

Mass Media Discourse: A Critical Analysis Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I aim to revisit some key issues in approaches to research on mass media texts from a discourse analytical perspective and to present a rationale, as well as a Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) framework for analysis of mass media discourse. I then consider a number of areas of critical research interest in mass media discourse locally and elsewhere. Examples of actual CDA research on mass media discourse are reviewed in terms of topics of apparent popular interest among practitioners such as racist discourse in news reporting, language of globalization and neo-capitalism, and war news reporting, before listing methodological, as well as topical agenda by a major proponent in the field for further work. The article concludes that CDA's multidisciplinary approach to research on mass media discourse helps reveal hidden socio-political issues and agenda in various areas of language as social practice and in doing so potentially empowers the individual and social groups.

Keywords: CDA, critical analysis, mass media discourse, critical discourse studies, language and power, media texts analysis, media research agenda

INTRODUCTION

Mass communication is a form of human communication practice, how human beings “talk” to one another via verbal and non-verbal means, but which concerns messages that are essentially transmitted

through a medium (channel) to reach a large number of people (Devito, 2011, p.2; Wimmer & Dominick, 2012). Mass media are channels that carry mass communication and almost all research into the latter “is based on the premise that the media have significant effects” (McQuail, 1994, p.327) on the affairs of people. From the outset, for a clear perspective on the issues concerning mass media effects, it is useful to illuminate what constitute mass

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 6 August 2013

Accepted: 27 December 2013

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media in current communication studies, i.e. “any communication channel used to simultaneously reach a large number of people, including radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, billboards, films, recordings, books, and the Internet. ...[as well as] the new category *smart mass media*, which include *smartphones*, *smart TVs*, and *tablets*” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2012, p.2). The last three smart media types mentioned are essentially stand-alone computers that can be used to communicate through tweets, blogs, text messages, email and other social media posts (Wimmer & Dominick, 2012), as well as specific traditional media genres such as news, advertising, film, and TV programmes.

In this article, I aim to revisit some key issues in approaches to research on mass media texts from a discourse analytical perspective and to present a rationale as well as a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework for analysis of mass media discourse. I then consider a number of areas of critical research interest in mass media discourse locally and elsewhere.

Despite the advances in mass communication and associated smart social media technologies and related media product spinoffs over the years, it appears that mass media research probably began to merge with discourse/language analyses circa the 1980s. Given the centrality of language as the primary semiotic modality in all forms of communication, van Dijk (1985) noted at the time that “despite their common interest for text, talk and communication” and particularly a methodological link in

content analysis, the two vast fields of mass communication and discourse analysis “seemed to ignore each other” (p.v).

Hence, van Dijk advocated that “classical methods of [quantitative] content analysis...be usefully combined with...a critical, ideological analysis” because “there is no strict distinction between content analysis on the one hand and explicit discourse analysis on the other hand, e.g. along the quantitative-qualitative dimension or according to whether observable or latent categories are studied” (1985, p.4). Although van Dijk’s own work over the years has tended to focus on news racism, he has also used a combination of content analysis and discourse analytical categories or structures (see e.g., van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk, 1997) to address social issues in mass media discourse and their related sociocultural and cognitive aspects (see also development in thinking about discourse comprehension in van Dijk, 2004). Fairclough (1995b) adopts a poststructuralist, sociocritical approach to set an agenda for studying the media *and* language “which readers can use themselves to pursue their own interests in mass media” (p.2).

Wodak and Busch (2004) have reaffirmed this coming-together of paradigms drawing support, as it were, from “observers [who] speak of ‘a qualitative turn’ in media studies” (p.105). These critical discourse analysts argue that in recent approaches to media texts, with the somewhat “decentralization” of the notion of “text” (p.106) presumably relative to other aspects of “discourse” (or text in

context), analysts have, therefore, refocused their interest on the “(social, cultural, and political) context and ... the ‘localization’ of meaning” (Wodak & Busch, 2004). This reorientation of research focus has taken place in tandem with a similar interest shift in approaches to texts in linguistics to the extent that media texts regularly populate data corpora in linguistic analysis. As a case in point, Wodak and Busch (2004) noted that “more than 40% of the papers published in the leading journal *Discourse & Society* are based on media texts” (p.106).

