

The power in language

Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. (3rd edn.) London: Routledge, 2015. Pp. 264. Paperback £30.99, ISBN: 978-1-13-879097-1.

Reviewed by Simone Bacchini, British Library

Just as there are disparate reasons for learning a language, there are also many possible and rewarding ways of looking at language. One such way is to investigate language for what it does, as well as what it is. For language does indeed do things. To be more precise, it is us – the language users who do things with it. This is not an entirely new insight; from ancient rhetoricians to modern philosophers such as J. L. Austin who, in 1955 published his now famous *How to Do Things with Words*, seen as the origin of speech act theory, the realisation that words are more than mere clothing for thoughts has steadily been gaining ground. J. L. Austin was born in Lancaster, England, in 1884. And Lancaster University is where Norman Fairclough, the author of the book under review, taught for many years and is now Emeritus Professor. He is one of the founders of the analytical framework – which is now well-established and has practitioners all over the world – called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

But what is CDA? Briefly, as Fairclough (2015) succinctly points out (p. 9), ‘CDA critiques discourse.’ Discourse, in this context, can be safely – if a bit vaguely – understood as ‘language in use’. CDA, Fairclough goes on to say (p. 9), ‘interprets, evaluates, critiques and explains this discourse. Of course, he goes on to say, ‘[i]nterpretation, evaluation, critique and explanation are not unique to critical analysis’; but the ways in which CDA does it are unique. CDA concentrates on the contradictions between what is claimed, by social and political agents, among others, and what actually is, by looking at ‘texts’, i.e. actual examples of language. It provides, to use another term, a recontextualisation of discourse.

The first edition of *Language and Power* appeared in 1989. It is not an exaggeration to say that, following almost immediate success, it has become a classic, which partly explains the publication of this third edition.

The volume is aimed at students, academics, and – one might add – any interested and discerning readers. It is both a primer and an update on Fairclough’s current thinking on CDA. CDA is a theoretical approach that

has been evolving over the years with its proponents’ thinking.

The book consists of nine chapters plus an Introduction. For this edition, the Introduction has been considerably revised and expanded. Perhaps a bit oddly, the author advises readers who are new to CDA to read the rest of the book first and then return to the Introduction, so that they can better understand how his thought evolved. I am not sure this is essential. Indeed, the Introduction can be, at least in this reviewer’s opinion, a very good place to begin. For example, it gives a simple yet detailed checklist of what the author sees as the main features of CDA (pp. 48-50).

After the Introduction, the chapters are: 2. Discourse as Social Practice; 3. Discourse and Power; 4. Discourse, Common Sense and Ideology; 5. Critical Discourse Analysis in Practice: Description; 6. Critical Discourse Analysis in Practice: Interpretation, Explanation, and the Position of the Analyst; 7. Creativity and Struggle in Discourse: the Discourse of Thatcherism; 8. Discourse in Social Change; 9. Critical Language Study and Social Emancipation; Language Education in Schools; 10. Language and Globalization.

Chapters 2-4 provide good methodological and ideological underpinnings of CDA. Like all other chapters in the book, they are accompanied by examples and suggestions for further reading. This, together with the clear writing, allows the volume to satisfy the curiosity of those who would like to discover more whilst keeping the total number of pages down to a manageable 264. In this reviewer’s opinion, sections one to three could almost be seen, and used, as self-contained. Chapter 3, ‘Discourse and power’, for example, is extremely well-written and could be used by a number of readers and in a variety of settings.

Chapters 5-7 provide what could almost be termed the ‘how-to’ section of the book. It would have been useful if more exercises had been included. As things



SIMONE BACCHINI'S whole academic background, from BA to PhD, is in linguistics. Three particular interests of hers have been sociolinguistics, language variation, and language change. She is also interested in health communication and Systemic Functional linguistics. Email: Simone.Bacchini@bl.uk

stand, readers and instructors looking for more practice ought to peruse other books by the same author, such as *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (2003) and *Political Discourse Analysis* (2012). However, bearing this caveat in mind, there is still quite a lot in this volume to keep the reader busy and to stimulate further analysis.

Chapter 7, on the discourse of Thatcherism, addresses the process of text production and develops the concept of the 'subject' in discourse. In addition, this is where the procedures introduced earlier are clearly applied. It therefore works as an extended case-study, so to speak, and is thus extremely helpful to show what CDA does, how it does it, and what it can be used for.

Chapters 8-9 take the reader back to the wider picture and are very useful for appreciating the potential uses of CDA. My favourite is Chapter 10 (Language and Globalization). It is an extremely interesting read where one can become more familiar with the author's views on aspects of the new global order, discussed in terms of language and power. Interestingly, Fairclough discusses both the 'globalization of discourse' and the 'discourse of globalization' clearly and with ample illustrations.

In conclusion, this is a very interesting and useful book that will be appreciated both by those new to CDA and those familiar with it. It happily combines theory and practice and, just like CDA itself, can be used in a variety of settings, across media and disciplines, thus making it very appealing for instructors across the board. Although CDA is by no means limited to English-speaking settings, this book will be appreciated by all those working with advanced learners of English. As noted, more exercises and practice suggestions would have been very useful. However, finding further texts to which to apply the book's insights will not be difficult and could indeed be very stimulating.

References

- Austin, J. 1975. *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and Power*. Harlow: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. 2003. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. 2012. *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. London: Routledge.