

## 6. Critical Discourse Analysis

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Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a highly context-sensitive, democratic approach which takes an ethical stance on social issues with the aim of improving society. This chapter begins by describing six ways in which CDA differs from other forms of textual analysis. After a description of general strategies, certain tools of CDA such as genre, framing, foregrounding, omission, and presupposition are introduced and implemented to analyze a newspaper article. A sentence-by-sentence approach is then described followed by an analysis at the word/phrase level. After a discussion of the social context of the newspaper article, benefits of CDA for the teacher are described.

**C**ritical discourse analysis (CDA) is a relatively new addition to the varieties of text analysis available to the second-language teacher and researcher. It could best be characterized as an approach or attitude toward textual analysis rather than as a step-by-step method. CDA differs from other forms of textual analysis in six major respects. First, it tries to acknowledge the fact that authentic texts are produced and read (or heard) not in isolation but in some real-world context with all of its complexity. CDA is thus highly context-sensitive: it tries to take into account the most relevant textual and contextual factors, including historical ones, that contribute to the production and interpretation of a given text.

Second, although critical discourse analysis casts a broad net, it is a highly integrated form of discourse analysis in that it tries to unite at least three different levels of analysis: the text; the discursive practices (that is, the processes of writing/speaking and reading/hearing) that create and interpret that text; and the larger social context that bears upon it. In so doing, CDA aims to show how these levels are all interrelated.

Third, critical discourse analysis is very much concerned with important societal issues. This feature derives partly from the first, inasmuch as "context" is meant to include not only the immediate environment in which a text is produced and interpreted but also the larger societal context including its relevant cultural, political, social, and other facets. CDA researchers and theorists feel that since there are no restrictions on the scope of an analysis,

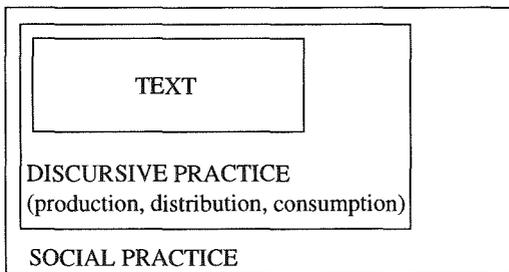
we might as well choose texts that potentially have real consequences in the lives of a large number of people.

Fourth, in analyzing such texts, CDA practitioners typically take an ethical stance, one that draws attention to power imbalances, social inequities, non-democratic practices, and other injustices in hopes of spurring readers to corrective action. This is why the term critical is used: CDA not only describes unfair social/political practices but is explicitly critical of them.

Fifth, critical discourse analysis assumes a “social constructionist” view of discourse. Following the poststructuralist philosophies of Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, and others, CDA practitioners assume that people’s notions of reality are constructed largely through interaction with others, as mediated by the use of language and other semiotic systems. Thus, “reality” is not seen as immutable but as open to change—which raises the possibility of changing it for the better. By focusing on language and other elements of discursive practice, CDA analysts try to illuminate ways in which the dominant forces in a society construct versions of reality that favor the interests of those same forces. By unmasking such practices, CDA scholars aim to support the victims of such oppression and encourage them to resist it.

Finally, in pursuit of these democratic goals, critical discourse analysts try to make their work as clear as possible to a broad, nonspecialist readership. In particular, we try to minimize the use of scholarly jargon and convoluted syntax, even at the risk of losing some precision in the analysis.

In sum, the primary activity of critical discourse analysis is the close analysis of written or oral texts that are deemed to be politically - or culturally influential to a given society. But the text-analytic activity cannot be done in isolation; rather, the analyst must always take into account the larger context in which the text is located. This can be schematized as follows (from Fairclough 1992):



**Figure 3.1**  
**Three-dimensional**  
**conception of discourse**

(from Fairclough, N,  
*Discourse and Social Change*,  
Polity, 1992)

As suggested by this schematic diagram, a text is assumed to be the product of discursive practices, including production, distribution, and interpretation, which themselves are embedded in a complex mosaic of social practices. To put this another way: The meaning of a text derives not just from the words-on-the-page but also from how those words are used in a particular social context. When more than one user and one social context are involved, a given text will typically have more than one "meaning."