Moreover, it had been argued previously that approaching mass media studies from a paradigm-based vantage was fraught with inconsistencies and speculations, not to mention turf wars (see for e.g., Berkenkotter, 1991; Gage, 1989). Given that a “paradigm” is defined as “a consensus among scholars” or “the entire global set of commitments shared by the members of a particular scientific community” (Kuhn, 1977, p.xix, as cited in Potter *et al.*, 1993, p.317), “[t] here is a good deal of speculation about the sets of assumptions or paradigms in various fields of social science” (Potter *et al.*, 1993, p.318) in which most mass media research appeared to have been done (more than 60% in the social science paradigm compared with about 34% in the interpretive paradigm and less than 6% in the critical one) (p.317). Hence, Potter *et al.* (1993) concluded that even though the social science paradigm may emerge as the majority paradigm in mainstream communication research journals, it “could not be considered a dominant paradigm in the research field”

(p.317) in question. Perhaps, as van Dijk (1996) has noted, instead of focusing on the effects of mass media from a communication studies perspective, discourse-oriented research could investigate “properties of the social power of the ... media ..., not restricted to the influence of the media on their audiences, but [which] also involves the role of the media within the broader framework of the social, cultural, political, or economic power structures of society” (p.9).

Elsewhere in the literature, proponents of mass media analysis, albeit with a clear focus on political theory such as Carpentier and de Cleen (2007), advance “bringing discourse theory into media studies” (p.265). They apply Laclau and Mouffe’s theories of discourse, as well as hegemony and socialist strategy (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, 2001) to articulate Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA), which they then compare to CDA but only to concede that “a significant number of valuable contributions [of DTA] to media studies can be found within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), ...the standard framework for analyzing media texts” (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007, p.274).

Accordingly, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) espouse that both DTA and CDA are *critical* in that they “investigate and analyze power relations in society and formulate normative perspectives from which a critique of such relations can be made with an eye on the possibilities for social change” (p.2). With its broad orientation to social critique, emancipation, and change, CDA in particular takes its bearings from the basic

notions of *text* and *discourse*, terms that “have been subject to a hugely proliferating number of usages in the social sciences... [in that] [a]lmost no paper or article is to be found which does not revisit these notions, quoting Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Niklas Luhmann, or many others” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009b, p.2)

RATIONALE AND FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

The term “discourse” is primarily concerned with language use in social context, particularly with the dialectical relationship between language, the main semiotic modality, and society, as well as with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication as social practice (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) in the written and/or spoken modes (or according to van Dijk, 2009, “text” and “talk”, respectively). Fairclough (1995, p.4) defines “text” as “the written or spoken language produced in a discursive event”, which includes visual, sound and other semiotic forms that are part of the multi-semiotic character of texts such as television language (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000, p.148).

Although discourse also potentially engages a range of non-linguistic semiotic modalities or resources besides language that are instantiated together as in mass media texts (e.g., multimedia texts, streaming video, and related multimodal discursive practices on the Internet) (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), language is the most

complex in the process of situated meaning-making (“semiosis”) in the social context of discourse production and interpretation (Fairclough, 1989, 1995a; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1994).

Simply put, discourse is language (linguistic text) in context and refers to expressing ourselves using words in ways of knowing, valuing, and experiencing the world. As theory and research in systemic functional linguistics have shown, linguistic forms can be systematically associated with social and ideological functions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1994). Hence, discourse, or for that matter, “Discourse” i.e. with a capital “D” after Gee (1999), can be symbolically used for the (re) production of systemic power relations and knowledge, and dominance or hegemony (e.g., the unmitigated influence of one social institution, group or nation over another) (Fairclough, 1998; van Dijk, 2008). Perhaps, more importantly, discourses can also be used to resist and critique such assertions of power, knowledge and dominance with a view towards transforming them into more egalitarian constructions of reality, and thereby empowering the individual in society towards instituting social change (Wodak, 2004; Wodak & Koller, 2008).

