

Critical Discourse Analysis and the Rational Faculty

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Abstract

In this age, the constant desire to be the best, to achieve the highest, to attain the most power, seems to be making us compromise our moral standards. The endeavour to strive and go to the next level may not always be practiced in a healthy manner. The present era poses its own problems, issues and challenges; complexities are part and parcel of social existence. In such an environment taking things at face value could lead one to be beguiled, influenced or manipulated. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers a window of opportunities to make apparent the not so apparent issues of a society. Its objective is to empower people by making them conscious of the hidden structures that exist in the social makeup of a community. Once an individual or members of a community and or a society becomes aware of the issues that may have escaped them, they will be in a position to choose what to believe and what not to believe, what is authentic and what is doubtful or questionable. This paper aims to give a brief introduction to CDA and suggests how it can make the rational faculty more inquisitive outside and inside the academia.

1.0 Introduction

Undeniably, with the advancement of science, technology and communication we are being offered more choices than ever before, but the desire to outdo ourselves and outrival our competitors has become a part of day-to-day existence. The pace of contemporary urban lifestyle, both in developing and developed communities, is so frenetic that the need to take a moment to think through and evaluate a situation seems to be taken for granted. The assumption that this is the 21st

century, the most advanced period of the new era, where everyone has abundant creativity, and are therefore a lot smarter and cleverer than before may be a problem that is often overlooked. But, what appears to escape most of us is that, though we live in a modern, advanced world where everything is accessible with the press of a button or just a phone call, life is anything but simple. In this whirlwind of complexities we are constantly confronted with choices which are far from easy. The line between right and wrong, virtue and vice, inclusion and exclusion is too subtle. At times what seems beneficial to the individual or society may in reality not be so.

1.1 Underlying Principle

Empirical evidence suggests that some people are endowed with more intelligence than others; however, this does not imply that critical thinking (hereafter CT) is intrinsic. Rather, it is an ability that needs to be acquired and nurtured. Likewise, critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) has to be learned and cultivated. CDA critically analyses social discourse, enabling us to better understand the issues and agendas embedded in contemporary society. Empowering us with the sort of knowledge that we lacked previously, CDA enables us to make informed and conscious choices by expanding our rational faculty. This paper introduces the basic concepts of CDA and comments on its applicability in everyday life as well as for research. In doing so it attempts to suggest how our rational faculty can be activated to make it more sensitive to the socio-cultural environment and allow us to view the world more critically.

2.0 Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis

Though rapidly growing in popularity, CDA is a relatively young science. Its origin may be traced back many years ago, but the major developments in this field of linguistics have occurred in the last two decades of the twentieth century. In fact, the first 'International Conference on Critical Discourse Analysis' was held in May 2004.

2.1 What is CDA?

It is somewhat difficult to come up with a satisfactory definition of CDA that may satisfy all the authorities on the subject, as they all tend to perceive and explain it according to their own theories, frameworks and studies. A simplistic view would be to consider CDA as a process, system or method for critically analysing instances of discourse in order to unveil and/or expose hidden agendas embedded in society (Haque, 2008: 483). Since it focuses on social issues, its objective is to empower people by making them conscious / aware of the hidden structures that

exist in the social make-up or have become part of the social set-up of a community. It does this by establishing a relationship between language (semiotic signs, paralinguage, advertisements, etc.), ideology and power (Haque, 2008: 484). Once an individual, a community, or a society becomes aware of issues that may have escaped the critical eye, they will be in a position to choose what to believe and what not to believe, what is authentic and what is doubtful or questionable (Haque 2004). In other words, they will be more discerning, critical and conscious about the social practices of the society and not take everything for granted.

But CDA is more than just that; it deals with real issues and real problems in society, like "globalization, social exclusion, shifts in governance, and so forth" (Fairclough, 2001a: 229). Wodak (1996: 16) tends to think of it as an instrument "whose purpose is precisely to expose veiled power structures: 'CDA aims to make more visible these opaque aspects of discourse' (Fairclough/Wodak 1996)". It deals with social inequality; and though this may be approached from many directions CDA analysts focus on 'the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance' (van Dijk, 2001a: 300). Dominance may be defined as the 'exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality' (*ibid.*).

By 'critical' discourse analysis Fairclough (1995a: 132) means discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes. It also investigates how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power and strives to explore how the opacity of the relationship between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (Fairclough, 1995a). In other words, Fairclough (2001b: 231) perceives CDA as the analysis of the dialectical relationship between discourse (including language as well as other forms of semiosis, for instance, body language or visual image) and other forms of social practices. For him, its particular concern is with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life, and with how discourse figures within processes of change, and with shifts in the relationship between semiosis and other social elements within the networks of practices.

According to van Dijk (2001b: 352), critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context, where analysts take explicit positions, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. He (Van Dijk 2001c:

96) thinks CDA is a critical way of doing scholarship; it is, so to speak, discourse analysis 'with an attitude', focusing on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse and domination. Wodak and Matouschek (2002: 238) opine that CDA has set itself the task, *inter alia*, of *utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to make transparent socially relevant problems ordinarily shrouded in a veil of discursive obfuscation*. Van Leeuwen, (2002: 166-7) believes that CDA is, or should be, concerned with not only discourse as the instrument of power and control as well as with discourse as the instrument of the social construction of reality, but also with the way in which linguistic analyses can bring to light, for instance, inequalities between addressers and addressees, or systematic omissions and distortions in representations.