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows:

1. a description of how critical discourse analysis is done, including a description of some of the tools involved;
2. an example of CDA using a newspaper report;
- and 3. discussion about how CDA can be applied to EFL teaching.

### **How to do Critical Discourse Analysis**

Since the primary activity of CDA is analyzing texts, it may be useful at this point to take a look at the kinds of tools that can be used. It should be kept in mind that CDA is not a linguistic theory and therefore does not provide a complete grammar of syntactic, phonological, or other linguistic elements for any particular language. Nor does it aim to describe any particular text in exhaustive detail. Instead, it tries to point out those features of a text that are most interesting from a critical perspective, those that appear to be textual manipulations serving non-democratic purposes. Not every concept found in a linguistics textbook (or even in a discourse analysis methods book such as this one) is equally useful when it comes to doing critical discourse analysis, and even CDA analysts differ somewhat among themselves in the kinds of tools they employ. Even those trained in Systemic Linguists, who represent perhaps the dominant strain of CDA, do not all focus on exactly the same kinds of text features.

It is necessary, however, for any CDA analyst to have a broad inventory of possible text-analytic tools to draw from. Since I believe my approach is fairly typical of CDA methodology, and since in any case there is no "standardized" form of CDA methodology, I will henceforth focus (with apologies to other CDA workers) on those tools that I have found most valuable in my own work. My comments will refer mainly to written texts, as these provide the best opportunities for CDA work in EFL contexts. If your students have access to

English-language advertisements, news reports, etc. on local radio or TV, however, you could apply many of the same concepts discussed here as well as some additional ones particular to spoken discourse such as turn-taking, topic management, metamessages, intonation, politeness, etc. (see Tannen, 1990; Levinson, 1983).

### *General Strategy:*

I try to approach a text in two stages. First, I play the role of a typical reader who is just trying to comprehend the text in an uncritical manner. In teaching EFL students, much time would normally have to be devoted to this stage, supported by traditional EFL reading materials and instructional methods. Second, I then "step back" from the text and look at it critically. This involves revisiting the text at different levels, raising questions about it, imagining how it could have been constructed differently, mentally comparing it to related texts, etc. Generally, this second stage goes from large (text-level) features to small (word-level) ones, though the exact sequence might differ from case to case. It is important during this second stage not to lose sight of the first stage; that is, one should always keep the ordinary reader in mind while critiquing the text. This allows the analyst to focus on those features that seem to have the potential of misleading the unwary reader.

### *Details:*

What follows is a more detailed description of this second (critical) stage.

### **The Text as a Whole**

It makes sense to start by considering the text as a whole, since this is usually where textual manipulations have their most powerful effect. Readers don't just pick up a text and start deciphering it word by word. Rather, they usually begin by recognizing that the text belongs to a certain **genre** (text type) that manifests a characteristic set of formal features serving a characteristic purpose. For example, advertisements as a genre are usually immediately recognizable by their use of attention-getting language and visual aids, by the way they extol the virtues of some product or service, and by their artificially personal tone - all of which are designed to encourage readers to buy that particular product or service. The CDA analyst should therefore begin by determining the genre of the text under analysis and observing how that text conforms to it. This

genre-orientation often allows the analyst to see why certain kinds of statements appear in the text and how they might serve the purposes of the text-producer, as encoded in that genre. It can also help the analyst imagine what has been left out - what could have been said, but was not. If the genre ordinarily includes certain kinds of information, and yet one does not find such information in the text being analyzed, it gives the analyst reason to suspect that the writer has deliberately left it out. (See comments on **omission**, below.) Finally, many clever writers know how to **manipulate** a genre, how to go beyond its normal boundaries to produce special effects. For example, news reports are supposed to use "neutral, objective" language, but some reporters will insert an occasional loaded word to slant the report. Genre knowledge enables the analyst to detect and interpret such deviations critically.

Another major part of text production and text interpretation is **framing**. Framing refers to how the content of a text is presented, what sort of perspective (angle, slant) the writer is taking. To be coherent, a text cannot simply be a collection of details; rather, it must try to pull these details together into some sort of unified whole. There can be frames within frames. For example, a news report might be framed as a narrative, or story; and within that frame it might set up a Good Guys vs. Bad Guys frame with one group of participants being given favorable treatment over the other. One particularly powerful way of framing a text is through the use of **visual aids**. Analysts should be alert to photographs, sketches, diagrams, formatting devices, and other visual embellishments.

