

**FROM DISCOURSE ANALYSIS TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS:  
THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Após quase duas décadas de estudos sobre a interação oral e escrita, pesquisadores voltam-se, na década de 90, para uma nova área de estudos lingüísticos, a Análise Crítica do Discurso (Critical Discourse Analysis) ou a análise discursiva como prática social. Esta área tem como finalidade primordial desvendar, através da análise lingüística estruturas sociais de poder, promovendo, possivelmente, uma melhor consciência social e política.

O presente trabalho traça o desenvolvimento teórico desta nova área, desde os primeiros postulados sobre linguagem e sociedade até a recente proposição teórica de Fairclough, que vê toda a prática discursiva sob um ponto de vista tri-dimensional. Para o autor, o **texto** (a atualização de vários discursos em linguagem), a **interação** entre pessoas e a **ação social** são instâncias discursivas inseparáveis. A maneira que textos são produzidos e interpretados depende da prática social e não pode ser analisada isoladamente. Os estudos discursivos da década de 70, no entanto, principalmente os de origem anglo-saxã, apesar de terem passado do código lingüístico à interação, concentravam-se na mera descrição de formas interativas. Textos eram vistos como **produtos**, dissociados de um contexto social.

A análise crítica do discurso vê a prática lingüística como o principal meio pelo qual os processos sociais operam e não como um conjunto isolado de significados ou formas textuais. O enfoque crítico tenta não simplesmente **descrever**, mas também **interpretar** e **explicar** diferentes formas de comunicação em seus contextos sociais. A própria análise já é considerada interpretação, pois o/a analista faz parte do processo interacional.

**1.1 - Introduction**

In the last two decades, the focus of linguistic studies has changed from the description of formal properties of languages as systems to the description of how people communicate through language. It is important now to make statements on what people do through language and how they identify themselves through a linguistic code

as subjects in social contexts. Up to the sixties, however, the academic discipline of linguistics (or linguistics proper) studied 'grammar' in a broad sense: the sound systems, the grammatical structure of words and of sentences and more formal aspects of meaning (semantics).

In this paper, I want to discuss briefly some of the most important statements made by recent and current approaches to language studies that contributed to the development of a new insight into interaction called **Critical Discourse Analysis**.

## 1.2 - Saussure, Voloshinov and Social Semiotics

Saussure, considered by many the founding father of linguistics, at the beginning of the century, reacted to the dominant approach to language study which dealt with the relations between languages and traced their descent. He decided to look at languages as structure, proposing therefore to cut through time dimensions and examine a given language systematically at a point **in time** instead of studying linguistic change and development **through time**. He called this 'synchronic' linguistics, opposing it to 'diachronic' (historical) study. He postulated that linguistic systems are made up of **langue** (the abstract system, which is a social contract, and not the property of an individual) and **parole** (the actualisation of this system, an individual's behaviour regulated by language, or particular instances of speech). For him the '**état-de langue**' was a network of relationships in which the value of each element ultimately depended, directly or indirectly, on the value of every other. A **langue** was made up of signs (signifier and significant), but individual signs could not be considered in isolation since both form and meaning were defined by their contrast with the other sign systems.

For Saussure, a language was a sign system, a kind of entity which sociologists call *social facts*. Social facts, according to Durkheim (1895), are ideas (representations) in the collective mind of a society.

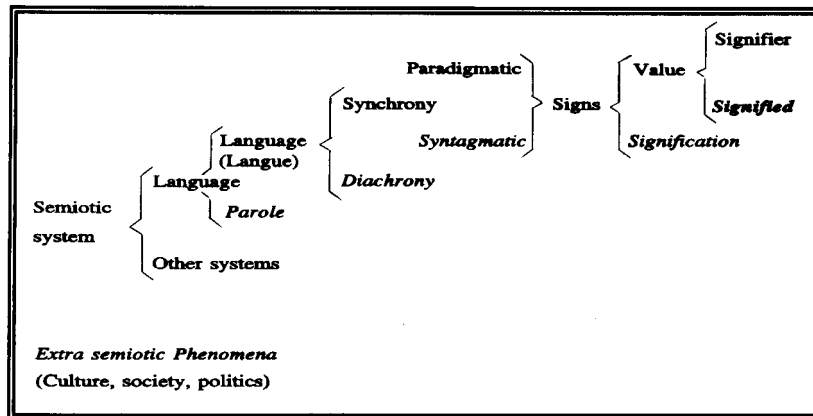
The collective mind of a society is something that exists over and above the individual members of the society, and its ideas are only indirectly and imperfectly reflected in the minds of the people who make up that society. (Sampson, 1980: 44).