2.2 Principles /Tenets

The basic principles of CDA are to be seen in the approaches and / or methods of the forerunners of the field—Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak and Kress and van Leeuwen. In general, CDA analysts deal with language, power and ideology and analyse the social order as well as the social make-up of society to unearth the hidden structures and issues embedded in that particular society. The principles / tenets are usually moulded according to the ideology, the mode of analysis and the subject or research focus of the CDA analysts. The main principles of CDA as summarised by Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271-80) are as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems;
2. Power relations are discursive;
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture;
4. Discourse does ideological work;
5. Discourse is historical;
6. The link between text and society is mediated;
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory;
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

2.3 Objectives and Aims of CDA

One of the objectives of CDA is to take up the cause of the oppressed and downtrodden of a society. It 'aims to show non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination, and in ideology' (Fairclough, 2001a: 229). Adopting a more down to earth perspective, one could say that CDA attempts to liberate the so-called 'losers' of social life. Though CDA pays more emphasis on 'top-down' instances of dominance than 'bottom-up' relations of resistance, compliance and acceptance (van Dijk, 2001a: 300),

this does not mean that the reverse cannot also be true. Analysts focus on relations of power and dominance that are not explicit but are rather subtle, and the subtlety that manufactures consent through concealment, legitimisation and (re)production of certain discourses and / or ideologies which may be beneficial to a select few. Commenting on such objectives, van Dijk (1993) observes:

Though in different terms, and from different points of view, most of us deal with power, dominance, hegemony, inequality and the discursive processes of their enactment, concealment, legitimization and reproduction. And many of us are interested in the subtle means by which text and talk manage the mind and manufacture consent, on the one hand, and articulate and sustain resistance and challenge, on the other.

(van Dijk, 1993: 132)

Specifically, the aim of CDA is to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use (Wodak *et al.*, 1999: 8).

Fairclough (2001a: 230) is of the opinion that the scope of CDA goes beyond mere analysis and includes establishing connections between language and other social elements that are often opaque; ultimately, it is committed to bringing about social change. He goes on to say that CDA "has an emancipatory 'knowledge interest'" (*ibid.*).

2.4 Beyond the academia: The so-what-factor

In general, discourse in discourse analysis (DA) implies spoken interactions and written texts. However, in critical discourse analysis (CDA) discourse is perceived from a broader perspective; besides spoken interactions and written texts, it could also denote semiosis, advertisements, or any form of communication that is systematically able to perform the basic communicative functions. Unlike DA, the discourse in CDA is not studied independently of social issues or problems; it is through the analysis of a piece of discourse that a social problem is emphasized, a problem which may trouble sociologists, political scientists, or educationists and not merely linguists:

The starting point of CDA is social issues and problems. It analyses texts and interactions, and indeed any type of semiotic material (written texts, conversations, television programmes, advertisements on billboards, etc.) but it does not begin with texts and interactions; it begins with the issues which preoccupy sociologists, or political scientists, or educationists.

(Fairclough, 2001a: 229-30)

One of the distinctions between discourse analysis (DA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) is that CDA addresses the *so-what-factor*. DA analysts generally analyze a piece of discourse (spoken or written text) from a linguistic perspective, without focusing on discourse, ideology and power in terms of the social issues; on the other hand, CDA analysts through the analysis of a piece of social discourse (spoken, written, semiotic, visual, etc. texts) focus on societal issues that perpetuate inequality. The relevance of DA is mostly confined to the confines of the academia and the research community. The usefulness of CDA goes beyond the academic and the scholarly world. Widdowson (2004) echoes this thought when he says:

Here was a development in linguistics which claimed to be applicable to the immediate and the pressing concerns of the non-scholarly world ... an applied linguistic approach to discourse analysis; but with an important difference. Whereas I had thought language teaching as the main area of practical concern, which discourse analysis could be relevant to, CDA had a much more ambitious and much more significant agenda. Its concern was to educate people more broadly in the abuse of power by linguistic means, to reveal how language is used for deception and distortion and the fostering of prejudice.

(Widdowson, 2004: viii)

One of the objectives of CDA is to focus on social issues and problems, and take up the cause of the oppressed and downtrodden people of a society. Some academics are more inclined to help what Fairclough (2001c) calls the 'losers of the society'—those who are marginalized, excluded, manipulated or simply taken advantage of because they are less informed about certain social practices. Such academics seem to be sceptical about DA in the sense that it is not far reaching enough to help unveil or expose social practices that are opaque in nature. They ask such questions as 'So what if you do DA?' or 'How can DA expose social inequality?'

Crossing the boundaries of the academia and venturing into the different realms of the social context, CDA addresses issues prevailing in the contemporary society. CDA analysts make it a point to take up the position of the uninformed people and endeavour to inform them about certain deceptive social practices that are practised by the select few, that is, those in positions of power; they (CDA analysts) do this by describing and explaining the relationships of social practices in terms of discourse, ideology and power. The goal of the (CDA) analysts is to curb the power of the select few who benefit at the expense of the common people, and thereby reduce social inequality. It is this addressing of social inequality, through the critical analysis of discourse that constitutes the *so-what-factor*.

2.5 *The Notion of Criticalness*

The notion of the 'critical' in CDA is derived from two traditions: one is based on the ideas of the Frankfurt School (especially the work of Habermas) and the other on a shared tradition with the so-called 'critical' linguistics (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 144).

Critical discourse analysis may be perceived as an application of a kind of critical analysis evolved within 'Western' Marxism to language (Fairclough, 2001a: 232-33). One of the main elements in the formation of Western Marxism is the Frankfurt School, which originated in Germany in the 1920s (*ibid.*). Though the legacy of Western Marxism (comprising key figures and movements in twentieth-century social and political thought like Antonio Gramsci, the Frankfurt School—including Jürgen Habermas—and Louis Althusser) frame the work of critical discourse analysts, they do not place themselves within the tradition explicitly (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 260). A reason for this may be that the work and the approaches used vary from analyst to analyst. However, looking at the theoretical origins of CDA in its entirety, the influence of those associated with Western Marxism as well as the concepts and ideals of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Michel Foucault (1972a, 1972b, 1979, 1981, 1984), Michel Pecheux (1982, 1988) and Julia Kristeva (1986) cannot be denied.