Closely related to framing is **foregrounding** (and its opposite, **backgrounding**). These terms refer to the writer's emphasizing certain concepts (by giving them textual prominence) and de-emphasizing others. Textual prominence sometimes derives from the use of genres, as certain genres will sometimes have "slots" that automatically bestow prominence on any information occupying those slots. For example, the top-down orientation of news reports decrees that sentences occurring early in the report will be foregrounded while those occurring later will be backgrounded.

The ultimate form of backgrounding is **omission**—actually leaving certain things completely out of a text. Omission is often the most potent aspect of textualization, because if the writer does not mention something, it often does not even enter the reader's mind and thus is not subjected to his or her scrutiny. It is difficult to raise questions about something that's not even "there."

Writers can also manipulate readers through **presupposition**. Presupposition is the use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative. A common example of this at the text level would be an advertisement that describes a product in such glowing terms that the product appears to have no rival.

Many texts contain more than one style of discourse (or “register,” see below). Writers can exploit these **discursive differences** to manipulate readers in various ways. For example, an advertisement for a medical product might be written partly in the voice of a typical user (“Some seasonal allergy medicines used to make me feel drowsy... Then I woke up to *Hismanal*”) and partly in the voice of the medical scientist (“The reported incidence of drowsiness with *Hismanal* (7.1%) in clinical studies involving more than 1600 patients did not differ significantly from that reported in patients receiving placebo (6.4%).”). The first “voice” emphasizes the helplessness of the ordinary citizen, the second emphasizes the authority and expertise of the scientific community. [Quotes from *Time*, 4.24.95, p. 57.]

### Reading Sentence-by-Sentence

Having noticed the genre and framing of a text, readers next typically proceed through it sentence by sentence. At this level, in addition to constructing the basic meaning of each sentence, they might notice that certain pieces of information appear as grammatical subjects of the sentence and are thereby **topicalized** (which is a type of foregrounding at the sentence level). A sentence topic is “what the sentence is about.” Often the topic of one sentence continues as the topic of the next, reinforcing its importance in the text. Topicalization is thus a form of sentence-level **foregrounding**: In choosing what to put in the topic position, writers create a perspective, or “slant,” that influences the reader’s perception.

Readers might also notice, if only subconsciously, the **agent-patient** relations in sentences. If someone is depicted as an agent, who is it? Who is doing what to whom? Many texts will describe things so that certain persons are consistently depicted as initiating actions (and thus exerting power) while others are depicted as being (often passive) recipients of those actions.

Another common form of manipulation at the sentence level is the **deletion** or **omission** of agents, which escapes the notice of many uncritical readers. Agent-deletion occurs most often through nominalization and the use of passive

verbs. For example, a headline like “Massacre of 25 Villagers Reported” does not say who did the killing, thanks to the nominalization *massacre*. The same is true of a headline reading, “25 Villagers Massacred,” because of the agentless passive construction. In both of these cases, the spotlight is on the victims, not on those guilty of the crime.

**Presupposition** can also occur at the sentence level. If a politician says, “We cannot continue imposing high taxes on the American people,” he or she is presupposing that the taxes Americans pay are “high” (which makes good political rhetoric but is not true, at least not compared to other industrialized nations). Such presuppositions are quite common in public discourse, especially in political speeches, advertisements, and other forms of persuasive rhetoric. They can also be found in supposedly “objective” discourse such as that found in news reports. Presuppositions are notoriously manipulative because they are difficult to challenge: many readers are reluctant to question statements that the author appears to be taking for granted.

**Insinuations** are comments that are slyly suggestive. Like presuppositions, they are difficult for readers to challenge—but for a different reason. Insinuations typically have double meanings, and if challenged, the writer can claim innocence, pretending to have only one of these two meanings in mind. (This is similar to what Hodge & Kress, 1988 call an “ideological complex.”) Because of this deniability, insinuations can be especially powerful elements in any kind of discourse.