Saussure placed the investigation of symbolic systems such as languages at the centre of a new science, the science of signs - semiology. Although Saussure was referring to the sign as a social fact, the linguists of the first part of this century, up to the 50's and even into the 60's, developed theories of language based exclusively on the saussurean notion of **langue**. The assumption behind the scholarship was that a language should be regarded as invariant across the community which it was spoken and that the study of language was synchronic since the system should be viewed as a static product existing at a given point in time and not as dynamic process that changes through time.

The American descriptivists and structuralists studied languages as self-contained systems, rather than as historical phenomena, or as social or pedagogical tools. They were also concerned with 'scientificity', in other words, a description meant 'objective investigation'. Their tradition was positivist and empiricist but their assumptions and the dissociation of language practice from a social environment led to an idealised view of language. From the American descriptivists of the 40's and 50's, to the structuralists of the 60's and 70's, the description of grammar and rules for the distribution of each element was the main concern .

Nowadays, in semiotic and critical discourse studies, the notion of scientificity in language studies is questioned and scholars go back to the saussurean notion that signs not only have values, (signs have a place in a system or structure), but also signification, that is, a relation of reference existing outside language. Saussure himself, however, opted only for considerations of values (relation in a system) rather than signification. His main interest was with signifiers, and not with signified. Langue, for him, was the primary object of study.

Hodge and Kress (1988:16) summarising Saussure's terminology, point out that the second part of all the pairs (in bold, in the diagram below) were the contents that Saussure minimised or excluded from his main considerations:



Semioticians, like Hodge and Kress, currently propose that what Saussure excluded should now be taken into consideration if we are to make any statements about language and social meaning. Hodge and Kress (ibid.) suggest that Saussure seemed to have "affirmed the social over the individual, but only as an abstract, immobilised version of the social order." (p. 17) An alternative Semiotics will incorporate, according to Hodge and Kress, the following components:

- 1- Culture (society and politics) as intrinsic to semiotics;
- 2- other semiotic systems alongside verbal language;
- 3- parole (the act of speaking) and concrete signifying practices in other codes;

- 4- diachrony, (time, history) process and change;
- 5- the processes of signification, the transactions between signifying systems and structures of reference;
- 6- structures of the signifié;
- 7- the material nature of signs. (p. 18)

At the around the same time Saussure was postulating the theory of the sign, another very important scholar was suggesting that "the utterance is a social phenomenon." Voloshinov, writing in 1929, pointed out that the problem with the Saussurean tradition, which he labelled "abstract objectivism", was that there was a rejection of the **parole** in the dichotomy '**langue** and **parole**'. He proposed that the form of signs must be conditioned by the social organisation of the people involved and also by the conditions of their interaction (1973:21).

Hodge and Kress (ibid.) say that "Voloshinov's work foregrounds the speech act as an exchange between individuals whose consciousness is already socially constructed". The importance of his work is that Voloshinov makes a close connection between the study of language and semiotics and the study of ideology. For him, the social dimension is essential in any semiotic analysis. He says that:

- 1- Ideology may not be divorced from the material reality of the sign.
- 2- Signs may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse (seeing that the sign is part of organised social intercourse, and cannot exist as such, outside it).
- 3- Communications and the forms of communications may not be divorced from the material basis.

For Voloshinov, therefore, language and ideologies are not monolithic phenomena. Society, for him, is characterised by conflicts and people are constantly renegotiating their roles and relations within a community. A certain way of dressing or a certain way of speaking reflect social meanings and at the same time, create other meanings by their interactions with other signs.

Voloshinov's basic ideas can still be considered as a basis for any investigation into a semiotic act. He leaves unexplored, however, as Hodge and Kress (ibid.) point out, the relationships between speech roles and social interactions in class societies. His postulations of 'conditions of interactions and social organisation of participants' were picked up again as important features only at the beginning of the 80's when the connections between society and language began to be made.

### 1.3 - Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics, which claimed to analyse language in a social context, has developed in reaction to the practice of 'linguistics proper'. Under the influence of disciplines outside linguistics, specially anthropology and sociology, the American linguist William Labov and his team felt that a more socially relevant discipline, concerned with the problems of disadvantaged groups, was necessary. They were also

reacting against the orthodox model of the time (Chomskyan transformational grammar) and the dichotomy **competence/performance**. They wanted to show that a theory which excluded **history** and **parole** was artificial and unsatisfactory. Quantitative Sociolinguistics, as it is now known, took as its object of study linguistic 'variation' or how speakers produce 'variants' (a given pronunciation or grammatical structure) according to their social class, educational background, age and biological sex. For the first time, quantitative studies correlated linguistic structures with social features.