In a commodified consumer-oriented society, discourse, ideology and power, in relation to the social context, constitute the foundations of CDA. The production and reproduction of discourse, via certain discursive practices, project the ideology of a select few, endowing them with the power to propagate their hidden agenda(s) so as to create and / or sustain the unequal power relations in society. It is such agendas that CDA seeks to address and expose, thus empowering the common people and balancing social inequalities. CDA underlines the significance of discourse, ideology and power in the social milieu and societal practices.

2.6 *Approaches to CDA*

There are several approaches to CDA including those of Norman Fairclough (three-dimensional approach to discourse analysis), Teun van Dijk (socio-cognitive approach), Ruth Wodak (discourse-historical method) and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (socio-semiotic approach). These may be employed to analyze various (social) discourses, depending on what and how the practitioner wants to analyze. For the purpose of this paper I employ an adapted version of Fairclough's three-dimensional concept of CDA (1989, 1992, 1995a, 1999, 2001c, 2003) to analyze the data collected from the recruitment ads (in the research part of this paper), a

version which looks at discourse from the perspective of social change. But before we focus on Fairclough's framework, let us briefly touch upon the other approaches.

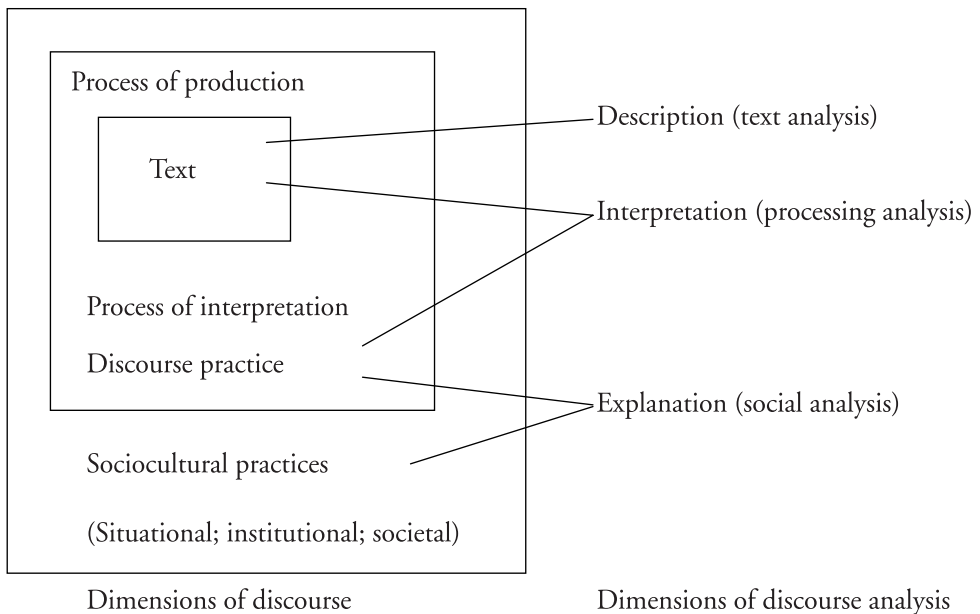
Though ideology is one of the central aspects of CDA, along with discourse and power, van Dijk's version of CDA (1998) adopts a multidisciplinary approach to the concept of ideology. According to him, most traditional approaches adopted to investigate ideology are 'rather of a *philosophical* than of a systematic, analytical and theoretical nature' (van Dijk, 1998: 313). In his groundbreaking book *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (1998) he uses a multidisciplinary approach to analyse and explain ideology in terms of the 'triangle' of (social) *cognition*, *society* and *discourse* (*ibid.*). According to the discourse-historical approach, developed by the 'Vienna School' (comprising of Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl, Gilbert Weiss, Rudolf de Cillia, Meyer, Bernd Matouschek, Janushek etc.), now synonymous with Wodak (see 1996; Titscher et al., 2000), in order to understand the present we need to look at the past. In other words, the historical context is always analyzed and integrated into the interpretation of discourses and texts (Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 70.) In their socio-semiotic approach, Kress and Leeuwen (1996: 1) looks at visual 'grammar', which describes the way in which people, places and things combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity. In their view (1996: 13; also see Kress and Leeuwen, 2001) the incursion of the visual into the many domains of public communication, where formerly language was the sole and dominant mode, is an equally significant theme for critical discourse analysis. Kress and Leeuwen (1996: 18) approaches communication from the social base, where meanings expressed by speakers, writers, printmakers, photographs, painters and sculptors are first and foremost meanings which arise out of the society in which individuals live and work.

2.6.1 Fairclough in Focus

Fairclough (1995a) believes that his framework is appropriate for studying socio-cultural change in the sense that it foregrounds links between social practice and language, and for the systematic investigation of connections between the nature of social process and properties of language texts. The approach also facilitates the integration of 'micro' analysis (of discourse) and 'macro' analysis (including analysis of language policy and planning). Furthermore, it is a 'critical' approach to discourse analysis in the sense that it sets out to make visible through analysis, and to criticize connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts, and whose effectiveness depends upon this opacity and to criticize them (*ibid.*).

Fairclough (1995a: 97) sees discourse and any particular instance of discursive practice, as simultaneously (i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and interpretation), (iii) and socio-cultural practice (see Figure 1). Moreover, he (*ibid.*) believes, a piece of discourse is embedded within socio-cultural practice at a number of levels—in the immediate situation, in the wider institution or organization, and at the societal level. For instance, one can read an interaction between marital partners in terms of their particular relationships, relationships between partners within the family as an institution, or gender relationships in the larger society (*ibid.*).

Fairclough's (1995a: 97) method of discourse analysis (Figure 1) comprises (i) linguistic *description* of the language text, (ii) *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive process and the text, and (iii) *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social process. He points out that a specific feature of this approach is that the link between socio-cultural practice and text is mediated by discourse practice: on the one hand, the process of text production and interpretation are shaped by (and help shape) the nature of social practice, and on the other the production process shapes (and leaves 'traces' in) the text, while the interpretation process operates upon 'cues' in the text (*ibid.*).



