

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Language and Power by Norman Fairclough

Review by: Janette Yael Zupnik

Language in Society, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), pp. 265-269

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4168234>

Accessed: 23/05/2014 09:44

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Language in Society*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

REVIEWS

NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH, *Language and power*. London: Longman, 1989. Pp. x + 248.

This is the first book in the Language in Social Life Series that aims to examine the dialectical process between discourse and social structures: to show how each is in part a cause and effect of the other; more specifically, to show how linguistic usage both reflects and helps create social institutions. The first book in the series is meant to assist political activists and the helping professions (teachers, social workers) to carry out Critical Language Study (CLS): the discovery through linguistic analysis of the hidden connections among language, power, and ideology. As the author does not assume the practitioners and activists to be very familiar with linguistics or social theory, he takes it upon himself to explicate some of the relationships between these fields.

The theoretical framework for this volume derives in part from the functional linguistics approach developed by Michael Halliday (1978). This stance holds that language functions as a social semiotic. It symbolizes the social system, and consequently, linguistic processes are to be analyzed from the standpoint of the social order through analysis of the functions that linguistic units fulfill in that order. More recently, since social theory in England and the continent has taken a "linguistic turn," many critical linguists within the Hallidayan or European tradition of political discourse analysis have attempted to base some of their linguistic analyses on contemporary theories of society, such as those suggested by the works of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (e.g., Wodak 1989).

Fairclough himself embeds his analysis of language and power within the Foucauldian framework of social and discursive orders and practices that act on each other (Foucault 1972, 1980). Fairclough's professed socialist position is clear here. He states that orders of discourse reflect the power structure of society that is determined by the conflict between the dominant and dominated classes of modern capitalist society over ownership of the means of production. Whereas Foucault (see Raulet 1983), a professed non-Marxist, was not interested in identifying the source of the power mechanism, Fairclough perceives it as the power of the dominant capitalist class. The difference between the two approaches should be remembered so that Foucault's theories are not simply subsumed by Fairclough, and, consequently, by the reader, into a Marxist interpretation of power and language usage.

Discourse is described as the social practice by which texts (that which is actually uttered or written) are produced and interpreted by means of cognitive and cultural schematic knowledge, which is termed "member resources": the knowledge necessary to interpret the surface structures and meanings of utterances (phonology, grammar, vocabulary, semantics, pragmatics), the local coherence of the text (cohesion, pragmatics), and the text

structure and “point” (schemata, frames, scripts, presuppositions, intertextuality, and social location of text).

CLS consists of three stages of analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation. The descriptive stage of analysis includes identification and description of particular elements of vocabulary, grammar, and text structure that function ideologically in discourse. Each linguistic element emphasizes one of three dimensions of the “power-in-discourse” held by the dominant classes in society: (a) power or control over the “content”: what is said or done in discourse; (b) control over the “relations” among individuals or groups; (c) control over “subjects”: the social roles fulfilled by interlocutors in discourse. For example, pronominals are to be analyzed for the relation dimension of meaning: how their usage helps set up the power relations between speaker and hearer. Agency and nominalizations are analyzed to highlight the content dimension: how power-related knowledge and beliefs of the speaker are created by their use. Modality is analyzed for its subject dimension: how subject positions of the powerful and/or the powerless are created through modal verb usage. Various British texts are analyzed to illustrate these processes, yet the most in-depth discussion is to be found in the analysis of a radio interview with Margaret Thatcher.

For example, the ideological relation function of first person plural pronominal usage is described in the analysis of the interview. When discussing the invasion of the Falkland Islands, Thatcher stated: “of course it showed that we were reliable in the defense of freedom and when part of Britain we: was invaded of course we went we believed in defense of freedom we were reliable” (175).

Fairclough explains that it is not clear whether the pronominal is used exclusively – to refer to a collective (the state, the government), excluding those addressed – or inclusively – to refer to the whole “people.” Because this pronominal ambiguity allows government actions and beliefs to be understood as those of the people, it has ideological effects. The “people” are assimilated to the leadership and are therefore powerless in relation to it.

The ideological subject function of modality usage is also described, as illustrated in the analysis of the following excerpt from the same interview: “I wonder if I perhaps I can answer best by saying how I see what government should do and if government really believes in people what people should do I believe that government should be very strong to do those things which only government can do” (174). According to Fairclough, by shifting from expressive to obligatory modality usage (from “I wonder if I perhaps I can answer” to “should”), Thatcher created a “novel discourse” type that allowed her to appear in the dual subject position of a stereotypical female role, created by means of a self-effacing tone, and a tough political leader, encoded in an authoritarian tone.

Many of the descriptions at this stage of the analysis are insightful. Yet,

there are several methodological problems with this approach. First, in order to avoid the implied generalization that any linguistic usage of the listed elements is ideologically motivated, some discussion on the distinction between ideologically and nonideologically motivated usage would have been helpful. In addition, the author's mapping of linguistic usage onto the functional components of a semantic system is problematic, because there is no justification to categorize a particular linguistic feature in one meaning category (e.g., relation) and not in another (e.g., content). Rather, linguistic items usually represent all the semantic dimensions mentioned by Fairclough: knowledge and beliefs, relations among groups or individuals, and roles fulfilled by speakers/listeners.

At the interpretive stage of analysis, Fairclough concentrates on Thatcher's processes of text production. The immediate context of the interview constitutes both a media and political event in which participants play dual media and political roles (interviewer/one of the people; interviewee/political leader; audience/the people). Yet, Thatcher is described as only interested in portraying the political dimension of the interview by creating a discourse of the political leader interacting with the people. Aside from this analysis, the interpretive stage repeats analyses found in the descriptive stage. As Fairclough himself is aware that any description of the functional usage of language implies interpretation, it may have been less confusing to have proposed only one level of analysis here.

