

ANALYSING DISCOURSE

Textual analysis for social research

NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH



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Analysing Discourse

'This is an important text which highlights not only why discourse analysis should be a central method within social science but, unusually, provides the resources necessary for putting this into practice. The book will be an inspiration for social scientists wishing to explore, in a sophisticated way, the importance of language and meaning making in social life.'

Annette Hastings, Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, UK

'Covers a wide range of important contemporary concepts in social and political theory taken from many different sources and disciplines. I would certainly recommend it to other researchers in the field as a thought-provoking contribution to critical discourse analysis.'

Ulrike Meinhof, School of Modern Languages, University of Southampton, UK

Analysing Discourse is an accessible introduction to text and discourse analysis for all students and researchers working with real language data.

Students across disciplines rely on texts, conversations or interviews in their research. Many discover that they cannot get as much from this data as they would like, because they are unsure about exactly how to analyse their material. This book provides a step-by-step guide to using and investigating real language data, helping students and researchers to get the most out of their resources.

Drawing on a range of social theorists from Bourdieu to Habermas, as well as his own research, Fairclough's book presents a form of language analysis with a consistently social perspective. His approach is illustrated by and investigated through a range of real texts, from political speeches to management consultancy and broadcast news reports.

Offering accessible summaries, an appendix of examples and a glossary of terms and key theorists, *Analysing Discourse* is an essential resource for anyone using and investigating real language data.

Norman Fairclough is Professor of Language in Social Life at Lancaster University, UK. He has published seven books in the area of critical discourse analysis, including *New Labour, New Language?* (Routledge, 2000), *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1995) and *Language and Power* (second edition, 2001).

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1 Introduction

This book is written with two main types of reader in mind: students and researchers in social science and humanities who have little if any background in language analysis (e.g. in Sociology, Political Science, Education, Geography, History, Social Administration, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Women's Studies); and students and researchers specializing in language.

People working in various areas of social science are often confronted with questions about language, and are often working with language materials – written texts, or conversation, or research interviews. However, my experience in teaching discourse analysis (for instance in the Faculty of Social Science research training programme at Lancaster University) indicates that there is widespread uncertainty about how to analyse such language material. I find that research students in Social Sciences often see the need to say more detailed things about their language data than they feel equipped to do. The prospect of following courses or reading books in Linguistics is generally daunting to them – not least because much of contemporary Linguistics is quite unsuitable for their purposes (especially the 'formal linguistics' which is concerned with abstract properties of human language, and has little to offer in the analysis of what people say or write). This book aims to provide a useable framework for analysing spoken or written language for people in social sciences and humanities with little or no background in language study, presented in a way which suggests how language analysis may enhance research into a number of issues which concern social scientists.

The book can also be seen as an introduction to *social* analysis of spoken and written language for people who already have some background in language analysis. There have been significant moves towards analysing language socially within Linguistics in recent decades – sociolinguistics and discourse analysis are now well-established parts of the field. But there are two limitations in most of this work which in this book I hope to begin to correct. The first is that themes and issues which interest social researchers have been taken up only to a rather limited extent. The second is that it is difficult to think of a relatively detailed presentation of

2 Introduction

a framework for linguistic analysis in the existing literature which indicates how that framework might fruitfully be used to address a range of issues in social research. That is my aim in this book.

I envisage the book being used in a variety of ways. It is suitable for use as a coursebook for second or third year undergraduates, MA students and research students both in courses in research methods in social science departments, and in courses in analysis of language use in language departments. But it could also be used outside the context of a course by research students and academics in social science and humanities who are looking for a socially-oriented introduction to analysis of spoken and written language.

Given that readers are likely to vary considerably in their familiarity with the concepts and categories I draw from social research and discourse and text analysis, I have included glossaries of key terms and key people (pages xxx – xxx), and references for them which in some cases extend the sources I have referred to in the main text of the book. Terms included in the glossaries are printed in **bold** at the point where they are first used.

Social analysis, discourse analysis, text analysis

I see this book as extending the work I have previously published in the area of discourse analysis in the direction of more detailed linguistic analysis of texts (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, Fairclough 2001b, 1992, 1995a, 2000a). (My approach to discourse analysis (a version of ‘critical discourse analysis’) is based upon the assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language.) (‘Dialectical’ relations will be explained in chapter 2.) This means that one productive way of doing social research is through a focus on language, using some form of discourse analysis. This is not a matter of reducing social life to language, saying that everything is discourse – it isn’t. Rather, it’s one analytical strategy amongst many, and it often makes sense to use discourse analysis in conjunction with other forms of analysis, for instance ethnography or forms of institutional analysis.