The opposition between the sociolinguistic approach to language studies and the Chomskyan one was that the former was concerned with the **linguistics of use** and community while the latter was concerned with **knowledge** and the individual. Halliday (1978) refers to these approaches as 'intra-organisms' and 'inter-organisms' perspectives. For the 'intra-organism' perspective, the emphasis is on the investigation of language as 'knowledge', of what the speaker knows. The 'inter-organism' perspective is concerned with language and social behaviour. It concentrates on the social aspects of language, or language in relation to the social environment.

It is now generally accepted, after the sociolinguistic studies of variation, that there is a correlation between linguistic production, particularly in terms of form (phonological, morphological, syntactic) and social variable - the social background of a speaker, the social relationships between participants in a given context, topic choice, etc. The studies have also shown that variation can be systematic and that speakers can be socially and communicative competent in the same way as they have the ability to construct grammatical sentences.

Sociolinguistics challenges the dichotomy 'synchronic' and 'diachronic', by arguing that these two aspects are interrelated. The social significance of variation in the present can determine future linguistic changes.

However, the problem with variational theory is that it is highly influenced by positivist concepts. Linguistic variation is a set of facts that should be observed from an outside point of view (the observer's paradox) through a methodology very similar to the one used in the social sciences. For this theory, observation done in a scientific manner has the status of value-free facts. However, in social interaction, any observation is value-laden. All participants are involved in the process, including the observer who is going to interpret 'facts' according to her/his perspective.

Another important point to be made about quantitative studies is that although 'social class' and 'sex' are sociolinguistic categories, there was no attempt in variational theory, to explain social relations of power or gender.

Feminist studies have now pointed out that the instruments for measuring data had serious theoretical implications based on bias and stereotyped interpretations. Sex, like race, was one of the areas of social relations where domination was invariably justified by difference. Women were invisible or excluded from data collection. Labov's important works (1972a, 1972b), for example, were mostly based on male production. And this data was taken as representative of all types of speech. Labov himself stated,

according to Cameron (1989) that the main representatives of vernacular culture were men (Labov et al, 1968:41).

Qualitative sociolinguistic studies (derived from the work Gumperz and Hymes and the notions of communicative competence), where interaction is the main focus of analysis, (Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b, Cheshire, 1982, Milroy, 1987, Erickson, 1988, among others), now prove that the classic sociolinguistic assertion that women use a language closer to the standard form is a simplistic generalisation (see Tannen, 1984, 1986, 1990, Cameron, 1985 and Coates and Cameron, 1988). Other factors like the social context and social roles determine linguistic production. And variables like communicative networks, neighbourhood, local work organisations, living conditions and above all, power relations, influence linguistic production. Variationists could only account for the 'what' of variations, but not for the 'why' and 'how.' Nevertheless, it is thanks to 'Sociolinguistics' and specially to 'Qualitative Sociolinguistics' that the socially constituted nature of language practice became a focus of empirical study.

#### 1.4 - Discourse Analysis

Many disciplines have contributed to what is now considered a new cross-discipline: anthropology, linguistics, sociology, psychology, etc. There are many approaches to **discourse analysis** and the variety of descriptive methods is extensive (see for a detailed discussion, Van Dijk, 1985). Conversational analysis and text analysis are the most prominent ones. The methods are, however, bound to the specificity of the different disciplines. According to Van Dijk (ibid.: 1) "since discourse is first of all a form of language use, it goes without saying that linguistic methods of analysis have played a predominant role in the study of text and talk". The concentration of discourse analysis was mainly on how sociocultural knowledge is related in the performance of what has been called speech acts.

American ethnomethodologists (Conversational Analysts, for example), investigated the production and interpretation of everyday action through conversation while European text analysts (Sinclair and Coulthard, Winter and Hoey, among others, looked at texts in terms of their internal organisation. In both cases, the first studies were concerned with the **description** of forms of oral and written interaction.

The research has so far demonstrated that both oral and written texts are systematically structured and socially organised (classroom and casual talk, doctor-patient interaction, lectures, meetings, etc.)