Institutional and broad societal levels of discourse are discussed at the explanation stage, the final level of the CLS model. The radio interview text is "explained" at the institutional level as a struggle between political parties, an example of governmental power, and an instance of the building of political consensus through the creation of an imaginary quality of solidarity between leaders and "fictional publics." At the broad societal level, the interview is explained as a discourse indicative of class struggle between the power holders and the lower classes in a capitalist society.

Broad discursive practices of modern capitalist societies are also discussed in the book. Following the work of Habermas (1984), the author notes the "colonization" of people's lives by the systems of advertising, consumerism, bureaucracy, and therapeutic discourses, all illustrations of "strategic action," which is oriented toward control over people through the use of manipulative and deceptive devices. By means of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough attempts to illustrate how such strategic action is carried out in modern capitalist societies. In his analysis of a washing machine advertisement, for example, the author attempts to demonstrate that the use of particular linguistic devices helps to construct a "synthetic personality." By addressing the reader in the second person, and through imperative sentence structure, a fictitious intimacy is created between the advertisement and the reader. Simple syntactic structures are interpreted by the author as an attempt to echo the au-

dience's own manner of speech. Further, the image of the modern lifestyle is created by means of visual and verbal cues that focus on the priorities of ease, efficiency, economy, and beauty.

Official forms are also mentioned as vehicles of manipulation of the public. Their simplicity places the public in a particular subject position of inferiority. Language simplification includes relatively simple sentence structure, nontechnical vocabulary, and particular choices of character style. The "easification" (Fairclough's term) is also evident by the entire "advertisement-like" layout of the forms. Interviewing techniques in the workplace and psychological counseling sessions are also discussed as illustrations of strategic action.

The final chapter concerns the emancipatory role of CLS. Such analyses can increase consciousness about the contribution of language to the domination of oppressed groups and will therefore constitute "the first step towards emancipation" (233). Different frameworks in which to pursue such critical studies are suggested, such as educational and political settings, or in the training of workers in public services. Particular focus is placed on the educational framework, as Fairclough believes what transpires in schools to be decisive in determining whether orders of discourse and existing power relations are to be reproduced or transformed. He proposes a new pedagogical model that could help focus on the socially constituted and constituting nature of discourse. By drawing on students' own experiences and developing their awareness of text, interaction, and context, teachers can help them develop metalanguage techniques that will enable them to identify the social origins of language practices and ultimately perhaps transform the dominant order of discourse.

Topics are recycled from one chapter to the next throughout the book. Whereas the rationale for this may have been to help the uninitiated become acquainted with the various fields in a developmental way, this approach causes much confusion. The diagrams and discussions of social theory, for example, lack clarity, particularly concerning the adoption of Foucauldian concepts of social and discourse orders and practices. On the other hand, the linguistic explanations are too sparse to allow for effective application of the critical discourse model by social workers, teachers, and political activists. Whereas some of the suggested practice assignments are specific, clear, and useful, others are too vague to help the uninitiated apply the model.

In spite of these qualifications, there are several strengths to the book. Fairclough has attempted to explicate both the social theory underpinnings and practical applications of the critical linguistic approach. To date, most of this work could be found in journal or handbook articles (e.g., van Dijk 1985), limiting both the scope of social theory explications and the types of text analyses undertaken. Although Fairclough may have tried to cover too many topics in one book, his is the first attempt to describe the approach at

REVIEWS

a level broader than the article. It is hoped that future volumes in this series will be more focused on a few chosen domains of analysis. In addition, although methodological concerns still remain, the analyses of authentic texts are insightful, such as the creation of new discourse types, as illustrated in the analysis of the Margaret Thatcher interview. Finally, each chapter includes a very helpful bibliography that will be a good resource to those unfamiliar with social theory.

REFERENCES

- van Dijk, Teun A. (ed.) (1985). *Handbook of discourse analysis. Vol. 4.* New York: Academic.
- Foucault, Michel. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge.* New York: Harper Colophon.
- _____. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings by Michel Foucault, 1972-1977.* New York: Pantheon.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1984). *The theory of communicative action. Vol. 1.* (T. McCarthy, trans.) Boston: Beacon.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning.* Baltimore: University Park Press.
- Raulet, Gerard. (1983). Structuralism and post-structuralism: An interview with Michel Foucault. *TELOS* 55:195-211.
- Wodak, R. (ed.) (1989). *Language, power and ideology: Studies in political discourse.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Reviewed by JANETTE Yael ZUPNIK
Program in Applied Linguistics
Boston University
Boston, MA 02146

(Received 22 October 1990)

WENDY LEEDS-HURWITZ, *Communication in everyday life: A social interpretation.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1989. Pp. xxii + 203.

The objective of this book is to answer “that rather plaintive question: ‘But what *is* communication?’” with a “single, coherent presentation of what the literature on social communication has produced so far” (xvi). It is meant to offer a perspective on communication, not a definition of it. Thus, the book crosses boundaries of the traditional divisions of communication study to offer examples from interpersonal, organizational, and mass communication. Leeds-Hurwitz admits that this perspective does not rest primarily on novel or unique insights, but claims as the book’s primary aim a coherent integration of ideas into a useful perspective on communication. The book works through five central aspects of communication behavior: that it is patterned, learned, contextually based, multichannel, and multifunctional. It does so in a very readable way, with theoretical points interspersed with data segments from Leeds-Hurwitz’ own research that provides useful illustration. The book is meant principally as a textbook, but it also attempts to synthesize recent thinking about communication as an inherently social pro-