

Critical Discourse Analysis and Its Pedagogical Implications for English Major Education in Chinese Universities

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ABSTRACT

The past decades have witnessed the process of educators and researchers reaching a consensus: Language education should not merely be focused on a linguistic level. A great number of studies have done in conceptualizing socio-cultural element of language education. The elements encompass people's emotions, attitudes, identities, beliefs and so on. Many perspectives and tools are developed for researchers to dig into 'what is behind language' and 'what language can do', such as critical linguistic (Cling) and systematic functional linguistic (SFL). Among these approaches, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) stands out with a particular focus on power and ideology, and it is combined by educators into developing social-guided and cultural-based teaching method. In this paper, we will present studies on the relations between language and power and analyse CDA as an approach to understand, study, and teach the power of language in part one; then review existing researches of CDA-based pedagogy in language classrooms in part two. In the third and fourth part, investigations will be conducted in discussing the feasibility of adopting CDA in teaching English majors in Chinese universities, and further implications will be summarised from both students and teachers perspectives.

KEYWORDS

critical discourse analysis; CDA-based language teaching pedagogy; Chinese college education; English majors

1 The Power of Language and Its Research Significance to Language Education

Associating power with language marks a big step in the development of a sociocultural approach to language education. In the view of most linguistics, the relations between language and power can be summarized as: interplaying, mutually-reflecting and mutually-affecting^[8].

On the one hand, people find out that language has power. For example, it is clear that language is used as a weapon in argument or negotiation; and mass media may make use of language to affect public opinions and attitudes. According to Norman Fairclough, power can be exercised through both 'coercion' and 'consent'^[6]. Wodak points out that language can also be used to challenge and control power^[19], which means it can be used to change and balance the distributions of power. The power of language is discovered layer by layer through years of studying. Power is classified into instrumental power and influential power according to its effect, while Fairclough identifies 'power in discourse' and 'power behind discourse' as two major sections of language power^[6]. On the other hand, power can determine the development of a certain language. The dominance of English in the global language context and the researches done in the field of language policy are both representative examples.

Fairclough points out the mobility of power, and he argues that power is never definitely held by any one person^[6], which proves that studying the power of language meets the innovation requirement of language education. Besides, the increasingly globalizing world requires learners to be capable of coping with various and complex language situations through selectively using 'powerful' or 'powerless' language.

A Chinese proverb can be used as an analogy here: 'Give people fish and you feed them for a day; teach them how to fish and you feed them for a lifetime'. Similarly, responsible language teachers will teach students how to do things with words. That is to say, cultivating students with the ability to identify how other people manipulate power in discourse and know how to make use of power in diverse context through 'linguaging' should be taken as language educators as an important teaching goal.

As a relatively new breakthrough in research on discourse and power^[1], Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) acts as one perspective to investigate the power of language. CDA approach is defined in different ways by scholars, and Blackledge even argues that CDA resists definition due to its nature^[1]. Overall, two key phrases occupy the core of its interpretation. The first one is 'power and ideology'. Bloome and Carter claim that CDA examines power and ideologies embedded in the text^[2] and according to Corson^[3], CDA focuses directly on power factors. In other words, CDA seeks to uncover the hidden ideology and power in language. The second one is 'challenge hegemony'. CDA raises people's awareness of how language is used to reinforce social inequalities^[11]. It has a 'positive emancipatory' function^[8], and it is a way to pose a challenge to asymmetrical power distribution^[9]. Norman Fairclough is seen as a notable and leading figure in the conceptualizing CDA approach. According to his argument, CDA approach confirms the inseparable and interactional relations between discourse and society^[8], and it bridges the gap between linguistics and social science^[1]. Fairclough has outlined a three-tiered framework for CDA approach, which includes analysis of text (description), discursive practice

(interpretation) and sociocultural practice (explanation)^[6].

2 Review of the Studies on the Application of CDA in Language Education

The application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in language education has been a topic of interest for decades. According to Rogers et al., Critical discourse analysis has been adopted into various domains in educational research^[16], such as political discourse, economic discourse, media language and institutional discourse. Rebecca Rogers states that plenty of empirical studies has been conducted on the basis of the commensurability existing between educational research and CDA^[17]. All in all, CDA is increasingly becoming mainstream in academic studies, and it brings the critical tradition into language studies^[7]. Flowerdew points out that the application of CDA in teaching mainly focus on three aspects^[8]. Firstly, CDA acts crucially in teacher education. Mulumba studied how to deploy critical analyzing techniques in enriching student teachers' knowledge base^[14]. Secondly, the designing of the learning materials and textbooks are judged under the principles of CDA. Most importantly, CDA is viewed as a new way to raise learners' Critical Language Awareness (CLA). The CLA movement developed by Fairclough and other scholars aims at bringing CDA approach into classroom practice^[8].

Evident studies have been done in promoting learners' language awareness through developing CDA-based teaching activities. Wallace's research takes CDA into consideration, and he has identified the key principles for critical reading class^[20]. Cots advocates for the use of CDA-related instructions in teaching process^[4]; he has offered a simplified version of Fairclough's CDA framework and designed relevant teaching activities based on that. Dar, Shams and Rahimi present the explicit CDA techniques and have tested their effectiveness of raising students' critical thinking ability in reading classroom^[5]. Hazaea and Alzubi's experiment in 2017 has also verified the vital role of CDA-based instructions on teaching reading in EFL context^[10].