Given the symbolic power of the spoken/written word and the notion of transformative empowerment mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, CDA is a broad, multidisciplinary field of inquiry that engages extant traditional approaches such as conversation analysis, ethnography of communication, interactional

sociolinguistics, and discursive psychology (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999). It has also attracted the interest of professionals from diverse backgrounds “who have become interested in discourse issues...to achieve social goals” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p.2) including historians, business entrepreneurs, lawyers, politicians, medical practitioners, as well as forensic linguists (pp.2-3). Clearly, it is for this reason that van Dijk (1997) prefers the term CDS (Critical Discourse Studies), “a new cross-discipline that comprises the theory and analysis of text and talk in virtually all disciplines of the humanities and social science” (p.xi).

CDA describes, interprets, analyses, and critiques social life (Luke, 1997) by studying “the discursive practices of a community—its normal ways of using language” (Fairclough, 1995b, p.55), stemming primarily from Jürgen Habermas’ critical theory and related espousals of the critical in the work of Louis Althusser, Mikhail Bakhtin, and the neo-Marxist tradition of Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School. Foucault’s views on power and “orders of discourse” (see for e.g., Fairclough, 1989, pp.28-31) are acknowledged in the approach of CDA’s principal exponents such as Norman Fairclough whose work is related to Michael Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics as well as to the critical linguistics of Roger Fowler, Tony Trew, Gunther Kress and Bob Hodge. An alternative approach to CDA, though not exclusively so, is the sociocognitive approach of Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak (Titscher *et al.*, 2000, p.144).

Fairclough’s (1989, 1995, 2001) framework of discourse is distinguished by three levels of meaning: 1) text, which can refer to both spoken and written language; 2) interaction, which concerns the process of text production and text interpretation; and 3) context, which deals with the broader social and cultural conditions of discourse production and interpretation. Corresponding to these three dimensions of discourse, he postulates three dimensions of analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation.

The stage of description focuses both on the forms and meanings of a text (Fairclough, 2001, 1995). Fairclough (1995) states that it is difficult to separate these two features of the texts for the reason that “meanings are necessarily realized in forms and differences in meaning entail differences in form” (Fairclough, 1995a, p.57; Cf. Halliday’s [1994] “lexicogrammar”). Linguistic analysis of a text covers traditional forms of linguistic analysis (such as vocabulary, semantics, grammar, phonology, and writing system analyses) but includes textual organization above the sentence (such as generic structure, cohesion and turn taking). Fairclough suggests Halliday’s (1994) systemic model of language for its theoretical view of language as basically a social phenomenon that is shared with CDA (Fairclough, 2003, p.5). Mediating between the text and social practice, the interpretation stage of analysis involves the process of text production/comprehension, and is concerned with the cognitive processes of participants. Finally, the stage of explanation covers the analysis

of the relationship between interaction and the social context of production and interpretation (Fairclough, 2001). It is related to different levels of abstraction of an event: the immediate, situational context, and institutional practices the event is embedded in (Fairclough, 1995, 2001).

Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA) is fundamentally compatible with Fairclough's approach to critical analysis of discourse in a way that both consider discourse as a form of social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Wodak's (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) approach is also somewhat three-dimensional: contents or topics, discursive strategies, and linguistic means. The analyst first identifies the specific contents, topics, or themes of a specific discourse that has racist, nationalist and/or ethnicist orientations. Next, s/he locates the discursive strategies underlying the topics/themes before examining their linguistic means and/or the specific, context-dependent linguistic realisations in the discourses under analysis. Texts, genres, and discourses, as well as related sociological aspects, institutional history, and situational frames are inter-connected via *intertextual* and *interdiscursive* relationships which serve in the exploration of "how discourses, genres and texts change in relation to socio-political change" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p.90). Additionally, the process of *recontextualisation*, "the transfer of given elements to new contexts" serves to provide insight into how new meanings are formed in use (p.90).