There are many versions of discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1997). One major division is between approaches which include detailed analysis of texts (see below for the sense in which I am using this term), and approaches which don’t. I have used the term ‘textually oriented discourse analysis’ to distinguish the former from the latter (Fairclough 1992). Discourse analysis in social sciences is often strongly influenced by the work of Foucault (Foucault 1972, Fairclough 1992). Social scientists working in this tradition generally pay little close attention to the linguistic features of texts. My own approach to discourse analysis has been to try to transcend the division between work inspired by social theory which tends not to analyse

texts, and work which focuses upon the language of texts but tends not to engage with social theoretical issues. This is not, or should not be, an 'either/or'. On the one hand, any analysis of texts which aims to be significant in social scientific terms has to connect with theoretical questions about discourse (e.g. the socially 'constructive' effects of discourse). On the other hand, no real understanding of the social effects of discourse is possible without looking closely at what happens when people talk or write.

So, text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis is not merely the linguistic analysis of texts. I see discourse analysis as 'oscillating' between a focus on specific texts and a focus on what I call the 'order of discourse', the relatively durable social structuring of language which is itself one element of the relatively durable structuring and networking of social practices. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with continuity and change at this more abstract, more structural, level, as well as with what happens in particular texts. The link between these two concerns is made through the way in which texts are analysed in critical discourse analysis. Text analysis is seen as not only linguistic analysis; it also includes what I have called 'interdiscursive analysis', that is, seeing texts in terms of the different discourses, genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together. I shall explain this more fully in chapter 2 (see Fairclough 2000a).

My focus in this book, however, is on the linguistic analysis of texts. But what I want to make clear is that this is not just another book on linguistic analysis of texts, it is part of a broader project of developing critical discourse analysis as a resource for social analysis and research. The book can be used without reference to that broader project, but I would like readers to be aware of it even if they do not subscribe to it. I include a brief 'manifesto' for the broader project at the end of the Conclusion. Some readers may wish to read this broader framing of the book (pages 202–11) at this point.

Terminology: text, discourse, language

I shall use the term text in a very broad sense. Written and printed texts such as shopping lists and newspaper articles are 'texts', but so also are transcripts of (spoken) conversations and interviews, as well as television programmes and web-pages. We might say that any actual instance of language in use is a 'text' – though even that is too limited, because texts such as television programmes involve not only language but also visual images and sound effects. The term 'language' will be used in its most usual sense to mean verbal language – words, sentences, etc. We can talk of 'language' in a general way, or of particular languages such as English or Swahili. The term **discourse** (in what is widely called 'discourse analysis') signals the particular view of language in use I have referred to above – as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements. But, again, the term

can be used in a particular as well as a general, abstract way – so I shall refer to particular ‘discourses’ such as the ‘Third Way’ political discourse of New Labour (Fairclough 2000b).

Language in new capitalism

The examples I use throughout the book to illustrate the approach will be particularly focused upon contemporary social change, and especially changes in contemporary capitalism and their impact on many areas of social life. The set of changes I am referring to are variously identified as ‘globalization’, post- or late-‘modernity’, ‘information society’, ‘knowledge economy’, ‘new capitalism’, ‘consumer culture’, and so forth (Held *et al.* 1999). I shall use the term **new capitalism**, meaning the most recent of a historical series of radical re-structurings through which capitalism has maintained its fundamental continuity (Jessop 2000). My reason for focusing on it is that a great deal of contemporary social research is concerned with the nature and consequences of these changes. And, quite simply, because no contemporary social research can ignore these changes, they are having a pervasive effect on our lives. A more specific reason for focusing on new capitalism is that this is now developing into a significant area of research for critical discourse analysts. There is a web-site devoted to it (<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/lnc/>) and the journal *Discourse and Society* has recently devoted a special issue to the theme (13 (2), 2002). I should add, however, that using the term ‘new capitalism’ does not imply an exclusive focus on economic issues: transformations in capitalism have ramifications throughout social life, and ‘new capitalism’ as a research theme should be interpreted broadly as a concern with how these transformations impact on politics, education, artistic production, and many other areas of social life.