There is nowadays an increasing concern with language and society, especially derived from the work of Michael Halliday, one of the founders of systemic/functionalist linguistics. Halliday seemed to have initiated the critical interpretation of discourses when he first proposed that language is a social semiotics. Halliday took his inspiration from the work of Firth, the academic who turned linguistics into a recognised distinct subject in Britain. Firth and his colleague Malinowsky were interested in investigating how languages function as social acts. For

Malinowski, a language, in its primitive use, "...functions as a link in concerted human activity... It is a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection" (1923: 312). Halliday, continuing in the same tradition, postulates that linguistic form is affected systematically by social circumstances. He says

Why is language as it is? The nature of language is closely related to the demands that we make on it, the functions it has to serve. In the most concrete terms, these functions are specific to a culture... The particular form taken by the grammatical system of language is closely related to the social and personal need that language is required to serve. (1970: 142)

The body of research on discourse developed so far can, therefore, be divided into two groups according to the nature of their social orientation to language studies. We can distinguish between non-critical and critical approaches.

The non-critical approaches simply describe discursive practices, while critical approaches not only describe but also show how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies. According to Fairclough (1992) critical language studies demonstrate "the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants." (p.129) Examples of non-critical discourse analysis are the American work on conversational analysis (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974, among others), therapeutic discourse (Labov and Fanshel, 1977), the British classroom discourse analysis in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), the text description in Winter (1977) and Hoey (1979,1983).

The Critical approaches include the "critical linguistics" of Fowler et al (1979,1991), the work of Fairclough on Language and Power (1989,1992a, 1992b), the French approach to discourse analysis developed by Pêcheux (1982), the cultural studies recently developed (Scanell, 1991) and the works on Language and Gender.(Cameron, 1989, 1992, Coates and Cameron, 1988, among others). etc.)

### 1.5 - Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is, according to Fairclough (1992b) an orientation towards language which associates linguistic text analysis with a social theory of the functioning of language in political and ideological processes. It criticises linguistics proper " for taking conventions and practices at face value, as objects to be described in a way which obscures their political and ideological investment. " (Fairclough, *ibid.*: 7).

In the late twenties, Voloshinov laid down the basic principles for a critical analysis and around 1935, Firth suggested that *language is a way of behaving and making others behave*. However, only in the past decade, has a critical orientation become well established. The first works known nowadays as 'critical linguistics' were

developed by a group based at the University of East Anglia in the 70's (Fowler et al, 1979, Kress and Hodge, 1979). This work, which was linguistically centred, drew heavily upon the functionalist theory of Halliday.

More recently, theorists like Pêcheux (1982), Kress (1985), Fairclough (1989, 1992a, 1992b), Gee (1990) are extending the boundaries of analysis and a 'new theory of language' is being born. The most important influences on CDA have been the social theories of Foucault, Bourdieu, Althusser and Habermas and the linguistic theory of Functional Systemics. The central concern of a critical discourse analyst is to relate the discourse process of text production and interpretation with social practice.

Discourse is socially constructive since social subjects and social relations are constituted in and by it. Previous discourse analysis tended to describe interaction and therefore text as products without placing them in a social context. Critical discourse analysts, however, see discursive practices or Discourses (with capital D) as

...modes of behaviour which place us in determined social groups. They operate to integrate people in societies. ...Interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles by specific groups of people, whether families of a certain sort, lawyers of a certain sort, bikers of a certain sort, etc. Language, as well as literacy, is always and everywhere integrated with and relative to *social practices* constituting particular Discourses. (Gee, 1991: xix)

The social group determines the discursive practices we are brought up in. Gee (ibid.) suggests that every cultural group has its own home based Discourse which is connected to that particular group's ways of behaving in and acting upon the world. This Discourse marks its identity. However, each one of us is also a member of many Discourses - the school, the work, the church, the business, etc., are sites where Discourses operate to integrate people. Since we act in many different sites, discursive practices represent our many identities. However, Discourses in general often do not have compatible values and in many instances, they can be conflictive. This has a crucial significance for education in general. The white middle class home based Discourses in many ways share features of the white middle class school Discourse - children of white middle class parents value books, for instance. A black, working class child, who comes from a different home based Discourse (where, for example, oral communication is more appreciated than written communication), when entering the white middle class school Discourse, will be at a disadvantage in relation to the white child. The whole process of literacy for this black child can be hindered, therefore.