Given the centrality of discursive strategies in Wodak's DHA, she proposes four

macro strategies of discourse, particularly for the analysis of national identities: 1) constructive strategies: "discourses serve to construct national identities"; 2) perpetuating strategies: discourses "may restore or justify certain social status quo"; 3) transformational strategies: discourses "are instrumental in perpetuating and producing the status quo"; and 4) destructive strategies: "discursive practices may have an effect on the transformation or even destruction of the status quo" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p.112). Further, in analyzing texts related to race, ethnicity, nationhood, or national identity, discursive strategies may be based on five key questions:

1. How are persons named and referred to linguistically? (*referential strategies*)
2. What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them? (*predicational strategies*)
3. By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify and legitimate the exclusion, discrimination, suppression, and exploitation of others? (*argumentation strategies, including fallacies*)
4. From what perspective or points of view are these namings, attributions and arguments expressed? (*perspectivation, and framing strategies*)

Are the respective discriminating utterances articulated overtly, are they even intensified or are they mitigated? (*mitigation and intensification strategies*) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p.xiii)

Wodak's DHA additionally links to the socio-cognitive theory of van Dijk (1998), which views discourse as "structured forms of knowledge and the memory of social practices, whereas 'text' refers to concrete oral utterances or written documents" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p.6). With its attention to the representation of groups and the social relations between them, van Dijk's approach is useful for analysis of news discourse to examine the socio-ideological representation of "Us vs. Them". Van Dijk (2001) begins his analytical approach with topics or "semantic macrostructures", which he argues, provide an initial "overall idea of what a discourse or corpus of texts is all about, and controls many other aspects of discourse and its analysis" (p.102). Next, he analyses local or "micro structures" for "the meaning of words (lexical), the structures of propositions, and coherence and other relations between propositions" (p.103). Then, at the "meso" level (i.e., mediating between global and local meanings), he identifies "an overall strategy of 'positive self-presentation and negative Other presentation', in which our good things and their bad things are emphasized, and our bad things and their good things are de-emphasized" (p.103).

In sum, the universal principles of CDA, as it were, which are shared between the sociocritical and the sociocognitive approaches outline above, are as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems.
2. Power relations are discursive i.e. performed and constructed through discourse.

3. Discourse constitutes society and culture in a dialectical relationship.
4. Discourse does ideological work and is not neutral.
5. Discourse is historical and cannot be understood without historical context.
6. The link between text and society is mediated through discourse.
7. Analysing discourse is an interpretative and explanatory process.
8. Discourse is a form of social action

(Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, pp.271-280)

Needless to say, the above principles reflect the multifarious ways in which discourse works and when appropriated by the power-holders in society, particularly the state and/or those who control the mass media, it serves to enact/sustain unequal power relations and representations of social groups, appearing to be common sense, normal, and natural when in fact there is inherent prejudice, injustice and social inequity.

Using legitimate language, purveyors of social power or those seeking it are able to set their own agendas in the mass media (Scheufele, 1999; Weaver, 2007), manufacture our consent (Herman & Chomsky, 2008; Robinson, 1999), and generally mislead us so that our concerns about persistent, larger systemic issues of class, gender, age, religion and culture seem petty or non-existent. Thus, CDA provides a framework to deconstruct their discourse and demystify their words, as it were, so that we avoid being "misled

and duped into embracing the dominant worldview (ideology) at our expense and their gain” (McGregor, 2003, Understanding the Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis section, para. 6).