(Source: Fairclough, 1995a: 98)

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of Fairclough's three-dimensional approach

The theoretical details of the above three-dimensional approach to CDA may be found in Fairclough's *Language and Power* (1989, 2001c), *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (1995a), Titscher et al.'s *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (2000) and Jørgensen and Phillips's *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (2002).

With the purpose of extending his previously published work (Fairclough, 1989; 1992; 1995a; 1995b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001c), Fairclough (2003) in his later work directed his focus on doing a more detailed analysis of texts. Though CDA can draw upon a wide range of approaches to analysing text, Fairclough in *Discourse Analysis: Textual analysis for social research* (2003) emphasizes the linguistic analysis of texts, especially grammatical and semantic analysis.

3.0 CDA vs. Critical Thinking

The commonality between CDA and CT (critical thinking) is that they both share the concept of the 'critical'. In order to carry out the analysis of discourse from a CDA perspective one needs to be able to think critically. Brookfield (1987) identifies four components of CT:

- *Identifying and challenging assumptions is central to critical thinking;*
- *Challenging the importance of context is crucial to critical thinking;*
- *Critical thinkers try to imagine and explore alternatives;*
- *Imagining and exploring alternatives leads to reflective skepticism.*

(Brookfield, 1987: 7-9)

Various people interpret CT in different ways—from the ability to test meaning (Hullfish and Smith 1961), be analytical (Ennis, 1962), curious (D'Angelo, 1971), reflective (Kitchener, 1986), presumptuous (Scriven, 1976), and to display logical reasoning (Hallet, 1984; Ruggiero, 1975). Halpern (1984) perceives CT in terms of attempting to achieve a purposeful goal based on rationality, while O'Neill (1985) is more object-oriented in differentiating between prejudice and rationality and fact and belief. Brookfield (1987) points out that alternative interpretations of CT may be thought of in terms of *emancipatory learning to dialectical thinking*. From a more practical perspective, Epstein (2002: 1) suggests, 'thinking critically is a defense against a world of too much information and too many people trying to convince us'. Chaffee (2000) sees CT as a mechanism for solving problems by perceiving language and thought, and enduring practitioners with the ability to report, infer and judge so as to be able to organize constructive arguments.

Basically, all the different facets of CT are explicitly and implicitly embodied in the general concept of CDA, in the sense that they may be applicable in critically analyzing instances of social discourse in varying contexts and situations. The emancipatory notion of CDA and CT emphasizes an opaque issue that needs to be exposed and made known to the members of society. Fisher (2001) mentions that CT is sometimes referred to as 'critico-creative' thinking, and gives two related reasons for this view:

The first is that the term 'critical thinking' is sometimes thought to sound rather 'negative', as though one's only interest is in adversely criticizing other people's arguments and ideas. This would be a serious mistake since (and this is the second reason) to be good at evaluating arguments and ideas one often has to be very imaginative and creative about other possibilities, alternative considerations, different options and so on. ... In short, critical thinking is a kind of evaluative thinking—which involves both criticisms and creative thinking ...

(Fisher, 2001: 13)

The negative aspect of the 'critico-creative' notion of CT is probably the closest embodiment of CDA in the sense that critical discourse analysis explores unequal dimensions of power, between the oppressor and the oppressed, taking the position of the downtrodden. It is through the critical understanding of the societal structures in terms of discourse, power and ideology that a CDA practitioner is able to focus on social issues that seem to escape the notice of ordinary people. In so doing, CDA exposes the ideology of the elite who benefit from the social abuse of power at the expense of ordinary people.

4.0 CDA in Instigating the Inquisitiveness of the Rational Faculty

It should be acknowledged that CDA does not offer a set of rules or guidelines which may be learnt overnight or employed to make rational decisions the very next day. From an academic perspective, CDA requires extensive reading of the critical theories and literatures of various disciplines of social sciences and the humanities; although the knowledge gathered thereby needs to be reinforced by comprehending the social practices of society. However, in order to instigate the inquisitiveness of people about the basic notions of CDA, they need to view things from a more critical perspective, that is, be inquisitive, ask questions and not take anything for granted; in order to do this, social consciousness / awareness is pertinent. This would enable them to make informed choices and not be manipulated by the discourses that are presented to them.

4.1 Critical Perspective in Everyday Life

The contemporary age is so competitive that people may resort to unscrupulous means to outdo their competitors, even in the realms of education and charity. The modern era affords many choices, but before making decisions we need to ask questions and not take everything at face value. For instance, there are some educational institutions that may project the image, through prospectus and web pages, that they are world-class institutions of higher learning with state-of-the-art facilities and qualified academics dispensing quality education. In reality, however, they may be institutions operating from rented residential houses or office blocks, with part-time staff providing sub-standard education (see Haque 2005). Even when we purchase an item as simple as a bookmark, candy, calendars, and so on, in the name of charity, we need to ponder on how much of the money will actually go towards charitable causes. Sometimes, companies, organizations or direct selling agencies use the concept of 'donate to charity' as a ploy to market certain products and boost sales production.

In today's world, projecting an image appears to be a very significant way of promoting a product, service or a personality. In promoting a personality there seems to be wide market for marketing physical beauty in the form of cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, apparels, slimming products or apparatus, packaged diets, and so forth. The media plays a very crucial role in marketizing such products through newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet. A common strategy employed is the 'before and after' shots of people to show the effectiveness of the product(s) being promoted, with the help of renowned personalities. A general consumer trend is to accept whatever is presented to people as a simple solution, which they can use to eliminate their problems (be it obesity, deformities, ugliness, scars, acnes, lack of fashion sense, etc.) merely by buying the advertised product(s). What most people do not seem to realize is that the 'before and after' shots are not always the result of using merely the advertised product. For instance, buying a slimming product/apparatus or a diet package may not result in attaining a 'washboard figure'.