### Words and Phrases

At a more detailed level of reading, one can take note of the additional, special meanings (or connotations) that certain words and phrases (lexis) carry. Connotations derive from the frequent use of a word or phrase in a particular type of context. The word “grammar,” for example, has negative connotations for most Americans, who have unpleasant memories of being drilled in school by a stern grammar teacher. **Labels** often carry unavoidable connotations. For example, with a polarized political issue, such as abortion in the U.S., it is virtually impossible to refer to one side or the other in completely neutral terms. Someone who opposes abortion would likely be labeled “pro-life” by sympathizers but “anti-choice” by opponents. Most educated American readers seeing one or the other term would immediately understand this additional connotation. Sometimes connotations are conveyed through the use of

**metaphor** or other figures of speech.

Another aspect of textuality based largely on lexis is the **register** of a text. Register refers to a text's level of formality or informality, its degree of technicality, its subject field, etc. The text you are reading right now, for example, is intended to be in a semi-formal, semi-technical, applied linguistic register. Writers can deceive readers by affecting a phony register, one that induces a certain misplaced trust. Typical examples of this would include advertisements written either in a friendly "conversational" register or in an authoritative "expert" register.

**Modality** is another feature of discourse worth attending to for critical purposes. Modality refers to the tone of statements as regards their degree of certitude and authority; it is carried mainly by words and phrases like *may, might, could, will, must, it seems to me, without a doubt, it's possible that*, etc. Through their use of such modal verbs and phrases, some texts convey an air of heavy-handed authority while others, at the other extreme, convey a tone of deference.

### An Example

We will briefly examine the following text to get a sense of how CDA works.

## Nevada Officials Arrest 700 At Test-Site Gulf Protest

MERCURY, Nev. (AP)—More than 700 people were arrested, Saturday during an anti-nuclear, anti-Persian Gulf buildup protest at the Nevada Test Site, officials said.

Thousands turned out for the demonstration. Those arrested on misdemeanor trespass charges were taken to holding pens, then transported by bus to Beatty 54 miles north of the remote nuclear proving ground.

An Energy Department spokesman estimated the crowd at 2,200 to 2,500 people. A sponsor of the protest, American Peace Test, said the crowd was 3,000 to 4,000 strong.

The turnout was one of the largest since anti-nuclear demonstrations began at the test site nearly a decade ago, but it failed to match a turnout of 5,000 demonstrators in 1987, when 2,000 people were arrested on trespass charges.

The DOE spokesman, Darwin Morgan, said more than 700 people were arrested and would be released on their own recognizance.

"Some of the demonstrators were a bit more aggressive, kicking at the guards when they were brought out of the pens," Morgan said.

Demonstrators carried signs reading "Farms not Arms," "Give Peace A Chance," "Radiation is Poison" and "Stop Destroying Our Planet."

The demonstrators rallied near the entrance to the site, then crossed a cattle guard on a road leading to this tiny community that provides support facilities for testing.

Others crawled across fences and fanned out into the desert, where dozens of security guards and members of the Nye County Sheriff's office waited to arrest them.

Bill Walker, a spokesman for the Las Vegas based American Peace Test, said the protest was in opposition to "military policies that have brought the U.S. to the brink of war in the Saudi desert" and in support of a proposed United Nations ban on nuclear testing.

British and U.S. nuclear weapons are tested at the Nevada site.

January 6, 1991

This is a news report published in the January 6, 1991 edition of *The Salt Lake Tribune*, one of the two main daily newspapers in Salt Lake City, Utah, a city of about 1,000,000 people in the western United States. The details of this report were actually gathered and distributed by an international wire service, the Associated Press; the *Tribune* presumably only edited the report and put a headline on it.

It is best to begin an analysis by trying to put oneself in the reader's position, that is, by imagining a typical reader and how he or she might typically deal with this text. (In terms of Fairclough's schematic diagram, this is one aspect of the "Discursive Practices" box.) It is reasonable to suppose that a typical reader of this report would be a regular reader of the *Tribune* and a resident of Salt Lake City. This topic would be of some concern to many such readers, for two reasons: (1) The state of Nevada lies just to the west of Utah and has long been the site of nuclear testing. During that time cancer rates among Utahns living near the state line have increased disproportionately to those of other Utahns, leading to widespread belief that these "downwinders" are being afflicted by nuclear fallout carried by westerly winds from Nevada. (2) At the time of publication (January 6, 1991), the start of the Persian Gulf War was less than two weeks away. Most Utahns, like most other Americans, were very much tuned in to the impending conflict. In my opinion, a typical reader of this section of the paper, having noticed the headline,

would probably have skimmed at least some of the article.

