# DISCOURSE- HISTORICAL APPROACH TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDIES: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS, BASIC CHARACTERISTICS AND ANALYTICAL TOOLS

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**ABSTRACT**
The ongoing research work probes and restores the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) creed through a re-conceptualization of such a discourse analytical trend. In this perspective, drawing on the theories and views developed and shared by prominent proponents like Wodak (2001, 2009, 2011, 2015a, 2015b), Reisigl (2017), Wodak & Reisigl (1999) Reisigl & Wodak (2009), Weiss & Wodak (2003), the study sheds some insights into the DHA. Merely theoretical in its nature, it sets the foundations of how to do a historical analysis of a discourse or a text. It finally provides, through suitable tools and discourse strategies, some guidelines (and not a panacea) to carry out a critical analysis through the DHA lens. Indeed, a re-visitation of previous works on DHA has helped bring to limelight the distinctive features of that discourse analytical perspective and how to approach language use (or discourse) under the DHA angle.

**Key words**: Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach, discourse strategies, historical context.

## Introduction

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an old discourse-analytical approach which is receiving more attention these years (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018). It subsumes a range of approaches which help decode the meaning of communicative events (or discourses). Among these, the Discourse-Historical Approach (devised by Wodak & Reisigl) seems to be given less importance by scholars and researchers recently, as most studies thus far carried out in the field of critical analysis are focused on other approaches, mainly the Socio-cultural Approach put forth by Fairclough, and the Socio-cognitive Approach invented by Van Dijk.

However, as argued by Reisigl (2017), "DHA stand[s] for one of the most prominent critical approaches to the study of discourse" (p.44). Indeed, that discourse-analytical trend which was originally applied by Austrian scholars, has evolved to the European level before reaching its current international sphere. Appreciating thus its relevance for the study of discourses, Reisigl (ibid) opines that "the Discourse-Historical Approach is a flexible and productive variety of CDS [Critcal Discourse Studies] that always opts for a problem-oriented perspective" (p.47). The current research paper aims to probe into that statement on the one hand, and to attempt to correct the image made of it on the other hand, by providing more insights into that approach.

## 1.    Critical Discourse Studies and the Discourse-Historical Approach

In this section, we are mainly concerned with positioning the DHA within the broadly defined field of CDS on the first hand, and comparing the DHA to other critical discourse approaches, on the other hand.

### 1.1.    Locating DHA within the Field of CDS

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is part and parcel of the broadly defined field of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), also called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak, 2001, 2009, 2015a, 2015b,Reisigl, 2017). According to Van Dijk (2003), CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power dominance abuse, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. Fairclough (1995, 2001) stresses that CDA is a multidisciplinary approach to discourse which views language as "a form of social practice" As for Pennycook (2001, cited in Mai & Al-Shaymaa (2015), he describes the goal of CDA and believes that "it" (p.191) aims to "mak[e] the social ideological systems and representations transparent and to show how they are related to the broader social order" (ibid). Wodak (2015a) rather posits that CDA aims to denaturalize the role discourses play in the (re)production of non-inclusive and non-egalitarian structures and challenges the social conditions in which they are embedded. It follows from this that the main objective of CDA or CDS is to produce enlightenment and emancipation of the less powerful by revealing unequal power relationships in/of language use (or discourse). In that perspective, and as posited by Meyer (2001), the discourse analyst "takes the part of the underprivileged and tries to show up the linguistic means used by the privileged to stabilize or even to intensify inequalities in society" (p.31). In the attempt to achieve that goal, CDA exponents rely on a number of approaches among which the DHA.

Considered as "one of the most prominent critical approaches to the study of discourse" (Reisigl, 2017: 44), the DHA mainly focuses on the systematic analysis of context and its dialectical relationship to meaning-making. Endorsing the view to resort to context in the analysis of discourse, Van Dijk (c*ited in Wodak, 2009, p.13-14)* sustains that (critical and other) discourse studies only paid lip- service to the necessity of developing the relations between text and context. Defining context as "the mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse" (Van Dijk, 2003: 356), he argues that one of the main tenets of CDA is that discourse is historical (ibid: 353). Resigl & Wodak (2009) consider discourse as (i) a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices, (ii) socially constituted and socially constitutive, (iii) related to a macro-topic and (iv) linked to the argumentation about validity claims. They thus infer that (a) macro-topic-relatedness, (b) pluri-perspectivity and (c) argumentativity are constitutive elements of a discourse. Endorsing Van Dijk (2003)'s view, Wodak & Ludwig (1999, cited in Todolí, Labarta, & Dolón, 2006) claim that: "discourse (…) is always historical, that is, it is connected synchronically and diachronically with other communicative events which are happening at the same time or which have happened before" (p.21). Drawing on this, Wodak (2001:65) states that the discourse-historical approach attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of 'the social and political fields in which discursive events' are embedded. In

other words, in doing CDA on the DHA scale, one should think about "the integration of past experience, present events and future visions" (Wodak, 2009: 11) to make a holistic analysis.

