Teaching 'with an attitude': Critical Discourse Analysis in EFL teaching

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Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sees discourse as a form of 'social practice', in which language use is seen at the same time as socially influenced and influential. Another characteristic of CDA is that it is engaged and committed; it intervenes in social practice and attempts to reveal connections between language use, power, and ideology. The critical approach to language study is consistent with a view of education which prioritizes the development of the learners' capacities to examine and judge the world carefully and, if necessary, to change it. Nevertheless, these views of language and education respectively are all too often absent from foreign language programmes. The main principles and notions of CDA are introduced in this article, and specific proposals are made for incorporating them into a foreign language programme.

Introduction

The expression in the title 'with an attitude' has been borrowed from van Dijk (2001) and Pennycook (2001), a linguist and an applied linguist respectively, who define their work as 'critical', to suggest that the introduction of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in language classes does not necessarily involve a change in teaching method or techniques. Rather, CDA offers a new perspective on language, which considers that language use (a) is questionable and problematic (b) reflects social/ideological processes and (c) constitutes, at the same time, a resource to act upon those processes.

This article aims at demonstrating in a very practical way how CDA can be implemented in foreign language teaching. The activities presented reflect the particular position of the author, teaching in an EFL teacher training degree programme in Spain that must take into account the students' need to develop simultaneously three types of competence: user, analyst, and teacher (Wright and Bolitho 1993). The first activity, *An unusual community*, requires a low level of English proficiency and is intended as an example of how to adapt existing materials to promote the critical literacy of the learners. The second activity, *Easy reading*, demands a higher level of language proficiency and it attempts to integrate the students' experience as readers of literature with their future professional dedication as EFL teachers. The article concludes with a set of questions that is intended as an analytical framework for teachers to refer to when designing and adapting teaching activities from the perspective of CDA. The ultimate goal of the

article is to show that the choices teachers or materials developers make in selecting or adapting texts to represent language use can be critically analysed, and that this analysis can be made in the classroom together with the pupils, while developing their procedural skills. By doing this, the EFL teacher's task can go beyond linguistic training and become a really educational undertaking, with the aim of helping the pupils develop their internal values and capacity to criticize the world.

Working the text: *An unusual community*

In this section I will briefly present a teaching activity from Oxenden et al. (1997: 30), a pre-intermediate EFL adult course, in order to point out some of the criticisms that could be made on it from the perspective of CDA. This activity will be taken up later in the article to exemplify complementary activities more in the line of CDA.

An unusual community

The Amish live in Pennsylvania, USA. They came from Switzerland and Germany in the eighteenth century and live together on farms. Although they live just 240 kilometres from New York City, their lifestyle hasn't really changed in the last 250 years. They've turned their backs on modern materialism: cars, high technology, videos, fax machines, etc. and they have very strict rules which they all have to follow.

They can't use electricity, so they have to use oil lamps to light their houses. They are allowed to use banks and go to the doctor's but they can't have phones in their houses. They use horses for transport because they aren't allowed to fly or drive cars or tractors. They can play baseball and eat hot dogs but they can't have TVs, radios, carpets, flowers, or photos in their houses. Although the Amish don't have churches they are very religious.

The extract forms part of a lesson with the aim of developing the learners' reading comprehension skills and their competence in the areas of (i) grammar ('can'/'can't' to express permission; impersonal 'you'; revision of 'have to'), (ii) vocabulary (describing appearance, for example, 'short hair', clothes; revision of colours and clothes), and (iii) pronunciation and intonation ('can'/'can't': weak/strong forms, sentence stress). The activities suggested require the students to (a) answer a series of pre-reading questions based on an accompanying photograph from the film *Witness* portraying an Amish family (for example, 'Where are they?' 'Do you know anything about the Amish?' 'Have you seen the film *Witness*?', and (b) read the text in order to 'find out three things about the Amish' and, in pairs, to 'complete a chart with what the Amish *can* do and what they *can't* do'.

From the point of view of CDA, both the text and the pedagogic work that is based on it produce an incomplete representation of language use. In the first place, the text has been neither selected nor used paying attention to the social practice it represents. The point here would be to make students 'interpret' the text (rather than simply read it for literal meaning) in terms of representations of social structure and ideological presuppositions that the author makes, and the ideological effects these representations may have on the audience. Furthermore, the work proposed for the text does

not take into account aspects related to the production and consumption of the text such as authorship, purpose, intended audience, print source, and connections with other texts. Finally, it could be argued that, in spite of their structural focus, the activities accompanying the text fail to show how the linguistic structures used in the construction of the text contribute to a global meaning representing a particular ideological position.