What is particular about 'before and after' shots (especially on the internet) is that they mention in the background in very light print '* RESULTS NOT TYPICAL'; implying that the 'after' shots may not be the typical result after using the advertised product(s). Most products using the 'before and after' shots do not mention the '* RESULTS NOT TYPICAL' clause, suggesting that the consumer can actually achieve a figure like the 'after' shot by using the advertised product(s).

It is when confronted with situations like the above that the knowledge of CDA can help readers in making informed choices rather than being influenced and manipulated by the discourse of marketization. Being critically informed, may lead readers to queries such as ‘What are the side effects of using a certain sliming product?’, ‘What are the side effects of cosmetic surgery?’, ‘Why consult a physician before using a certain product?’, etc. Before buying any ‘abdominal-instruments’ one should consider whether a mere ‘three minutes a day’ workout is enough to attain ‘six-pack’ abdominal muscles, as is promoted by various ‘Smart Shop’ commercials employing ‘before and after’ shots of models with washboard physique. In a report prepared by the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) consumer feature (September 2002) on weight loss advertisements, it was found that among the 300 ads that ran in 2001, researchers found that 55 percent made at least one false or unsubstantiated claim:

- *rapid weight loss (e.g. ‘You can loose 18 pounds in one week’)*
- *no need for dietary restrictions or exercise (e.g. ‘Eat as much as you want – the more you eat the more you’ll lose’)*
- *permanent weight loss (e.g. ‘take it off and keep it off’)*
- *lose weight despite previous failures (e.g. ‘Are you tired of fad diets that never seem to work?’)*
- *scientifically proven doctor-endorsed (e.g. ‘clinically tested’)*
- *money-back guarantees (e.g. ‘Yes. Guaranteed! You lose or it doesn’t cost you a penny’)*
- *safety (e.g. ‘proven 100% safe’ or ‘natural’)*
- *before-and-after testimonials (e.g. ‘7 weeks ago I weighed 268 pounds; now I’m down to 148 pounds!’)*

(FTC consumer feature, September 2002: 2-3)

The concept of ‘Mega Sales’ seems to be a marketization tool in consumer culture in recent years. Frequently employed sales tagline such as ‘Buy one free one’, seems to work wonders in appealing to consumers. The question that needs to be asked is, ‘Are we really being offered anything free?’ Apparently people seem to be influenced by the lexical choice ‘free’, and become manipulated into purchasing two items of a product that they may not have any real or urgent need for at that particular point in time. But the concept of getting something ‘free’ for the price of one seems a bargain that is too tempting to resist.

From a critical perspective, even the word ‘sale’ could be considered manipulative to some extent, because it gives consumers the promise of a ‘good deal’. Usually sales are announced to get rid of old stocks, which if retained on

the shelves would not get sold, and whose life would otherwise wither away. Most sales items are leftover stocks from the previous season, and may have gone out of fashion. New arrivals (of goods) are not usually included in sales. Sometimes, discounts or 'offer prices' may be considered on new arrivals, but that is purely for promotional reasons.

The proverb that we should not 'judge a book by its cover' may not always be applicable in the contemporary age. Sometimes people do 'judge a book by its cover', and this is where companies tend to cash in. Packaging is a very significant marketization strategy, giving the impression that superior external packaging reflects the quality of the contents. Consumers should also remember the proverb, 'all that glitters is not gold', implying that just because the packaging may be of superior quality does not necessarily mean that the content is of high quality too. They should take the time to read the information on the label and/or packaging, and not be influenced by the external features of consumer goods.

Consumables that are on sale or are offered as 'free' to increase the sales of other products are usually very close to their expiry dates. Consumers should be very careful when purchasing such items and use the consumables before the expiry dates. Otherwise, they risk their health for a few pennies.

The basic notion of CDA can help in such situations in the sense that it teaches us not to take everything at face value. We should inquire about things, even when we are not in doubt. By inquiring, by asking questions, by trying to understand the mechanics of the society and how things function, ordinary (uninformed) people can make informed choices and not be influenced and manipulated into making uninformed choices that may initially seem beneficial, but in reality may not be so.

The concept of asking questions, being inquisitive and not taking anything at face value could be introduced as a general elective subject at secondary and tertiary levels of our educational system. The media (e.g. print and electronic) can also play a significant role in sensitizing various issues and raising the general awareness of social inequalities by emphasizing how people are influenced, deceived, marginalized, and so forth. Just like De Bono (1970) thinks that people can be trained to think creatively, asking questions about various social norms and practices in order to understand how things function in a society can also be taught. If people are taught to think critically and creatively from an early stage in life, they will have a better chance of not being taken advantage of or manipulated.

4.2 CDA in Research: Exclusion in Recruitment Advertisements

Apart from the everyday use of CDA, it can also be used as a tool to analyze data for research purposes, helping us to focus on opaque (non-apparent) issues and exposing them to society at large. In doing so, society would be empowered and know what it did not know before, and people therefore would be able to make informed choices. The following pages examine ways in which job advertisements invite potential employees for various advertised positions using the critical discourse analytical (CDA) framework adapted from Fairclough (1995, 2003).

4.2.1 Method of Analysis

This part of the article will engage with Malaysian (recruitment)¹ advertising texts on different levels, but the main focus is on lexical choice, modality and hedging, and exclusion and inclusion of social actors. CDA's theoretical perspective, the assumption that language has a central role to play in the construction and maintenance of power, especially ideological power, that is the power to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense' (Fairclough, 1989), is of particular relevance here. Practitioners of CDA are particularly committed to unveiling the 'ideological loading of particular ways using language and the relations of power which underlie them' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258). Fairclough's approach in particular provides the tools necessary for detailed linguistic analysis which will bridge 'the well-known gap between micro- and macro-analysis of social phenomena' (van Dijk, 1990).