### **Text Analysis**

We now take a close look at the text, starting with features associated with the text as a whole (genre, framing, visual aids, etc.) and then gradually narrowing down to sentence-level and word-level features.

#### *Genre*

Newspaper reports typically have a top-down or “inverted pyramid” structure with information presented in descending order of importance (Van Dijk, 1988). Thus, whatever the reporter chooses to put first will be interpreted by most readers as most important, and whatever appears last will be interpreted as least important. In this case, the reporter has chosen to foreground the arresting of 700 people, not the reasons for the demonstration. Indeed, the fact that “British and U.S. nuclear weapons are tested at the Nevada site” is mentioned only at the very end. Other reasons for the demonstration are only briefly mentioned, all in the second column.

#### *Framing.*

The news-report “formula” just described obliges the writer to order his information in a top-down sequence of statements, with the initial ones serving to create a frame for the story. In the case at hand, the writer has clearly chosen to frame the event as a simple confrontation between a crowd of protestors and law-enforcement officials. The entire first column is devoted to numerical details about how many demonstrators there were and how many of them were arrested. The writer has also chosen to depict the officials in favorable terms and the protestors in unfavorable ones. Notice, for example, how Energy Department estimates are given priority over those from the protesting group, and how the DOE (Department of Energy) spokesman’s comments are presented before those of the demonstrators. This framing succeeds in drawing attention away from the more substantive aspects of the event, such as American military policies, public health, and environmental protection.

#### *Visual aids*

No photos or other visual aids accompanied this article, though one can easily imagine what kinds of photos could have been used (policemen wrestling with

protestors, protestors being led away to police vans, etc.). The large, bold typeface used for the headline would certainly draw the reader's attention, and thus immediately set up the frame just discussed.

### *Foregrounding/backgrounding*

As mentioned above, this article foregrounds the protestors-versus-police frame. And in so doing, it backgrounds more important societal issues regarding military policy, public health, etc.

### *Omission*

Determining what has been left out involves first asking the question, What could the writer have said here? In other words, what kind of information does the genre allow? Teun Van Dijk's studies of news discourse show plainly that the news-report genre allows for substantial background information and verbal commentary. This text could have included information about the scope of the nuclear testing planned for at the Nevada site, about the longstanding health problems being experienced by downwinders, about American military policies, about environmental effects of nuclear testing, about where the protestors came from (were they locals or did they come from all over the U.S.?), and so on. The fact that it does not include such important information - in a genre supposedly devoted to "informing the public" - gives the critical discourse analyst ample reason to raise suspicions about the real interests of this newspaper and the wire service (Associated Press) which supplied the report. I would argue, with Michael Parenti (1993), that in order to secure a large audience for advertisers, the popular news media as represented by this newspaper and wire service are more interested in entertaining and titillating than in genuinely informing and educating the public.

### *Presupposition*

The way this news story is framed presupposes that the most interesting feature of public protests is the number of protesters arrested, not the issues behind the protest. The story also presupposes that government officials are more correct in their actions than ordinary citizens, and more reliable in their accounts. Another presupposition in this account is that the behavior and movements of the protestors are of more significance than the behavior and movements of the police.

### *Discursive Differences*

For the most part, this text is written in the semi-formal register of reportorial discourse. There is a noticeable intrusion of protest-sign discourse, however, with slogans like "Farms Not Arms," "Give Peace a Chance," "Radiation is Poison," and "Stop Destroying Our Planet." This alternative discourse, though perhaps necessary for signs, seems less dignified in comparison to the discourse of the rest of the article. Instead of quoting the signs directly, the reporter could have interviewed the sign-holders and gotten fuller statements from them similar to that from Bill Walker. In my view, this would have had the effect of treating the protestors' concerns with more respect.

### *Topicalization*

Looking more closely at the individual sentences, one can see a pattern of sentence topics that supports the protestors-versus-officials frame:

"Nevada Officials..."  
 More than 700 people...  
 Thousands [of demonstrators]...  
 Those [demonstrators] arrested on misdemeanor trespass charges...  
 An Energy Department spokesman...  
 A sponsor of the protest, American Peace Test,... the crowd...  
 The turnout...  
 The DOE spokesman, Darwin Morgan,... more than 700 people...  
 Some of the demonstrators...  
 Demonstrators...  
 The demonstrators...  
 Other [demonstrators]...  
 Bill Walker, a spokesman for the [protestors]... the protest...  
 British and U.S. nuclear weapons...