Capitalism has the capacity to overcome crises by radically transforming itself periodically, so that economic expansion can continue. Such a transformation towards new capitalism is taking place now in response to a crisis in the post-Second World War model (generally known as ‘Fordism’). This transformation involves both ‘re-structuring’ of relations between the economic, political and social domains (including the commodification and marketization of fields like education – it becomes subject to the economic logic of the market), and the ‘re-scaling’ of relations between the different levels of social life – the global, the regional (e.g. the European Union), the national, and the local. Governments on different scales, social democratic as well as conservative, now take it as a mere fact of life (though a ‘fact’ produced in part by inter-governmental agreements) that all must bow to the emerging logic of a globalizing knowledge-driven economy, and have embraced or at least made adjustments to ‘neo-liberalism’. Neo-liberalism is a political project for facilitating the re-structuring and re-scaling of social relations in accordance with the demands of an unrestrained global capitalism (Bourdieu 1998). It has been

imposed on the post-socialist economies as the (allegedly) best means of rapid system transformation, economic renewal, and re-integration into the global economy. It has led to radical attacks on universal social welfare and the reduction of the protections against the effects of markets that welfare states provided for people. It has also led to an increasing division between rich and poor, increasing economic insecurity and stress even for the 'new middle' classes, and an intensification of the exploitation of labour. The unrestrained emphasis on growth also poses major threats to the environment. It has also produced a new imperialism, where international financial agencies under the tutelage of the USA and its rich allies indiscriminately impose restructuring on less fortunate countries, sometimes with disastrous consequences (e.g. Russia). It is not the impetus to increasing international economic integration that is the problem, but the particular form in which this is being imposed, and the particular consequences (e.g. in terms of unequal distribution of wealth) which inevitably follow. All this has resulted in the disorientation and disarming of economic, political and social forces committed to radical alternatives, and has contributed to a closure of public debate and a weakening of democracy (Boyer and Hollingsworth 1997, Brenner 1998, Crouch and Streek 1997, Jessop 2000).

Readers will find in the Appendix a set of texts which I have used for illustrative purposes throughout the book. In the main, I have selected these texts on the basis of their relevance to a number of research issues arising in a range of disciplines from the transformations of new capitalism. In some cases, I have taken examples from previous research to try to show how the approach adopted in this book might enhance existing methods of analysis.

The approach to text analysis

My main point of reference within existing literature on text analysis is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a linguistic theory and associated analytical methods particularly associated with Michael **Halliday** (Halliday 1978, 1994). In contrast with the more influential Chomskyan tradition within Linguistics, SFL is profoundly concerned with the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life, and its approach to the linguistic analysis of texts is always oriented to the social character of texts (particularly valuable sources include Halliday 1994, Halliday and Hasan 1976, 1989, Hasan 1996, Martin 1992, Van Leeuwen 1993, 1995, 1996). This makes it a valuable resource for critical discourse analysis, and indeed major contributions to critical discourse analysis have developed out of SFL (Fowler *et al.* 1979, Hodge and Kress 1988, 1993, Kress 1985, Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, Lemke 1995, Thibault 1991).¹

But the perspectives of critical discourse analysis and SFL do not precisely coincide, because of their different aims (for a critical dialogue between the two,

see Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). There is a need to develop approaches to text analysis through a **transdisciplinary** dialogue with perspectives on language and discourse within social theory and research in order to develop our capacity to analyse texts as elements in social processes. A 'transdisciplinary' approach to theory or analytical method is a matter of working with the categories and 'logic' of for instance sociological theories in developing a theory of discourse and methods of analysing texts. This is inevitably a long-term project which is only begun in a modest way in this book, for instance in the discussion of 'genre chains' (chapter 2), 'dialogicality' (chapter 3), 'equivalence and difference' (chapter 5), and the representation of time and space (chapter 8). Van Leeuwen's work on representation (referred to above) can also be seen as developing text analysis in this transdisciplinary way. Another concern I have had is to try to make the analytical categories as transparent as possible for social analysis of discourse, moving away to an extent from the often forbidding technical terminology of Linguistics.

I should also briefly mention corpus analysis, though I shall not be dealing with it at all in this book (De Beaugrande 1997, McEnery and Wilson 2001, Stubbs 1996). The sort of detailed text analysis I introduce is a form of 'qualitative' social analysis. It is rather 'labour-intensive' and can be productively applied to samples of research material rather than large bodies of text. Though the amount of material that can be analysed depends on the level of detail: textual analysis can focus on just a selected few features of texts, or many features simultaneously. But this form of qualitative analysis can usefully be supplemented by the 'quantitative analysis' offered by corpus linguistics, as De Beaugrande (1997) and Stubbs (1996) argue. The packages available (such as Wordsmith, which I make some use of in Fairclough 2000b) allow one, for instance, to identify the 'keywords' in a corpus of texts, and to investigate distinctive patterns of co-occurrence or **collocation** between keywords and other words. Such findings are of value, though their value is limited, and they need to be complemented by more intensive and detailed qualitative textual analysis.