CDA AND THE MASS MEDIA: A RESEARCH AGENDA

In recent years, with the debate on globalisation as “the principal frame of reference when we try to explain new political, economic and cultural phenomena... [and] the spread of the Internet..., media and communication are ascribed a significant part in the processes of change” (Hjarvard, 2003, pp.15-17). Even a brief reflection on how the array of mass media channels listed at the beginning of this paper impacts people’s lives will bear testimony to our mass-mediated world and the emergence of the network society (Castells, 2000, 2011).

As Wodak and Busch (2004, pp.109-111) have noted, in CDA, media are representations of public space and may be studied as sites of social struggle and power, particularly in terms of the language of the mass media: “[L]anguage is often only apparently transparent. Media institutions often purport to be neutral, in that they provide space for public discourse, reflect states of affairs disinterestedly, and give the perceptions and arguments of the newsmakers” (p.110), while they often have hidden sociopolitical agenda that lie at the heart of the matter (e.g. Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Herman & Chomsky, 2008; Miller, 2004). Major issues that are appropriated in the agenda include

racism, capitalism, nationalism, identity politics, anti-semitism, sexism, and war reporting. Some areas of CDA research vis-à-vis the mass media and related examples are outlined below.

Racist Discourse

Van Dijk (van Dijk, 1987, 1991, 1993; van Dijk, Barquin, & Hibbett, 2009) has devoted much of his research to the critical analysis of the mass media, particularly newspaper articles (van Dijk, 1988, 1991). His socio-cognitive framework for analyzing articles focuses on “the discursive nature of the reproduction of racism by the press” based on the “us” versus “them” dichotomy in relation to in-groups/out-groups and positive self-presentation/negative Other presentation strategy, respectively (van Dijk, 1991, p.247). He notes that empirical research in many countries have shown that “the media play an important role in expressing and spreading ethnic prejudice... [which] is one of the conditions of racist practices that define racism as the social system of ethnic power abuse” (van Dijk, 2012, p.15).

Indeed, as Wodak and Busch (2004) have highlighted, the (written) news genre has been most prominent in CDA research on media including right-wing editorial biases in newspapers and journal editing, and Wodak’s own studies of nationalism, anti-semitism and neo-racism (Wodak, De Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009). Studies on the local scene that have delved into racism, nationalist ideologies and related practices in news media include those by

Abdullah (2004), Nair (2008a, 2008b) and Manan (2008).

Language of the New Capitalism

Another area of research and commentary on mass media discourse that is also prominent in CDA and “which illustrates the mediating and constructing role of the media” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009a, p.12) in neo-capitalist, neoliberal discourses has been pioneered by Fairclough (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995a, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001). In this relatively new area of critical work, the “language of the new capitalism” (Wodak & Busch, 2004, p.188) refers to both the dominant global position of the English language (read: powerful Anglophone countries), as well as to the (language as) discourse of the (yet incomplete) globalization project (Fairclough, 2001a). In both senses, neo-capitalist language is linked to discourses of transparency, democratization, modernization, etc., in a chain of equivalence to the digitally-networked k-economy characterized by “time-space distanciation” as “an extension in the spatio-temporal reach of power” in language use (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.80).

In short, the buzzwords of the globalisation project are more than mere vocabulary of our time; instead, they signify texts and discourses in the “new planetary vulgate” that is “endowed with performative power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p.3, as cited in Fairclough, 2004, p.104) in the new world order. As the

discourse-driven neoliberal project strives to remove “the obstacles to the new economic order” (p.104) via the appropriation of linguistic resources in mass-mediated social practice, new alliances are forged with the major players on the geopolitical scene and new identities are constructed at the global/local levels via new genres, including hybridised ones, in the mass media (Abdullah, 2004, 2008; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

War Reporting

War reporting in the mass media has also been analysed using the CDA approach. An analysis of archived US newspaper articles reporting anti-Gulf War protests revealed three frames of news interpretation: the Enemy Within, Marginal Oddity, and Legitimate Controversy, as well as metaphors, themes, argumentation strategies, and syntactical and lexical choices for each frame (Hackett & Zhao, 1994). However, a crucial aspect of the hidden agenda was the “treatment of different voices (moralist, utilitarian, radical) *within* the peace movement [which] was placed on the defensive in press discourse, compelled to defend its legitimacy” (p.509; emphasis in original).