Most studies focus on evaluating CDA as an instruction to cultivating students' ability of critical reading and writing. Debates regarding to the studies lie in its limitations. For examples, explicit instruction of classroom task-based activities is still lacking, and more research is needed in analyzing multi-model texts such as hyper-texts and network communication^[16].

3 Designing CDA-based Instructions in College English Class in China

In the past decade, research on CDA experienced remarkable growth and prosperity in China, with it expanding to encompass wide array of disciplines, such as corpus linguistics, cognitive science, multi-modality, translation studies, eco-linguistics, and cultural heritage, among which educational studies shine particular brightly. Topic under exploration involve textbook development, classroom discourse between teachers and students, and the institutional discourse in educational setting^[18].

Theoretically, researchers have systematically elaborated that language expression has the characteristics of textuality, cognitive nature, and sociality, and CDA, originated from critical linguistics, emphasizes the social significance of language^[15]. Their studies have laid a solid foundation for teaching design, helping teachers to clarify the core essence and teaching value of CDA.

In terms of practical application, research on the use of critical discourse analysis in college English classrooms has primarily focused on English reading instruction. Taking English news reading class as an example, Lu utilized Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis framework to analyze classification and modality systems, guiding students to uncover the ideologies behind news texts and develop critical reading habit^[12]. This demonstrates that CDA significantly enhances students' information analysis abilities and their understanding of the power dynamics and ideologies embedded in language.

In the field of writing and integrated reading-writing instruction, research on CDA-based pedagogy has also made progress. Man argues that English reading and writing courses are both discourse-centered, and CDA can provide new perspectives for reforming integrated reading-writing courses^[13]. Under the guidance of CDA, students 'deconstruct' ideologies and conduct in-depth meaning making during reading, and they 'reconstruct' discourse in writing, achieving a transformation from input to output. Qiu emphasizes that incorporating CDA into English writing lessons for language majors can help students foster a positive interaction between writers and readers^[15].

In summary, domestic research on CDA-based instructional design in college English classrooms has been conducted across various areas, including reading, writing, and integrated courses, achieving notable outcomes. These efforts have provided abundant theoretical and practical insights for future teaching practices. However, further exploration is still needed to systematically and effectively incorporate CDA into routine teaching, optimizing instructional design to suit different student backgrounds and needs. This would maximize the pedagogical potential of CDA.

4 Pedagogical Implications for English Major Education

Professional core competencies are a concentrated embodiment of the educational value of a discipline. In the new era, the cultivation of English majors in Chinese universities has also embraced new goals. Beyond enhancing language skills, the development of English major now places greater emphasis on fostering students' critical thinking, information literacy, intercultural communication skills, and global perspectives. In the context of economic and cultural globalization, English majors in China are expected to possess sharp critical thinking abilities, enabling them to think independently and avoid blind conformity, thus forming their unique insights.

Moreover, with the new media industry thriving in today's world, English curricula must integrate with relevant technologies to strengthen students' proficiency in multimedia usage and their intercultural communication skills. The design of major courses should help students to develop their ability to efficiently retrieve, analyze and synthesize new media resources. Simultaneously, students' academic awareness will be systematically fostered, with a particular emphasis on cultivating their capacity to critically evaluate the credibility, authority, and objectivity of information sources and content—an indispensable competency in the context of the AI era. CDA will guide them to question the status quo, to challenge assumptions, and to recognize the ways in which language can both reflect and shape reality.

In summary, concepts related to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) should be integrated into the curriculum design of English programs in Chinese universities. From a linguistic perspective, this integration can enhance students' information literacy by progressively developing their ability to evaluate information authority and credibility (during the information retrieval stage), to engage in critical inquiry and reflection (during the information input stage), and apply language functions effectively (during the information output stage). Furthermore, the professional development of English faculty should emphasize training in discourse literacy to ensure the instructors are well-equipped to guide students in these areas.

5 Conclusion

Chinese TESOL teachers are being inspired by all the works done in the CDA fields and have understood how to discover knowledge behind the language and how language are used as a weapon to reach various ends^[5]. Just as demonstrated above, the importance of teaching not only the 'words' but also the 'implication' and 'power' of the words should be taken as a major principle in the pedagogical process for all language educators in Chinese colleges.

Introducing CDA approach to college students can better prepare them to be a critical reader, writer and researcher in the future. Relevant CDA techniques can be used to judge the reliability of the existing information, especially those generated by artificial intelligence. What's more, the fast-changing world requires language learners to have the ability to mobilize the power of language in different language environments. This stimulates Chinese students to employ CDA-related theory in their communications with other people in the global context.

In conclusion, for language educators, teaching both language and power allows them to cultivate critical readers, independent learners and responsible global citizens; and for every global citizen, pursuing peace and equality in the world is the common goal, and CDA function as a power-balancing platform to get closer to that end.

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