

# Critical Discourse Analysis. Theory and Interdisciplinarity

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With the discipline of political science becoming increasingly reflective about its study matters, its explanatory potential, and its own disciplinary boundaries, the so-called post-positivist theories and methodologies, such as the critical discourse analysis (CDA), have recently generated a spate of genuine scientific interest. Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak's edited volume *Critical Discourse Analysis. Theory and Interdisciplinarity* (2003) is an example (and result) of such interest as it challenges the conventional thinking along rigid disciplinary lines in the study of politics. Its main goal is to investigate the topic of interdisciplinarity in relation to the methodological opportunities offered by CDA. It thus brings together scholars from social and linguistic studies and philosophy in order to investigate how bridges between their different approaches can be constructed and common 'conceptual tools' developed (pp.8-10). Therefore, two main and interrelated questions that this volume poses concern (i) the dynamics of theory formation in political research and (ii) the advantages and problems related to conducting an interdisciplinary study within the field of CDA.

This volume is divided into three distinctive parts. The first one includes conceptual and epistemological discussions e.g. about the meaning of the 'critical approach' towards the mainstream views in social sciences (Billing, pp. 37-40), the nature of the post-positivist research in general and the so-called 'second epistemological break' (Guoveia, pp.50-59) and the notion of 'reflexivity' and 'self-criticism' in CDA (Jørgensen, pp.67-69). All these contributions demonstrate that in spite of some shared fundamental assumptions (as its incredulity towards 'meta-narratives', etc.), CDA 'cannot be viewed as a holistic or closed paradigm' and that its studies 'are multifarious, [and] derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds and oriented towards very different data and methodologies' (p.12).

The second part deals with the problematic issue of conducting the CDA research in practical terms. Here Dascal presents a fascinating study of fluctuating Arab and Jew identities of inhabitants in Israel, where he looks at 'identity' as a quality of self-understanding achieved through a formation of dichotomous categories such as 'democracy vs ethnicity, trust vs suspicion, 'isrealization' vs 'palestinization', [...] cultivation of difference vs assimilation, equality vs discrimination', etc. (pp.152-153). Another contribution comes from Lemke who analyses the role of texts (understood as constitutive of 'social structuration', p.130) in the technologies of social organization (pp.132-147), and from Martin who examines the discursive representation of the aboriginal Australians in the writings of the European incomers (pp. 199-219). Here Martin makes an important difference between the modern and poststructuralist initiatives to conclude that the latter provided an insightful *problematization* of the 'representation of' and 'giving voice to' Indigenous Australians, as well as of 'how we read the voices that are presented to us, and how we read the discourse enacting those presentations' (p.215).

The third part shifts from the issue of interdisciplinarity to that of theory formation. Here O'Connor investigate addicts' and prisoners' autobiographical narrations, and subsequently theorizes on the topic of 'subjectivity' both on the part of the articulator and the recipient (pp.223-240). In another chapter Rojo and Esteban link linguistics with gender perspective in order to analyse different management models in the Spanish context and bring up the question of power relations in institutions and that of 'discursive practices and the ideological production, reproduction and justification of the gender relations of domination' (p.28 and 244-271). Finally, Anthonissen studies the institution of printed media censorship in South Africa in relation to the policies of apartheid (pp.297-311). She focuses in particular on the discourse of visual media, which turned out to be more frequently employed for the purpose of communicating the censored information than the verbal means.

Both on the level of theory and practical research this contribution has much to offer to those who employ CDA and interdisciplinary methods in their study of *the political*. This is particularly

valuable if one considers that even though the concept of interdisciplinarity has entered the scientific jargon for good, so far its understanding has been given little reflective examination (for an interesting exception see Nicolescu 2002). An additional merit of this volume is that it goes beyond mere introduction to CDA and that it trespasses questions about its theoretical validity and soundness. Rather, it explores the problematic issues of *operationlisation* of discourse theory and gives much inspiration and insight into different research paths that CDA can take. Its aim to show the multiplicity CDA methods in practice, however, gives also an overall impression of disarray as to its structure and final conclusions (which are actually missing from the volume). It seems that complexity and richness of the studies of discourse is shown at the cost of parsimonious explanation of *the political*.

Finally, this volume attempts to provide an answer (at least indirectly) to the conventional criticism of any post-positivist approaches, namely about their unavoidable relativist (and nihilist) implications. It thus denies the claims that CDA *by definition* remains a descriptive (and not analytical) approach and is incapable of taking a normative stance to ethical issues in politics (cf. e.g. Hay 2002). It shows how post-positivism – even if unable to provide sufficient defence to such criticism – can proceed further in developing its methodology, remain both critical and prescriptive view and be innovative in its findings.

**Literature:**

Hay, Collin, (2002) *Political Analysis. A Critical Introduction*, New York: Palgrave.

Nicolescu, Basarab, (2002) *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*, New York: SUNY.