Indeed, patterns of press discourse in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) appeared to provide broad insights into “America’s ‘master narrative’ of war, a narrative which had been threatened by the Vietnam experience” (Hackett & Zhao, 1994, p.509). To show how the state uses the mainstream media to promote its own

interests, Kellner (1992) investigated “a classic case of media manipulation” that showed that the Bush administration had secretly released disinformation to the press “to legitimate sending U.S. troops...and to mobilize public support for this action”. In the subsequent period of the war, the media became a conduit for U.S. policy, “privileging those voices seeking a military solution to the conflict” (p.57).

More recently, Davies (2007) analysed a *Sunday Mirror* news report of the February 2003 demonstration in London against the Iraq war as part of a larger study of the textual generation of oppositional pairs (or antonyms) in news reports in the UK national press. He discovered that unusual “created... ‘situational or context bound antonymy’ [such as] the much quoted response by George Bush to the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, “*Either* you’re with us *or* with the terrorists’... combine rhetorically to construct groups of protesters as ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’” (pp.71-73). Davies argued that although Bush had used “coordinated antonymy” (*either* X *or* Y), he employed “us and terrorists” unconventionally rather than “us and them” in seeking to unite America and the rest of the world “against a common enemy”... [leaving] no possibility of a middle way” (Davies, 2007, pp.71-74; original emphasis).

Thetela (2001) is another interesting study on the use of the classical *us* versus *them* binary opposition in the South African newspapers covering military intervention and war in Lesotho, South Africa as a discursive strategy to establish “two rival

social group identities” (p.347). Also, dehumanizing the enemy appears to be a popular strategy that is used to depict warring factions/nations. For example, Steuter and Willis’ (2009) study shows how the Canadian news media covered the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Headlines data revealed “a pattern of dehumanizing language applied to enemy leaders as well as Arab and Muslim citizens” besides the use of “animal imagery that reduced human actions with sub-human behaviours” (p.1). Another case in point in which both the *Us* vs. *Them* binary, as well as demonizing language, were used was the ideological construction of Iran (Jahedi & Abdullah, 2012a) in the post-September 11 *The New York Times* news discourse as “the negative Other, a nation of people that formed part of George W. Bush’s contentious ‘axis of evil’ thesis—malevolent, untrustworthy, violent, and a threat to world peace” (Jahedi & Abdullah, 2012b, p.59).

Overall, other than working with online news reports, newspapers and even political cartoons that may be found on their editorial pages (see for e.g., Sani, Abdullah, Ali, & Abdullah, 2012a; Sani, Abdullah, Ali, & Abdullah, 2012b), CDA work has dealt with social media and networking sites such as *Facebook* (Eisenlauer, 2013), radio and television, as well as their associated genres. See, for example, Chouliaraki’s (2004) analysis of footage on television of the September 11th attacks in New York. Further, while the general focus of critical analysis is based on the study of linguistic features of media texts, and images are

treated as “visual language” (Fairclough, 2001), i.e. often analyzed as if they were linguistic text (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.61), Kress and van Leeuwen’s (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006) work in critical social semiotics has served to elucidate visual features via multimodal discourse analysis (see also Lemke, 2004; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Advertising Discourse

Advertising as a discourse “must first be recognized as *paid* nonpersonal communication forms used by identified sources through various media with *persuasive intent*” (Rotzoll, 1985, p.94; emphases added). While advertisements are generally connected with the mass media of newspapers, magazines, television, etc., the public also encounters them on billboards, posters and in direct mail (Rotzoll, 1985), not to mention in recent times on the ubiquitous Internet web page.