I will now examine the textual materials of selected Malaysian job advertisements in terms of content and language. Analysis of content involve screening the advertisements for unreasonable and unfair requirements which appear to be neutral on the surface, but which may in practice have a negative effect on a higher proportion of people from one group. For example, there are many job advertisements which discriminate indirectly by disproportionately disadvantaging people of certain ages (e.g. a job advertisement specifically requesting for a 23-29 year old to 'fit in with a young, vibrant and energetic team').

Textually, the analysis will focus on how the language of job advertisements can contribute to the exclusion of a significant proportion of people, who may have the right qualifications, skills and abilities for the job from the labour market. Such an analysis could reveal certain patterns of exclusion and

¹The study is based on my Ph.D. thesis entitled *Discourse of Exclusion: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Recruitment Advertisements*; the data for the research was collected from the Malaysian context.

discrimination, which have so far been (consciously or unconsciously) overlooked and under researched. By adopting Fairclough's three-dimensional view of discourse (discourse as text, as discursive practice and as social practice) and adapting his (2003) tool for text analysis, I intend to illustrate how textual analysis can be made to be more socially relevant and meaningful.

4.2.2 Textual Material for Critical Analysis

According to Fairclough (2003: 202), the aim of critical social research is 'better understanding of how societies work and [to] produce both beneficial and detrimental effects and [show] how the detrimental effects can be mitigated if not eliminated'. As regards job advertisements, the detrimental effect could be the exclusion of the best possible people from applying due to the lack of some criteria which have no direct relevance to the job. I concur with Fairclough in accepting that the social effects of discourse can only be understood by examining the actual instances of language in use, that is texts. Texts constitute a major source of evidence for empirical claims about social structures, social relations and ongoing processes. The data was gathered from two Malaysian national English newspapers, *The Star* and the *Sunday Star*; the former being a daily and the later a weekly. Thus, the data selected for critical analysis in this article is drawn from various classified sections (e.g. *Recruitment*, *Metro Classifieds* and *Classifieds*) of these newspapers, and cover three different months (September 2001, February 2004 and October 2004), over a period of thirty-eight months. The data is sufficient to highlight the general patterns of Malaysian recruitment advertisements. The aim here is to determine what the discriminatory criteria are and how they are semiotically constructed. By choosing different periods of time an 'unfair hiring practice' is exposed as something which is 'ongoing' and not an 'one-off' thing.

4.2.3 Analysis of content

Analysis of content will be carried out simultaneously with analysis of form because content is necessarily realised in form and different content entails different form and vice versa. Since, job advertisements are directed towards certain target groups the choice of language and semiotic features in job advertisements play a significant role in conveying the preferred meaning.

Examination of the data shows that the primary criteria of exclusion, which can be directly or indirectly discriminatory, are socio-economic condition (henceforth SEC), gender, age, ethnicity, and language. Discrimination tends to treat a person or a group of persons less favourably because of a particular trait,

which is beyond his/her/their control. Socio-economic conditions for example, includes possession of a car, motorcycle and/or a driving licence, mobile phone and so forth. This can be discriminatory as it indicates a preference for a certain group in society equipped with the necessary economic means. Stating that applicants should belong to a socially or genetically defined sub-group (e.g. either a woman or a man, or someone who speaks a particular dialect or is from a particular ethnic group or of a certain age) is discriminatory especially when they are of no relevance to a job. The number of sexist and ageist job advertisements in the newspapers is a testament to how many employers in Malaysia still tie gender and age to competencies. Of course not all exclusionary criteria are discriminatory. Some are necessary and are directly related to the job to be performed and to essential duties related to the position, for instance. degrees/education required, experience, demonstrated excellence in writing/communication skills, physical requirements for essential duties, etc.


In the advertisement itself, the exclusionary criteria are presented in the form of a list sequentially arranged no doubt in terms of priority. How the various criteria are sequenced in the list is important as this can contribute to the foregrounding of certain criteria and the backgrounding of others. This is especially significant when the first criterion itself favours a particular class of individuals over other groups. In the light of the above discussion, let us now examine the following advertisements:

SALES	executives
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Male, age between 28-40 • Min. diploma; 3 yrs outdoor sales exp • Able to travel outstation • Fluent in written and spoken English • Opportunity for exposure to international trading
	administrator exec.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female; preferably Chinese, age 30 & above • Proficient in English & Chinese • Min. 3 yrs experience & computer literate • Opportunity for exposure to international trading
	<p>A well established paper trading company in Sunway urgently needs applicants to fill the above positions.</p> <p>Call Frances for an immediate interview.</p> <p>03-5636 8336</p>

(Source: StarMetro Classifieds pullout from the Star dated 24.02.2004)
Advertisement 1

In Advertisement 1, the first line in the list of requirements in the two positions advertised include inherent characteristics such as ethnicity (Chinese), gender (male or female) and age limits (between 28-40; 30 and above). The next line contains the qualification of the potential candidate. The ordering of the first experience and line seems to suggest that sex, ethnicity and age are more important than qualification. This may result in the favouring of a particular class of individuals over other groups. It is also interesting to note here that in Advertisement 1, which is for a position which requires a lot of travelling, the text producer specifies preference for male applicants with a specific age range.

The preferred criteria can also be foregrounded by colour contrast. In Advertisement 2, the black and white combination as well as the abbreviated representations of the specific gender (e.g. M and F) is an effective way of highlighting the preference for a specific sex, that is, male or female. Notice the location of the abbreviation, which clearly associates the post with a specific gender:

 CERAGEM MALAYSIA Sdn.Bhd	
This global company dealing with the medical equipment. (Already advanced more than 30 countries in the world)	
MANAGER	M
▪ Min. Colleague graduated	
ADMINISTRATION	F
▪ Experienced hands	
TECHNICIAN	M
▪ Min. Above SPM	
STAFF	F
▪ No limit of Age & Education	
No.26-3-3 rd F/L JI.24/70A Desa Sri Hartamas 50480 K.L	
Contact No: 012-258-1130 (Ms. Lesley)	

(Source: StarMetro Classifieds pullout from the Star dated 30.10.2004)

Advertisement 2

Given such advertisements there is a strong possibility that people who have the 'required' qualifications, experience and abilities for the jobs but do not have the 'preferred' requirements as mentioned in the ad will not apply, thus

reducing the pool of potential employees. The prioritisation of discriminatory hiring criteria may send the wrong message to job applicants that is, that qualification and experience are secondary to age, gender and ethnicity.