Critical discourse analysis can in fact draw upon a wide range of approaches to analysing text. I have chosen in this book to place the main emphasis on grammatical and semantic analysis because while this form of analysis can, I believe, be very productive in social research, it is often difficult for researchers without a background in Linguistics to access it. There are other approaches to analysis which are more familiar and more accessible (conversation analysis is a good example) which I have not dealt with in this book (for an overview, see Titscher *et al.* 2000). That does not mean that they cannot be drawn upon in critical discourse analysis – indeed I have made some use of them in earlier publications (Fairclough 1992, for example).

Social research themes

Each chapter of the book will address one or more social research themes, and I shall signal these at the beginning of the chapter. The aim will be to show how the particular aspects of text analysis dealt with in the chapter might productively be drawn upon in researching these themes. The themes include: the government or **governance** of new capitalist societies, **hybridity** or the blurring of social boundaries as a feature of what some social theorists call 'postmodernity', shifts in '**space-time**' (time and space) associated with '**globalization**', **hegemonic** struggles to give a '**universal**' status to particular discourses and representations, **ideologies**, citizenship and 'public space', social change and change in communication technologies, the **legitimation** of social action and social orders, the dominant **character** types of contemporary societies (including the manager and the therapist), **societal 'informalization'** and the shift away from overt hierarchies. (All the terms in bold are included in the glossary.)

From the perspective of a social scientist, the set of themes addressed and the social theorists and researchers I have drawn upon will no doubt seem rather disparate. Although I have selected themes and sources which I find generally helpful in addressing the theme of Language in New Capitalism, these should be seen as no more than illustrative with respect to my general aim: on the one hand, to consider how social research and theory might inform the approach to text analysis, and on the other hand, how text analysis might enhance social research. In a sense, the diversity of sources and themes is advantageous, because it may help to make the point that the relationship I am advocating between text analysis and social research is a general one which is not limited to particular theories, disciplines or research traditions in social science. Although I have chosen to focus on the research theme of Language in New Capitalism, this should not be taken to imply that textual analysis is *only* relevant to social research oriented to this theme. And of course a single book cannot possibly begin to show all the areas of social research which might be enhanced by text analysis.

I have drawn on the work of a number of social theorists. Again, this selection of sources should not be regarded as in any way exhaustive or exclusive – they are theorists with whom I have found it fruitful to conduct a dialogue when working within critical discourse analysis. They all, in one way or another, raise questions about language and discourse, though none of them use the resources for detailed analysis which, I am suggesting, can enhance such theoretical projects and associated research. See the glossary of the main social theorists to whom I refer.

(A systematic discussion of the relationship between critical discourse analysis and social theory can be found in Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), which can be seen as complementary to this book.) It includes extended discussion of the relationship of critical discourse analysis to the main social theories I refer to here, as well as

detailed account of critical discourse analysis. Readers will find in Fairclough 2000b an extended application of critical discourse analysis to a particular case, the language of the 'New Labour' government in the UK.

Social effects of texts

Texts as elements of social events (see chapter 2) have causal effects – i.e. they bring about changes. Most immediately, texts can bring about changes in our knowledge (we can learn things from them), our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth. They also have longer-term causal effects – one might for instance argue that prolonged experience of advertising and other commercial texts contributes to shaping people's identities as 'consumers', or their gender identities. Texts can also start wars, or contribute to changes in education, or to changes in industrial relations, and so forth. Their effects can include changes in the material world, such as changes in urban design, or the architecture and design of particular types of building. In sum, texts have causal effects upon, and contribute to changes in, people (beliefs, attitudes, etc.), actions, social relations, and the material world. It would make little sense to focus on language in new capitalism if we didn't think that texts have causal effects of this sort, and effects on social change. Though as I shall argue below, these effects are mediated by meaning-making.

We need, however, to be clear what sort of causality this is. It is not a simple mechanical causality – we cannot for instance claim that particular features of texts automatically bring about particular changes in people's knowledge or behaviour or particular social or political effects. Nor is causality the same as regularity: there may be no regular cause–effect pattern associated with a particular type of text or particular features of texts, but that does not mean that there are no causal effects.² Texts can have causal effects without them necessarily being regular effects, because many other factors in the context determine whether particular texts actually have such effects, and can lead to a particular text having a variety of effects, for instance on different interpreters (Fairclough *et al.* 2002).