Bhatia (2004) reports that advertisements as the “primary and most dominant form of promotional discourse” (p.89) are readily appropriated via the embedding/mixing of genres. For example, the *South China Morning Post* carries a special weekly product or service review called “Classified Plus”, which in the mixed genre form such as “an advertorial or a blurb...has been deceptively used as a recommendation or a review, whereas in fact it is no different from an advertisement” (p.91). Bhatia proceeds to demonstrate how the rhetorical structure of written discourses such as “philanthropic fundraising” and “commercial advertising”

may be analyzed side-by-side to reveal the appropriation of generic resources and elements of interdiscursivity in the latter type of discourse so that it deceptively resembles the former (pp.95-97). Appropriation of interdiscursive elements and the colonization of one discourse by another, result in hybridization and the construction of hybrid identities in advertisements (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.115; see also Fairclough [1995, pp.10-12] for “conversalization”, “marketization”, and “commodification”). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) relate how advertisers in post-apartheid South Africa were quick in appropriating black emancipation discourses: “*Fochini* [fashion house]: You’ve won your freedom. Now use it. Get a Fochini’s credit card today” (p.115).

In the case of advertisements that employ multiple semiotic modalities including linguistics text to create a composite image of a preferred representation, Machin and Mayr (2012) advocate a social semiotics approach based on the pioneering work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001). While Machin and Mayr (2012) note that “[h]ow much images can be described as working like language [the multimodal discourse analysts’ claim] has been challenged”, they show how Kress and van Leeuwen’s analytical toolkit used together with CDA “does enhance our ability to describe more systematically what it is that we see” (p.8), taking the typical text plus image “Easy-at-work fitness tips!” advertisement in *Cosmopolitan* magazine targeting young female office workers who need “fitness tips for bikini body performance” (Machin

& Mayr, 2012). The analysis shows that the image does not depict “a real woman at work”, but rather “one that symbolizes a particular kind of lifestyle” to sell advertising space, and the magazine, while distracting “the reader from the absurdity of many of the tips provided” (pp.9-10).

Summary of Current/Future Research Areas

Wodak and Meyer (2009a) list six areas of interest in CDA that constitute current critical research agenda together with examples of research that may be linked to the challenges and to socio-political issues in the media such as nationalism, racism, identity politics, governance, globalisation, and gender, and how these are mapped on to other issues at the local level. Some of the areas essentially cover methodological issues while impinging to a lesser extent on topical interests, as follows:

1. Effects of the Knowledge-based Economy (KBE) on society and its recontextualization;
2. Incorporating cognitive science approaches into CDA to go beyond Western and Eurocentric perspectives;
3. New phenomena in our political systems arising from global/local developments;
4. Effects of new media/genres and changed concepts of space and time;
5. Relationships between complex historical processes, hegemonic narratives and CDA approaches especially in the context of identity politics on all levels; and

6. Avoiding “cherry picking” using integrated quantitative and qualitative methods and via “retroductable [transparent, explicit], self-reflective presentations of research

(Wodak & Meyer, 2009a, p.11).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the foregoing sections of this article, I have attempted to make a representation of CDA as a multidisciplinary approach to the critical analysis of mass media discourse with particular reference to oft hidden socio-political issues and agenda such as racism, capitalism, nationalism, identity politics, anti-semitism, sexism, and war reporting. The review here of actual research conducted using the approach is not, of course, exhaustive but I think it could serve as an initial road-map towards further exploration of the language of the mass media, as it were, and its role in legitimating unequal power relations and hegemonic social practices. Illumination of social issues and problems in this way can only empower marginalized, disenfranchised, and oppressed individuals and the social groups that they populate.

As McGregor (2003) notes, CDA “tries to illuminate ways in which the dominant forces in a society construct versions of reality that favour their interests”, as well as to unmask such practices “to support the victims of such oppression and encourage them to resist and transform their lives” (Understanding the Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis section, para. 1). That is what counts in understanding the pervasive

role of the mass media in people's lived realities.

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