4.2.4 Linguistic analysis

In this section I will first examine how the text producer linguistically presents exclusionary requirements in terms of choice of modality, lexical choice and inclusion and exclusion of social actors. I should stress that I regard these choices as ideologically significant.

4.2.4.1 Choice of modality and lexis

Job advertisements clearly reflect the authority of the potential employer. The first major interpersonal orientation in any discourse of job advertisements is one of authority and power. The presence of explicit obligational meanings in most advertisements examined marks the unequal power relations. The text producer who writes on behalf of the potential employer positions the latter unambiguously as someone with authority to demand something from the potential applicant. The power of the organisation is overtly expressed and readers are positioned as powerless applicants. The members of the organization consider themselves as potential employers having authority and view the readers as potential job seekers with no authority

The requirements included in the text are expressed in overtly obligational forms using modality. Most modal verbs in the data are those that express compulsion which foreground the degree of commitment that ranges from high to low, for instance ‘must’, ‘should’, ‘can’, etc. This is not surprising since the main purpose of a job advertisement is to make known to the applicant what the prospective employer requires of them. Fairclough (2003: 171) schematically outlines the degree of commitment to obligation/necessity as follows (Table1):

Table 1: Degree of Commitment

Degree of commitment	Obligation	Modal verbs
High	Required	Must
Medium	Supposed	Should
Low	Allowed	Can

The organisation claims authority with respect to what kind of candidate it is looking for. The relationship as reflected in the sample sentences below is an unequal one, with the text producer fully in control of the text and taking no measures to mitigate the demands he/she makes of the potential applicant. Authority is marked through strong deontic modality such as "must", make the following requirements obligatory:

1. *Must possess own transport.*
2. *Must possess valid driving licence and own transport.*
3. *Must possess own transport with a valid driving licence and willing to travel extensively.*
4. *Must be fluent in Mandarin and Hokkien.*
5. *Must speak Chinese dialects.*
6. *Candidates must be above 22 years of age.*

In sentences 1 to 6, meanings of requirement and obligation are explicitly worded. 'Must' indicates that the potential applicant is expected to have the above pre-requisites which range from possessing "own car" and/or a driving licence, being fluent in a particular language or dialect to being of a particular age. Requirement 6 tends to exclude applicants below 22 years of age. Requirements 4 and 5 seem to marginalize those (applicants) who cannot speak the required language or dialect. One consequence of the above requirements is the exclusion of those who do not have the required prerequisites though they may have the relevant qualifications and skills.

Besides 'must' the other modals used include 'should' which involves a lesser degree of compulsion than 'must':

- *Should possess own car with valid driving licence.*
- *Should be at least in his / her thirties.*

'Must' reflects an obligatory condition whereas 'should' reflects a condition that is preferred; both assume that the author of the obligation or preference has the power to demand.

Obligation is also expressed lexically using the adverb 'only' as is illustrated in the examples below:

1. *Male only*
2. *Age between 18-35 only*
3. *Chinese female only*
4. *(Chinese Only)*
5. *Female only*

'Only' here means 'exclusively' and leaves no option. The use of 'only' here is different from its use in another context, e.g. 'Only RM5', which means 'no more than'. Notice how the requirements are worded, brief and to the point. This could be due to the need to reduce the number of words to cut cost.

Sometimes the requirements are implicitly worded, being presented as preference rather than necessity, thus softening the illocutionary force of the statement. Some of the hedging devices used include *preferably*, *preferred*, *preference*, *advantage*, *(added) advantage*, *encourage*, *welcome*. Hedging signals a reduced illocutionary commitment on the side of the text producer. Although these devices reduce the strength of the obligation, the exclusionary prerequisites are still foregrounded. The following are some sample sentences:

1. *Preferably with own transport*
2. *Preference will be given to those with transport*
3. *Added advantage if you possess own transport*
4. *Male preferred*
5. *Female preferred*
6. *Preferably male*
7. *Preferably female*
8. *Males are encouraged to apply*
9. *Females are encouraged to apply*
10. *(SPM Female Candidates are welcome)*
11. *Preferably aged below 28 yrs*
12. *Preferably Chinese*
13. *Chinese candidates preferable*
14. *Chinese preferred*
15. *Preferably able to speak in Cantonese*
16. *Well [sic] command of English and Chinese will be an advantage*

The exclusionary criteria are gender, ethnicity and age and these, as discussed earlier, can be discriminatory. The above hedging devices (e.g. *preferably*, *are encouraged*, *added advantage*, *are welcome*) give the impression that candidates without the requirement could still be appointed. However, from the candidate's point of view the hedging devices are more likely to be seen as more than mere linguistic devices and that an application would almost certainly be a waste of time. By using such devices, potential employers could in practice deter applicants from applying while claiming in principle not to be discriminatory at all. What is required in practice is a more positive statement that employers promote equal opportunities and positively invite applications from groups who

are likely to be deterred.

Another common device used by advertisers is what is known as a 'tag on', whereby some form of exclusionary criteria (SEC in this case) is tagged on to the end of other job requirements (that usually bears no connection to the exclusionary criteria), for example:

1. *Min SPM / MCE qualification and possess own transport*
2. *Computer literate and possess own transport*
3. *Good communication, positive attitude & possess own transport*
4. *Pleasant, tactful, enthusiastic and customer-focus, possess own transport*

The essential characteristic of a 'tag-on' is that it is not logically related to the item to which it is conjoined. The first item is a legitimate and necessary requirement, whereas the tag-on is exclusionary and discriminatory especially when it is not related to the performance of the job.