'Critical' goals in foreign language education

Following Fairclough (1992a: 39–41), we could say that language education tends to be dominated by a competence-based model in which knowledge is equated to training and it is defined as the capacity to do things in the most efficient and appropriate way. This way of doing things is usually the result of a successful application of the norm. Thus, the norm is not presented as an arbitrary imposition but as a democratic choice of the individual between efficiency and inefficiency, appropriateness and inappropriateness. The model is also individualizing in the sense that it presents language learning and use as an individual enterprise, in which learners, depending on their personal goals, are conceived of as specific configurations of competences and skills which they must work upon as autonomously as possible.

In opposition to this utilitarian view of education, whose goal is that of equipping students as thoroughly as possible to become productive citizens, one could suggest an alternative list by van Lier (1996: 91), including a set of 'lifelong learning skills' as goals of education: (a) deal with the unexpected, (b) make informed choices, (c) develop sharp observational skills, (d) construct useful knowledge in one's interaction with the world, and (e) be guided by internal values, convictions, and reasons. Many of these skills can be included within the definition of 'critical' that is found in the dictionary: 'A critical approach to something involves examining and judging it carefully' (Collins Cobuild 1987). In other words, in order to *deal with the unexpected* you have to be able to *examine* it and this can only be done if you have developed *sharp observational skills* and are capable of *constructing useful knowledge* through the examination; once you have examined and conceptualized the object, you can pass *judgement* on it, provided you are equipped with *internal values, convictions, and reasons*; this judgement will then allow you to make an informed choice on your response.

A 'critical' attitude to analysing language use

CDA is an approach to the analysis of language use that, according to van Dijk (1997: 2–6), shares the premises of the more social approaches to discourse. In the first place, it considers discourse as a practical, social, and cultural phenomenon. Secondly, it views the relationship between discourse and context as dialectical, whereby the former is influenced by and at the same time shapes the latter. And, thirdly, it distinguishes between local and more global functions of discourse in a hierarchy that goes from the particular pragmatic function of a discourse move in the text (for example, apologizing, inviting) to social, political, and cultural functions (for example, promoting globalization, discriminating).

Tables 1 and 2 constitute an attempt to schematically summarize the main differences between approaching discourse with and without a 'critical' attitude. Table 1 includes two possible ways of defining discourse depending on whether it is looked upon critically or not.

What is discourse?	
Critical view	**Non-critical view**
Ideologically determined ways of talking or writing about persons, places, events or phenomena.	Stretch of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive.
A mode of social practice that is both structured by society and, at the same time, contributes to structuring that same society.	Different ways of talking / writing about (and structuring) areas of knowledge or social practice (e.g. medical discourse, ecological discourse).

TABLE 1
Critical and non-critical views of discourse

Table 2 presents possible definitions of what is involved in the systematic study of discourse, again depending on the 'attitude' of the researcher.

What is discourse analysis?	
Critical view	**Non-critical view**
Analysis of how texts work within specific socio-cultural practices.	Description of natural spoken or written discourse.
Explanation of how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideology and, at the same time, is used to construct social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief.	Study of what gives a stretch of language unity and meaning.

TABLE 2
Critical and non-critical views of discourse analysis

From an analytical point of view, the model of CDA proposed by Fairclough (1989, 1992b), considers discourse as the result of three different types of practice: social, discursive, and textual. At the level of social practice, the goal is to discover the extent to which discourse is shaped by and, at the same time, influences social structures and the nature of the social activity of which it forms part. The discursive practice dimension acknowledges the specificity of the communicative situation, taking into account both material and cognitive aspects related to the conditions of textual production and interpretation (for example, intertextuality, presuppositions, etc.). Finally, the textual practice dimension focuses on formal and semantic features of text construction, such as grammar or vocabulary, which contribute to conveying/interpreting a specific message.

Re-working the text with an 'attitude': *An unusual community 2*

The activity that is presented in this section is not intended as 'alternative' but as 'complementary' to the activity suggested in Oxenden *et al.* (op. cit.) for the text *An unusual community*. The goal of the activity is to give learners a view of language use, as a situated phenomenon in which speakers make linguistic and non-linguistic choices according to their goals and circumstances. Following Fairclough's analytical framework, the activity will be organized into three phases corresponding to the three levels of analysis: social practice, discursive practice, and textual practice.

Social practice

In this phase of the activity learners reflect upon the following aspects:
(a) how the text contributes to a particular representation of the world and whether this representation comes into conflict with their own

representations; (b) how the textual representation is shaped by the ideological position of its producer(s); and (c) how it contributes to reinforcing or changing the ideological position of its readers. The following questions may help the learners in their analysis:

1 Are the Amish typical American people? Why?
2 In your opinion, who wrote the text? An Amish or a non-Amish person? Try to justify your answer.
3 What do you think of the Amish after reading the text? Would you like to be an Amish?

