfred Steger, between “globalization” (defined as an inevitable historical process) and “globalism” (defined as an economic program of neo-liberalism, thus a restrictive approach to political economy). The ways in which the ideology of globalism, an injurious form of domination, is promoted and imposed is the subject of concern to Fairclough. He states:

“Globalism represents the highly complex phenomenon of globalization reductively as purely economic, as a particular form of capitalism and a particular view of what capitalism should — must — be like.” (2006, p. 9)

The harm caused by globalism can be revealed through the application of his next assumption. While genres of discourse may certainly affect social processes, the direction of influence is not equal. Therefore, an analysis of discourse must also examine what aspects of social life are omitted, or ways in which a given text may be lacking in explanatory accuracy. In other words, what is left out of a text can be just as revealing as what is included. For example, when neo-liberal discourses omit social or cultural implications, the patterns of control can be seen in these omissions.

He then goes on to elucidate three levels of social embedding of texts: social events, social practices and social structures. While all texts exist at the level of practices, they are embedded at these different levels.

The approach in the book is to take a stance in the globalization process and analyze examples of texts arising from that stance’s discourse around globalization. He identifies five such stances: Academia, governments and government agencies, non-government agencies and actors, the media, and the public at large. Each of these stances forms a chapter, with several cases mentioned for each one.

For his review of academic writings on globalization, he relies heavily on Steger’s position that globalism has become a coherent and internally consistent ideology. To make the case, he uses Steger’s “essential claims” in an analysis of a speech by Stuart Eizenstat, a former Under-Secretary of State under American President Bill Clinton. He then applies the same analytical frame to publications by anti-globalization groups (in this case, Christian Aid and Greenpeace) to find the same assumptions.

Herein lies the first of my concerns. One of the hallmarks of academic argumentation is that the side being criticized has to be able to recognize themselves in their portrayal. I strongly doubt that Mr. Eizenstat would see

his remarks as conforming to the analysis of either Steger or Fairclough. This to me veers too closely to polemics in the guise of analysis.

The second of my concerns is in the choice of text. To select texts without an articulated methodology of selection is vulnerable to a criticism of unfair bias. Why this speech as opposed to many other possibilities? If this is the “academic” stance, where are some of the many other techniques we are familiar with, such as the use of keyword analysis of publications in academic journals?

In the next chapter, the focus is on the nation-state, as seen in the case of Romania’s assimilation into the European Union. It should already be abundantly familiar to Fairclough’s readers that the two most powerful institutions of globalization (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) have been widely criticized for applying conditions and rules to emerging economies that have proved to be seriously inappropriate. In this chapter, Fairclough uses a reading of several documents to lay out his analysis of the same charges. He is somewhat successful in making the case that EU goals of Romania’s “transition” are based on inappropriate uses of “scales.” Scales, he says, are social constructions related to contests and negotiations over power. The results of inappropriate “re-scaling” efforts mean that the small-scale phenomenon of “poverty” becomes a larger scale issue of social exclusion of large numbers of Romania’s economic actors. While the EU’s goals may be laudable, as in the reform of Romania’s system of higher education, Fairclough successfully reveals that the documents cited contain certain contestable assumptions. In particular, he argues that the definition of “competitiveness” carries with it several assumptions which he aligns with the “neo-liberal” economic agenda. While he makes a persuasive case of this, it is not clear how this analysis, and by extension the entire chapter, constitutes CDA as opposed to simply providing Fairclough with a forum for voicing his opinions.

Chapter Five concerns itself with mass mediation. He is most concerned here with the ways in which the communication industry represents the plight of “distant others” in a way that uncouples human suffering from space and time. Here, he looks at the use of the terror attacks

of 9/11 by the mass media, especially the American-based news agencies, to justify American global interventions. He argues that information industry we call “news” makes important distinctions in the location of human tragedies. Some examples of human suffering can be rendered as entirely local, while others, most importantly the 9/11 attacks, can be framed as a global story, of vital interest to the world. The ways in which the mass media made 9/11 a “global story” are examples of discourse in the service of global domination.