Discourses have their own theory. Theories, for Gee (ibid.), are

a set of *generalisations* about an area (in this case language and language acquisition) in terms of which *descriptions* of phenomena in that area can be



couched and *explanations* offered. Theories, in this sense, ground beliefs... (p.15)

and count as 'normal' what is a practice to a certain type of Discourse, excluding (and rejecting) whatever is different. These 'theories' are 'ideologies' and language is inevitably connected to them.

Different Discourses form different systems. Meaning arises from the social and institutional position from which the discourse comes: "words, expressions, propositions, etc., change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them" (Pêcheux, *ibid.*: 111).- All institutions and social groupings have thus, specific meanings and values which are articulated in 'language' in systematic ways. Kress (1985:7) suggests that

Discourses define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not to say (and by extension what is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution... A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and give structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about. In that, it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions.

If we want to practise any kind of linguistic analysis, therefore, we must not dissociate linguistic production from ideological values.

The **School**, for example, as an institution, fails to recognise that there is difference in Discourses and instead of initiating children into an educated form of interaction where 'difference' is tolerated, it excludes the ones that do not belong to the 'accepted' type of Discourse. In other words, it considers 'difference' as deficit.

Literacy activities are, therefore, bound to particular Discourses. One does not learn to **read** or **write**. One learns to read or write texts of a certain type, selected and interpreted by certain people, generally associated with dominant groups. There are, therefore, many literacies, since texts can be read in many different ways. Each literacy involves control over a different Discourse and the ideal school should be able to expose and teach children to control several interactive modes.

Power relations and the effect they have upon social practices is a main concern of CDA. The main objective of a critical reading is, therefore, to expose misrepresentation and discrimination in different types of discourse and by doing so, produce social change. Everything we say, think, feel and do, is always indebted to the social context we live in.

Language, according to the functional theory of language, (Halliday 1985), is a "system for making meaning" (p. xvii). Meaning derives from the relationships and the interactions people have with each other. There are many links between linguistic structure and social practices - one shapes and is shaped by the other. Whenever we

communicate, we take a particular point of view or perspective on whatever we want to transmit. This 'perspective taking' signals our views of the world and consequently our ideologies. To be competent in one language is not simply to know the grammar and words of a linguistic code. 'Variability' and 'multiplicity', concepts fundamental to language, account for different ways of saying things according to different situations. These different language 'styles' are tied to signals of status and solidarity. When we communicate, we manipulate the sociolinguistic variables in order to display various identities. Therefore, when we speak, we express and reproduce social structure. Language, according to Gee, is inherently ideological, since it is "both an assessment and expression in both form and function, of ideology " (p.131).

### 1.6 - A Three Dimensional View of Discourse

Fairclough (1992a and b) is one of the most active proponents of the critical orientation to language studies. He says that every discursive instance has three layers or dimensions: it is **text**, spoken or written, it is an **interaction** between people. This interaction involves processes of text production and interpretation. Interactions are systematically-organised ways of talking. The processes of text production and interpretation also called 'discursive practices' are a part of **social action**. These layers of discourse are inseparable, since social action and text are mediated by interaction and the nature of interaction. The ways texts are produced and interpreted are inherently dependent upon social action. Every text has its own environment, or what Malinowski (1935) called 'the context of situation' which is placed in a 'context of culture'. The context of culture determines the nature of the linguistic realisation. So, any text chosen by any person is predictable from that person's place in social and institutional structures. Any member of a society is situated in a network of relationships which determine the set of texts in which s/he participates as a consumer-producer.

The text itself, on the other hand, reflects in its formal and stylistic aspects, the processes of production and presents 'cues' for its interpretation. It is the job of an analyst to investigate, for example, how texts arise, how and why they get produced and how any reader comes to read a particular text.

Discourse Analysis, according to Fairclough (ibid.: 11) has also three dimensions. **description** of the **text**, **interpretation** of the **interaction** and **explanation** of how the two first dimensions are inserted in **social action**.