Discourse practice

This second phase centres on the specificity of the communicative situation of which the text forms part, taking into account material and cognitive circumstances such as the following: (a) the discourse type or genre that the text can be classified into and the intertextual chains it enters into; (b) the contribution of the different propositions in the text to the overall impression of coherence; and (c) the readers' knowledge of the world and experience of other texts that the author draws upon. The following are possible questions that learners could try to answer:

4 Where can you find a text like this? What kind of readers is it addressed to? Is it written for Amish or non-Amish people?
5 What is the 'point' of the text? What is the author trying to tell us? What do you remember from the Amish after reading the text?
6 What do you know about New York or the USA? The Amish live near New York. Are they really 'an unusual community'? How does the author of the text try to show us that they are 'unusual'?

Textual practice

The focus now is on reflecting upon salient formal and semantic features of text construction involving different levels of linguistic analysis and contributing to a global interpretation of the text. The questions suggested as examples focus on connectors, modality, and vocabulary, respectively:

7 What linking words connect the following ideas in the text?

Living near New York $<>$ Lifestyle of the Amish
Using banks and going to the doctor's $<>$ Having phones
Playing baseball and eating hot dogs $<>$ Having TVs, radios, carpets . . .
Having churches $<>$ Being very religious
8 Are the ideas on both sides presented as paradoxical or contradictory?
9 Look for examples in the text containing the verb *can/can't*. What *can* the Amish do? What **can** the Amish *not* do? Next look for examples containing the verbs *have to* and *allow*, expressing obligation. What are the Amish obliged to do?
10 Fill in the 'you' column in the table below and say in each case if the word/phrase in question has a positive (+) or a negative (–) meaning for you. When you have finished, do the same to fill in the 'Amish' column according to what the text says.

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	You	Amish
Change		
High technology, videos		
Strict rules		
Travel by plane		
Flowers		
Being very religious		

11 How often do you have the same symbol in both columns? What conclusions can you make?

A sample task:
Easy reading

The sample task presented in this section, *Easy reading,* is intended to show how CDA can be implemented in the classroom following the format that Willis (1996) proposes for tasks: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. The pre-task phase involves basically an introduction by the teacher to the topic and the task, identifying the essential notions that students will have to use. The task cycle is divided into three stages: the task, the planning or preparation of the report, and the presentation of the report. Finally, in the language focus phase, the students examine and discuss specific features of the text, try to reach some conclusions, and apply them to specific practice.

This task involves a comparative analysis of a passage from the original version of E. M. Forster's novel *A Room with a View* (Forster 1908: 23) with another passage from a simplified version of the same novel produced for EFL learners (Forster 1988: 5). The critical orientation of the task is based on the fact that it focuses on the social practice of teaching/learning a foreign language through the communicative situation of reading a text (discourse practice) which has been previously simplified to fit the level of the audience (textual practice). The goal of the task is (a) to make students aware of differences in terms of form and content between the two versions, and (b) to present the adapted text as the result of a series of textual choices based on the author's representation of the potential readers' cultural, literary, and linguistic competencies.

Original version

'The Signora had no business to do it,' said Miss Bartlett, 'no business at all. She promised us south rooms with a view, close together, instead of which here are north rooms, here are north rooms, looking into a courtyard, and a long way apart. Oh, Lucy!'

'And a Cockney, besides!' said Lucy, who had been further saddened by the Signora's unexpected accent. 'It might be London.' She looked at the two rows of English people who were sitting at the table; at the row of white bottles of water and red bottles of wine that ran between the English people; at the portraits of the late Queen and the late Poet Laureate that hung behind the English people, heavily framed; at the notice of the English church (Rev. Cuthbert Eager, M.A. Oxon.), that

was the only other decoration of the wall. 'Charlotte, don't you feel, too, that we might be in London? I can hardly believe that all kinds of other things are just outside. I suppose it is one's being so tired.'

'This meat has surely been used for soup,' said Miss Bartlett laying down her fork.

Simplified version

Miss Charlotte Bartlett and her young friend Miss Lucy Honeychurch arrived for a holiday at the little Hotel Bertolini, in Florence. Miss Bartlett was not very young, but Lucy was a very pretty young girl with a lot of dark hair.

The Bertolini was managed by a lady called Signora Bertolini. The Signora showed them their rooms and then they went to the dining-room for dinner. All the people at the long table were English.

'The Signora was wrong, quite wrong,' said Miss Bartlett. 'She promised us south rooms, where we could see the river. I really wanted a view of the river. And we have north rooms with a view of the backs of houses. Oh Lucy!'

'And she's not Italian, she comes from London. Charlotte, don't you feel we are in London, not Florence?'

'And this meat isn't very nice,' said Miss Bartlett.