All but the last sentence have topics referring either to the protestors (11 references) or to the officials (3). The text is clearly, therefore, about the protestors and the officials; it is not about the issues that motivated the rally in the first place.

### *Agency*

Although the protestors are heavily topicalized in this text, they are not endowed with much power. If we note how agent-patient relations are depicted, we see that in almost all of the sentences in the first half of the report, the government officials are the ones initiating actions: They *arrest, take, transport, estimate, say, and release*. It is only in the second half of the report that the protestors are empowered with initiative of their own: They *kick, carry, rally, cross, crawl*, etc. Interestingly, this sequencing of events is the precise opposite of the actual chronology of events; the actions of the protestors presumably **preceded** those of the government officials, not the other way around.

### *Deletion/omission*

Although the government has the power in this text, it is somewhat concealed from view. For example, the slogans on the signs carried by the demonstrators do not say who should “give peace a chance” or who is “destroying our planet.” Presumably it is the government, but we are forced to guess this. In a sentence like “More than 700 people were arrested Saturday...,” the writer could have added, “...by government officials.” Instead, the writer probably assumed that readers could easily infer this, and so left it out. Many other sentences and noun phrases in this text also omit specific mention of the government as agent. This has the overall effect, I would argue, of backgrounding the government’s responsibility for any of these things.

### *Presupposition*

There are a number of sentence-level presuppositions operating in the verbal comments embedded in this text. For example, when the DOE spokesman says that “Some of the demonstrators were a bit **more** aggressive [emphasis mine],” he implies that all of the demonstrators were aggressive to at least some degree. The demonstrator’s sign reading “Give Peace a Chance” presupposes that the government is presently not doing so. Another sign reading “Stop Destroying Our Planet” presupposes that the government is presently destroying our planet. Although there are more presuppositions attached to the protestors’ discourse, the one presupposition from the DOE official may actually carry more weight because it is framed differently.

### *Insinuation*

The reporter makes a key insinuation in this text. In the fourth paragraph, he or she notes that “[the turnout] failed to match a turnout of 5,000 demonstrators in 1987, when 2,000 people were arrested on trespass charges.” This statement is embedded in a sentence about size comparisons, and so the reporter could argue that it is simply making a statement of fact regarding the size of the demonstration. I would argue, however, that there is also an implied judgment of quality here, too. Most readers of this report, I believe, would be wondering about whether this demonstration was a success or a failure. The report never answers that question directly, but since it describes the event largely in terms of numbers (of protestors and arrests), the reader is likely to interpret the phrase “failed to match” as an insinuation that the demonstration itself was something of a “failure.”

### *Connotations*

At the word/phrase level, we can begin our analysis by noting some of the connotations employed by this writer. Although news-reporting discourse is supposed to be “objective,” the author of this piece indulges in a number of metaphorical excesses. For example, the actions of the demonstrators are described in distinctly animalistic terms: They “crossed a cattle guard,” “crawled across fences,” “were taken to holding pens,” and “kicked at the guards when they were brought out of the pens”; some were “a bit more aggressive” than others. Verbs like “rallied” and “fanned out” add a faintly militaristic sense: one commonly speaks of **rallying the troops** and having soldiers **fan out in search of the enemy**. Both sets of metaphors serve to trivialize the protestors: The animalistic ones depict the protestors as irrational, while the militaristic ones make them seem violent and thus hypocritical, given their public stance in favor of peace.

### *Register*

Most of this text is written in the standard, semiformal register of news reporting. The only exceptions are the quote from the DOE spokesman and the slogans on the demonstrators’ signs, which are somewhat informal. I would argue, however, that these two kinds of exceptions have different effects. The informality of the DOE spokesman’s comments serve to put “a human face” on

the government officials, making them more sympathetic. The informality of the protestors' slogans, on the other hand, only trivializes their concerns.