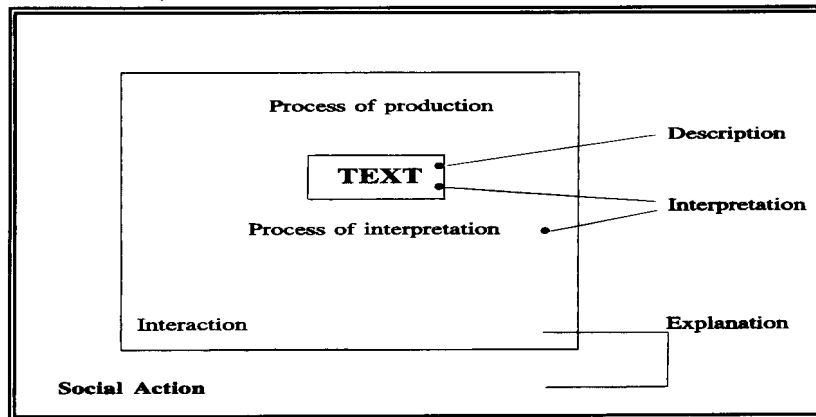
In **description**, the text is analysed in terms of its formal characteristics. A text, for Halliday (1985: p.xvii) is a semantic unit, not a grammatical one. But meanings are realized through the grammatical system. So, texts can be looked at in terms of their vocabulary, grammar, cohesion or text structure (micro or macro structures). These headings form a kind of rank scale. Texts can also be analysed in terms of their 'illocutionary force' or in terms of their coherence and inter textual properties.

The suggested headings constitute the skeleton for an analytical framework and cover all aspects of language production and interpretation as well as the formal properties of texts. Analyses published so far have dealt with one or more of these headings. (see Fowler et al, 1979, Kress and Hodge, 1979 or Van Dijk, 1988, for example).

In **interpretation**, conventions are scrutinised. Here, for instance, the analyst would draw upon various '**interactional genres**' in order to see how the interactive conventions are used. 'Genres', or discourse types according to Kress (1985), are formal conventional categories whose meanings and forms arise out of the conventionalised occasions of social interaction. Genres provide an index and catalogue of the relevant social occasion. Examples of different genres, like 'interviews', 'lectures', 'medical examinations', etc., are all bound to specific rules that govern the interaction.

In **explanation**, the aim is to explain how the properties of interaction work by reference to social action. The analyst will also assess the contribution of the discourse to social action, specifying its political and ideological uses. Here, power relations and discriminatory values can be uncovered

Fairclough summarises his framework in the following diagram (1992b:10):



Language use helps to constitute and change knowledge, social relations and social identity, since 'discourse' "constitutes the social" (Fairclough, 1992b:8). The dimensions of the social, that is, *knowledge*, *social relations* and *social identity* correspond to the three metafunctions of language or components of meaning proposed by Halliday (1978, 1985). The **ideational metafunction** is the manifestation in the linguistic system of a general purpose which allows us to understand and experience the environment; the **interpersonal or relational metafunction** allows us to constitute and change social relations and social identities and these are realised through the **textual metafunction** through which the other functions are realised linguistically. The metafunctions occur at the same time as the three dimensions of the social develop. In

this way, knowledge, social relations and identities are simultaneously enacted and re-enacted.

Fairclough (1992b) proposes a series of statements which are the theoretical basis for an adequate critical approach to discourse analysis. Here are some of the most important ones:

- 1- The object of analysis is linguistic texts which are analysed in terms of their own specificity.
- 2- In addition to text, the processes of text production and interpretation are themselves analysed. Analysis is interpretation.
- 3- Texts may be heterogeneous and ambiguous and configurations of different discourse types may be drawn upon in producing and interpreting them.
- 4- Discourse is socially constructive, constituting social subjects, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief.
- 5- Discourse analysis is concerned not only with power relations in discourse, but also with how power relations and power struggle shape and transform the discourse practices of a society or institutions.
- 6- Analysis of discourse attends to its functioning in the creative transformation of ideologies and practices as well as its function in securing their reproduction.
- 7- Texts are analysed in terms of a diverse range of features of form and meaning (properties of dialogue and text structure as well as vocabulary and grammar) appertaining to both the ideational and interpersonal functions of language. (pp. 35/36).

Critical discourse analysts like Fairclough and Gee, among others, argue in this way for a **socially-based linguistics**. For Gee (1991), a linguistic theory should be the one that "claims that all practice (human action) is inherently caught up with usually tacit theories that empower or disempower people and groups of people " (xx).

One of the roles of a critical linguist therefore, is to make visible the relationship between language and social practice. Gee even claims that it is a moral obligation "to render one's tacit theories overt when they have the potential to hurt people" (ibid.).

The issues discussed in this paper are the basis for a critical analysis. The linguistic system is not 'neutral' and all discourses reflect ideas and beliefs of an institution. Language, as Fowler (1992: 1) suggests, "is a highly constructive mediator" and we, as analysts, should be aware of the hidden meanings of all texts.

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