A Pre-task

In order to get students to think about using language according to the addressee, the task should be introduced by means of a discussion about the differences between describing or explaining something to a classmate and to a four-year old or between a native speaker of the learners' L1 and someone who has just started to learn their L1. This could be done on the basis of a situation that the learners themselves could construct in their L1 (for example, What is school life like? Why do people get married?).

B Task cycle

The students' task consists of writing a report on some of the changes that authors of simplified versions make to adapt original literary works to an audience of EFL learners.

In the first stage, students must read the original version of the passage. The teacher's help, if necessary, should be limited to supplying the translation of difficult words or expressions, without any other explanation which could clarify the content of the passage. The students should, in the first place, indicate those segments which do not make sense to them, and in the second place, produce a summary (in L1 or L2 depending on their level) of the passage.

The second stage requires the students to read the simplified version and check the accuracy of their basic understanding of the situation.

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In the third stage, the teacher points the attention of the students toward a series of features of the original version which do not appear in the simplified one. The features may be of two types:

1 Features which are not strictly related to linguistic competence but rather to literary and cultural competence

   a Beginning the novel without introducing the characters.
   b Introduction of certain unique referents: 'the late Queen', 'the late Poet Laureate', 'the English church', 'the Arno'.
   c Conversational implicitness relying on cultural knowledge (in this case, knowledge about accents and dialects of English): 'And a Cockney, besides!'; 'It might be London.'
   d Use of indirectionality: 'This meat has surely been used for soup.'

In order to convince the learners about their capacity to interpret these literary devices they could be given similar examples from a literary piece in their L1.

2 Features related to linguistic competence and having to do with amount of information supplied as well as with specific grammatical structures and lexical items used:

   a The characters: physical appearance, personality.
   b The situation.
   c The dialogues.

The preparation and presentation of the report could be organized around the following question:

What does the author of the simplified version assume that the readers are and are not familiar with in terms of (a) their literary and cultural competence, and (b) their linguistic competence?

Table 3 includes examples of each type:

Cultural/literary competence		Linguistic competence	
Readers know	Readers do not know	Readers know	Readers do not know
Florence is a city in Italy.	The Arno is a river that goes through Florence.	Past forms of regular verbs (e.g. *arrived*, *showed*, *wanted*) and of the verb *to be*.	The idiomatic expression *have no business* meaning 'have no right'.
Literary narratives include segments with the narrator's voice as well as segments with dialogue between the characters.	Literary narratives may begin without introducing the characters.	Sentence structure S + V + IO + DO (e.g. The Signora showed them their rooms).	Complex sentences (i.e. including subordination; e.g. She looked at the two rows of English people who were sitting at the table).

TABLE 3
Possible assumptions about the readers' competencies made by the author of the simplified version

C Language focus

Students and teacher discuss on the extent to which the presence or absence of certain elements in a message may be important to understand (a) the relationship between speaker/writer and listener/reader, and (b) how the addressor can construct the identity of the addressee through specific decisions about what to say and how to say it.

Conclusion

My goal with this article has been to present CDA as a complementary model for analysing language use and for designing language learning activities. The 'critical' nature of the model is that it relies on the users'/learners' capacity to interpret a text within a specific communicative, social, and ideological context and react to it taking into account their personal experience and values. Following the analytical model proposed by Fairclough (1992b), I include below a list of questions that may be used by teachers (a) to approach language use with a 'critical' attitude, and (b) as a reference framework to plan how to present language use to learners.

A Social practice

A.1 What social identities does/do the author(s) of the text represent?
A.2 What is the relationship between the social identities the author(s) represent(s)?
A.3 What is/are the social goal(s) the author(s) has/have with the text?
A.4 To what extent is the text necessary to accomplish the goal(s)?
A.5 In what kind of social situation is the text produced? How conventional is it?
A.6 Does/do the author(s) represent or appeal to particular beliefs?
A.7 What are/may be the social consequences of the text?

B Discourse practice

B.1 How conventional is the text taking into account its situation of use?
B.2 Does it remind us of other texts we have encountered either in its form or in its content?
B.3 Can we classify it as representative of a specific type?
B.4 Is the text more or less accessible to different kinds of readers?
B.5 Does it require us to 'read between the lines'?
B.6 Does it presuppose anything?
B.7 Who are the producer(s) and intended receiver(s) of the text?

C Textual practice

C.1 If the text is co-operatively constructed (for example, a conversation), is it obvious in any way that one of the participants is more in control of the construction than the others?
C.2 How are the ideas represented by utterances, sentences, or paragraphs connected in the text?
C.3 Does/do the author(s) follow any rules of politeness?

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C.4 Are there features in the text that contribute to projecting a specific image of the author(s).

C.5 Is the author's attitude expressed in the text?

C.6 How does syntactic structure as well as lexical choice affect the meaning? Are there alternatives?

C.7 Are there any relevant terms, expressions, or metaphors that contribute to characterising the text?

Revised version received August 2004

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