4.2.4.2 Social Actors

Social actors are participants in social processes, and in this communicative event, the main social actors are the potential employee and the potential employer. Although the text producer is also a participant, he / she is totally silent. Being only the mouthpiece of the organisation, the total suppression of his / her role is understandable. Just as there are lexical choices and modality choices, there are also choices in the representation of social actors that is, in terms of whether they are made explicit or left implicit. According to Fairclough (2003), the choice of excluding or including the social actors may be ideologically significant. When included, potential employees are realised as nouns and pronouns. When excluded, they can either be suppressed (i.e. not mentioned in the text at all) or backgrounded (i.e. mentioned somewhere in the text, but having to be inferred in one or more places). In many of the job advertisements examined, it was found that the requirements based on SEC are articulated without the social actors as illustrated below:

- *Own motorbike*
- *Own car*
- *Own vehicle*
- *Own transport*
- *Possess motorbike*
- *Possess Class 3 Driving Licence*
- *Possess own motorcycle*

- *Possess own vehicle*
- *Have own transportation tool*
- *Have own transport*
- *Has own transport*
- *Valid driving license*
- *Class 3 driving license*
- *With own transport*

The above requirements are articulated in incomplete sentences, without the article and sometimes without the verb (e.g. *Valid driving licence, Class 3 driving licence*). They do not adhere to the normal structure of subject-verb-object. They are brief and to the point, and despite the absence of the verb and the subject we know what the potential employer wants. The requirements are stated as an existing state of affair and as such cannot be challenged. By presenting the statement of requirement without any social actors, who is doing the excluding or marginalising and who is being excluded are not made explicit or apparent, and the requirement becomes a mere condition which has to be fulfilled.

In recruitment prerequisites that adhere to the subject-verb-object formula, addressees are realised in the clause as pronouns (he, she, you) and nouns (candidate/the candidate, candidates, applicants). Notice that representations of the addressees are personal and referred to both individually (the candidate) and as a group (candidates/applicants). The following are some sample sentences offered for further examination:

1. ***He/She** must possess own transport and [sic] able to travel extensively within Malaysia.*
2. *The company would require **you** to possess your own transport and be willing to travel*
3. *Added advantage if **you** possess own transport*
4. ***Candidate** must possess own transport*
5. ***The candidate** should be between 24-30 years old and has a valid Class D driving licence.*
6. ***Candidates** should be responsible, self-motivated, possess own transport and be willing to work the necessary hours to meet project deadlines.*
7. ***Applicants** should have their own transportation*

The authority of the company is marked through explicit obligational modalities such as *Applicants must ...; Applicants should ...* which is a

characteristic of this discourse. By making explicit references to readers as applicants/candidates, they are excluded from being applicants, let alone employees.

4.2.5 Including the Excluded

The purpose of job advertisements is to reach the largest qualified audience. This means the wording of the advertisements should work to include all possible recruits. Restrictions placed on the number of people who can be evaluated according to certain criteria like age, gender, ethnicity and so forth can only reduce the effectiveness of the selection. The hiring criteria and the way they are presented can potentially restrict certain people from applying for certain posts. When you reduce the size of a sample, you reduce the range of measured abilities in the sample. If a selection pool is limited to those possessing a car, having a driving licence and below 21 years old, the number of people even minimally eligible to fill a position will drop drastically. It is highly probable that the best candidate in a restricted sample will be not as good on any measurable characteristics than the best candidate in an unrestricted sample.

In recruitment advertisements, any statements inviting applicants of diverse groups would set a positive tone and an inclusive platform for everyone to apply. A fair job advertisement is one which acknowledges diversity in potential job applicants and recognises the need to choose the best possible people from the widest pool of potential employees. Instead of being exclusionary it should be inclusionary and based on ability. Fair hiring criteria are those that are objective and directly related to the job to be performed and to essential duties related to the position.

5.0 Conclusion

Are you tired of being conned? Of falling for every pitch? Of making bad decisions? Of fooling yourself? Or just being confused?

(Epstein, 2002: 1)

Almost everyone can use their rational faculty to a greater or lesser extent. However, using it to critically make informed choices on the spur of the moment is another matter. Being able to think critically is generally associated with the level of intelligence and intellectuality. Fisher (2002: 1) points out that in recent years 'critical thinking' has become something of a 'buzz word' in educational circles. Previously, educators emphasized teaching information and content and not 'thinking skills'. Edward de Bono (1970) was one of the pioneers in

suggesting that 'thinking skills' could be systematically taught and learned, and presented the world with his concept of 'lateral thinking'. On the other hand, CDA analyzes the content of social discourse (be it visual, verbal, semiotic, and so on) to expose non-apparent issues that plague society. In the tradition of critical theory, it aims to make transparent the discursive aspects of social disparity and inequalities; hence, taking up the position of the underprivileged, it (CDA) tries to expose the (linguistic) means used by the privileged to stabilize or even intensify iniquities in society (Meyer, 2001: 30).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), unlike critical thinking (CT), is not so straightforward. To comprehend the in-depth notion of 'critical', extensive reading is required into the realms of the various disciplines of the social science and the humanities, as was mentioned earlier. However, does this imply that everyone has to be voracious readers to apply CDA in day-to-day-life? To make informed choices and not be manipulated by the commonsensical ideologies of the select few, one needs to be socially conscious. Whether this awareness is attained through basic education introduced in our education system, media sensitization (awareness), specific training in critical and creative thinking, asking questions, knowing the environment, the facts, basic human rights, society at large, or by being aware of social issues they all tend to make people more inquisitive to the point that they may experience for themselves how the mechanics of manipulation is at work. In doing so, community members can become socially empowered to decipher the unequal play of power. Maintaining a critical outlook towards life and the environment around us, and questioning social norms and practices, subconsciously instigate the inquisitiveness of our rational faculty.

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