Chapter 6 concerns the ways that globalization have altered the ways that the citizenry see their place in the world. Of most interest to readers in Thailand is the extensive attention Fairclough pays to the coal-fired power plant at Map Ta Phut (in Thai, มหาบตาพุท) in Rayong. The tale told here is the opposition “from below” to the construction of the plant. The discourses of globalization were appropriated by local people (in this case, the Thai chapter of Greenpeace and their local supporters) to attempt to block the incinerator due to its contribution to global warming. This is an example, he says, of “Globalization From Below,” a phenomenon that includes Britain’s Labour Party’s opposition to the policies of Margaret Thatcher.

The book went to press too soon to report that Greenpeace was successful in persuading EGAT to insist that the plant shift from coal to natural gas. This resulted in several delays; as of this writing, I am unable to determine if the plant finally went online.

In summary, **Language and Globalization** seems to be lacking in the rigor he promised in the beginning. The linguistic methodologies he promised that would enrich the social science analyses that preceded him are not much in evidence. This is not the contribution we might have expected from as illustrious a scholar as Norman Fairclough. Its greatest weakness is that there is no clearly stated methodology for the selection of texts. This makes the entire argument vulnerable to the charge of being a polemic and not a sustained critical analysis. The analyses used are mainly examinations of rhetoric and rhetorical devices, not the systematic linguistic analyses that were promised. Nor is it clear how Fairclough is doing anything other than voicing an opinion prompted by narrowly selected texts.

While preparing this review, I came across another book that provides an extremely illuminating contrast. Ali Rahimi of Kushan University and Rahman Sahragard of Shiraz University (both in Iran) have produced a book called **Critical Discourse Analysis** that is intended to be a textbook for graduate students in English. It is intended to provide students with a methods manual in conducting CDA and by doing so, to foster in their students an increased level of critical thinking. Towards that goal, they have incorporated a model developed by Teun van Dijk (www.discourses.org and van Dijk 2004) and applied it to texts widely available in their native Iran.

The centerpiece of the book is an expansion of a previously published article (Rahimi and Sahragard 2006) on responses to the death of Pope John Paul II. Their source materials were a series of emails posted to English-language chatrooms in Iran. In this expansion, the topics were broadened to include letters in English on current events concerning Iran's position in the world, selected texts from a radio program entitled "Analysis of Foreign Radio" and a review of a popular Iranian movie. Even with this broadening, the limited range of source materials actually provides the study with its analytical and pedagogical strength.

The analysis is similarly circumscribed; they limit the discussion to two discourse strategies, derogation and euphemisation. They select key phrases in the emails, identify these phrases as being examples of either derogation or euphemisation, then suggest both the effects of this strategy and a suggestion of possible ideological goals. This is followed by a discussion of the ideological implications of these discourse strategies.

This chapter in the book does exactly what Fairclough had promised in his book but largely failed to deliver. Here we find a linguistically-informed approach to social practices, and presented in a way that encourages critical thinking rather than agreement. However, the book is certainly not without its flaws.

The greatest weakness is in its literature review in the beginning. One would expect that a literature review in a textbook for students would take either an historical perspective or the “family tree” approach, where schools of thought would be systematically laid out to demonstrate their origins, inter-relationships and influences. One would also hope that, in a book written for Farsi-speaking graduate students, the writing style would make it easier to explain the ideologies involved. Rather, this literature review seems to be an uncritical compendium of name-dropping. There is a “flat-earth” quality to an essay that puts Althusser and Barthes at the same level as Chomsky in a discussion of ideology (p. 13). The writing style, too, seems to mimic the opaque style of many of their intellectual progenitors. For example, how would a student in Shiraz respond to the following?

“A comparison of the available theoretical and practical approaches to ideology tends to indicate a prevalent disposition towards ideology with a more political sense of ideology which also reflects the conscious nature of language use in society rather than with the general sense of worldview, especially with an unconscious significance which renders all language users innocent of any charge of language abuse and which, therefore, devoids ideology of its critical edge.” (p. 19)

This, mind you, is a single sentence!

It is not until we reach Chapter Four, where the authors provide an overview of the framework that they use, that the book emerges as a useful textbook. They use the framework of van Dijk and provide an exposition that is clear both in its descriptions and in its graphical layout.

In summary, Rahimi and Sahragard have produced a first draft of a book that has great potential as a teaching tool. The application of CDA to the texts they used is done in a way that makes the methodology clear and, it is hoped, employable in a variety of contexts. However, this book is still a first draft; the literature review that begins the book needs a significant amount of revision. As it stands, students would be better served by Wikipedia as their introduction to the literature.

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