Contemporary social science has been widely influenced by 'social constructivism' – the claim that the (social) world is socially constructed. Many theories of social constructivism emphasize the role of texts (language, discourse) in the construction of the social world. These theories tend to be idealist rather than realist. A realist would argue that although aspects of the social world such as social institutions are ultimately socially constructed, once constructed they are realities which affect and limit the textual (or 'discursive') construction of the social. We need to distinguish 'construction' from 'construal', which social constructivists do not: we may textually construe (represent, imagine, etc.) the social world in particular ways, but whether our representations or construals have the effect of changing its construction depends upon various contextual factors – including the

way social reality already is, who is construing it, and so forth. So we can accept a moderate version of the claim that the social world is textually constructed, but not an extreme version (Sayer 2000).

Ideologies

One of the causal effects of texts which has been of major concern for critical discourse analysis is ideological effects – the effects of texts in inculcating and sustaining or changing ideologies (Eagleton 1991, Larrain 1979, Thompson 1984, Van Dijk 1998). Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation. This ‘critical’ view of ideology, seeing it as a modality of power, contrasts with various ‘descriptive’ views of ideology as positions, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, etc. of social groups without reference to relations of power and domination between such groups. Ideological representations can be identified in texts (Thompson 1984 glosses ideology as ‘meaning in the service of power’), but in saying that ideologies are representations which can be shown to contribute to social relations of power and domination, I am suggesting that textual analysis needs to be framed in this respect in social analysis which can consider bodies of texts in terms of their effects on power relations. Moreover, if ideologies are primarily representations, they can nevertheless also be ‘enacted’ in ways of acting socially, and ‘inculcated’ in the identities of social agents. Ideologies can also have a durability and stability which transcends individual texts or bodies of texts – in terms of the distinctions I explain in chapter 2, they can be associated with discourses (as representations), with genres (as enactments), and with **styles** (as inculcations).

Let us take an example: the pervasive claim that in the new ‘global’ economy, countries must be highly competitive to survive. One can find this claim asserted or assumed in many contemporary texts. And one can see it (and the neo-liberal discourse with which it is associated) enacted in, for example, new, more ‘business-like’ ways of administering organizations like universities, and inculcated in new managerial styles which are also evident in many texts. We can only arrive at a judgement about whether this claim is ideological by looking at the causal effects it and related claims have in particular areas of social life (e.g. whether people come to believe that countries must be highly competitive to survive), and asking whether they and their enactments and inculcations contribute to sustaining or changing power relations (e.g. by making employees more amenable to the demands of managers). Notice that even if we did conclude that such a claim is ideological, that would not make it necessarily or simply untrue: we might for instance argue that contemporary economic relations do indeed impose greater competitiveness, though point out that this is not the inevitable ‘law of nature’ it is often represented

as being, but the product of a particular economic order which could be changed. I return to the discussion of ideologies in chapter 3, with respect to ideological assumptions in particular, and in chapter 4, with respect to argumentation.

Text, meanings and interpretations

Part of what is implied in approaching texts as elements of social events is that we are not only concerned with texts as such, but also with interactive processes of meaning-making. In the case of a face-to-face conversation, the text is a transcript of what is said, and to a degree one can see meaning-making going on by looking at how participants respond to each other's conversational turns. Let us take a very simple example (from Cameron 2001):

- 1 *Customer*: Pint of Guinness, please.
- 2 *Bartender*: How old are you?
- 3 *Customer*: Twenty-two.
- 4 *Bartender*: OK, coming up.

In turns 2 and 3, the Bartender and the Customer are interactively establishing that the preconditions for ordering an alcoholic drink in a bar are met, i.e. that the Customer is (in the case of Britain) over the age of 18. The Customer in turn 3 shows his or her understanding that this legal constraint is at issue, and the Bartender's purpose of resolving the legal issue in asking the question, by collaboratively providing what may on the face of it seem irrelevant information in the context of ordering a drink. The Customer is able to recognize that the Bartender's question in 2 is relevant not only on the basis of his or her knowledge of the licensing laws, but also because of the position of the question – if a request (turn 1 in this case) is answered with a question, that tends to mean responding to the request is conditional upon the answer to the question.

(This example suggests that there are three analytically separable elements in processes of meaning-making: the production of the text, the text itself, and the reception of the text.) The production of the text puts the focus on producers, authors, speakers, writers; the reception of the text puts the focus on interpretation, interpreters, readers, listeners.³ Each of these three elements has been given primacy at different points in the recent history of theories of meaning: first the intentions, identity etc. of the author, then the text itself, then more recently the interpretative work of the reader or listener. But it seems clear that meanings are made through the interplay between them: we must take account of the institutional position, interests, values, intentions, desires etc. of producers; the relations between