### **Modality**

This entire text is written in the indicative mood and past tense, the same modality as that of historical discourse. It reports a series of actions in a highly factual tone, without the slightest trace of uncertainty. There are no instances of conditional, hypothetical, or subjunctive modality in this text. This has the overall effect, I would argue, of making the issues underlying the protest completely closed to discussion or negotiation. And this makes the events themselves seem more like an ineffectual ritual than a meaningful clash of ideas.

### **Contextualized Interpretation**

As emphasized earlier in this chapter, an essential feature of Critical Discourse Analysis is the full use of context in analyzing texts. In analyzing this particular text, I have already made a number of comments indicating how I think a typical reader might read and interpret it. I have also suggested various tactics used by the writer (whether consciously or not) to put a certain slant on this text. My analysis shows, I think, that the text clearly paints a one-sided picture that favors the government officials and belittles the demonstrators.

But this is not enough. A full discussion of this text should also take into account the larger sociocultural context surrounding it. This could include the place of political demonstrations in American culture, the environmental and health effects of nuclear testing, the proposed United Nations ban on nuclear testing, U.S. military policy in general and the buildup leading to the Gulf War, and so on. It should also include a discussion of the media in influencing American public opinion. A useful reference here is Parenti's *Inventing Reality*. Parenti argues that in a society where the major news media are owned by large corporations and thus expected to turn large profits, reporters are under constant pressure to titillate the public without seriously challenging the power structure. This Gulf Protest report is an excellent example. It entertains the reader by recounting an interesting skirmish in the desert between the government and a large group of citizens, but it does so in an uninformative way that does not challenge the status quo: Several thousand protestors gathered in the desert, they rallied and agitated, and they were either dispersed or

arrested—end of story. The serious issues underlying this event are so obscured and trivialized that one has to ask the question: Is this report typical of anti-government protest coverage? If the answer is yes, then one has to ask further questions about the role of the media in informing the public, the role of the media in democracies, the responsibility of the educational system in the face of such ideological manipulation, etc.

Space restrictions prevent my going further into this aspect of CDA, which is unfortunate since this is a crucial part of the whole enterprise, one that distinguishes CDA from other forms of discourse analysis. In any case, contextualized interpretation should be broad enough and deep enough to take into serious account the fundamental premises of a democratic society: equal justice for all, basic fairness, individual freedoms (within reason), guarantees of human rights, government by popular will, etc.

### **Applications to English Teaching**

Critical discourse analysis offers several benefits to the teacher of English. First, it engages students' interest. Many students are interested in current issues, especially those having cultural or political aspects. CDA deliberately seeks out texts that "matter," the kind that students are confronted with in their daily lives. Even course readings and other educational materials could serve as targets of critical discourse analysis. Second, CDA helps students become better, more discerning readers. It makes broader use of context than other approaches and thus invites students to "look at the big picture." And it encourages students to analyze texts in ways that bring their hidden meanings to the surface. Third, it allows teachers to focus on a variety of textual features and show students how they have real significance for reading comprehension. Concepts like connotation, framing, presupposition, and so on can be taught not just as abstract terms but as important features in the interpretation of real-world texts.

In this chapter, I have tried to give you a fairly detailed idea of how critical discourse analysis is done. Needless to say, such an analysis is far too complicated to assign to students who are just learning the language. Instead, I recommend that teachers acquaint students with CDA in smaller doses. This can be done in either of two ways:

1. Using much shorter texts than the one we just analyzed. Advertisements would be a good possibility, as they are often quite brief; or

2. Taking a longer text (such as our "Gulf Protest" example) but having students focus on only a few kinds of features. To make things easier, teachers could analyze the text beforehand and then direct students' attention to those features that are most salient.

Teachers could start by having students first read the text and then answer questions about it such as "How is this text framed?" or "Point out an example of metaphor in this text." A useful follow-up step would be to ask "Why is it framed in this way?", "What purpose does this metaphor serve?", etc. Once students become familiar with this kind of questioning, teachers could take a different text and just start in with open discussion. Alternatively, teachers could have their students do a written analysis of the text.

In any case, it is important to assign texts that pertain to a subject and culture that students are familiar with. The reader has probably noticed while we were analyzing the "Gulf Protest" text that a good analysis depends heavily on knowledge of the topic and the larger social context. I would therefore recommend that teachers look for English-language texts in local newspapers or magazines, on topics of local interest.

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