### 1.2. *DHA and other Analytical Approaches: Commonalities and Distinctive Features*

As can be inferred from the previous subsection, CDS encompasses a range of approaches among which the DHA is a prominent one. Like the other critical discourse analysts, the proponents of DHA make practical claims of emancipation and criticize discursively constituted power abuse, injustice and social discrimination, and they make epistemic claims of revelation or enlightenment (Reisigl, 2017). Power, as argued by Fairclough (1989), is the capacity to control orders of discourse. It can be exercised through *coercion* or *consent*. In that sense, discourse is regarded as the favoured vehicle of control by consent. Fairclough (ibid) thus states that "language has become the primary medium of social control and power" (p.3). The discursive exertion of power can be expressed through grammatical forms, and also by a person's control of political, educational, judicial, religious and social occasions. "Texts" (Reisigl and Wodak 2008) are then viewed "as sites of social struggle, as channels of power legitimation" (ibid). However, DHA proponents sustain that, language is not powerful on its own – it is a means to gain and maintain power by the use powerful people make of it (Reisigl & Wodak, 2008). Therefore, analysts are interested in 'demystifying discourses by deciphering ideologies'.

Similar to other critical discourse practitioners, DHA apologists lay emphasis on the practice-related quality of discourses, the context dependence of discourses, and the structures as well as constructive character of discourses. Methodologically, the approach entails a transdisciplinary and multi-theoretical perspective. This means that DHA works in dialogue with other disciplines and theories and does not constitute a well-defined empirical method, but rather a cluster of methods. Like their CDA fellows, discourse historical analysts prefer to focus on problem-related "authentic" data and to employ multiple methods of analysis. They share with other CDA scholars that they reject a purely formalist and context-abstract view on language. They pay attention to multi-model macro-as well as micro-phenomena, to intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, as well as to social, historical, political, economic, psychological and other factors relating to the verbal and non-verbal phenomena of communication.

In spite of the above sameness, DHA significantly differs from the other approaches for a number of elements. First, although DHA is aligned to Critical Theory, general social theory plays a minor role compared with the discourse model and the emphasis on historical analysis: context is understood as mainly historical. Second, the DHA is claimed to follow the principle of triangulation more systematically than other CDA approaches, mostly in extensive research projects. The principle of triangulation implies taking a whole range of empirical observations, theories and methods as well as background information into account. Third, the practical application of the analytical insights, i.e., practical critique, is occasionally a more important objective. For example, in their analysis DHA activists may cogently advocate for non-discriminatory language use. In that regard, they critique discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order, i.e., relations of power that systematically privilege men as social group, and disadvantage, exclude, and disempower women as a social group (Lazar,

2007). Fourth, the concept of "rhetoric" ranks a crucial position in DHA than in other CDA approaches (i.e. in Van Dijk's Social-Cognition and Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Approach). Indeed, "rhetoric" in the DHA includes argumentation as a central area. It should be highlighted that  the argumentative step is an elaboration on the observational, descriptive and explanatory process of CDA. Fifth, in contrast to the mono-perspectival concept of discourse devised by Fairclough and Van Leeuwen (i.e., a discourse relates to one perspective on social reality), the DHA opts for a multi-perspectival concept of discourse (i.e., a discourse including various perspectives on social scales). Six, the DHA protagonists make more reference to Functional Pragmatics than other discourse analysts do. These distinctive features make the DHA a peculiar analytical framework in that the DHA puts weight on historical subjects and on historical anchoring more than other CDA approaches.  However, DHA practitioners establish cooperation with proponents of the other CDA approaches. Having distinguished DHA from other approaches, it is necessary to seek to know how one can recognize that research program through its specific patterns. The coming section will thus be devoted to the main characteristics of DHA.

## 2.    General Characteristics and Research Interests

This section aims at disclosing the fundamental elements whereby a discourse-historical CDA approach can be recognized, and the fields of studies it deals with. Characteristics are assimilated to principles here, and the research interests concerned in this study are mostly to do with the modern life.

### 2.1.   *Basic Principles of the DHA*

The DHA is characterized by various principles which have evolved over time. Wodak (2015a) identifies ten of the most important principles which are briefly summarized below.
- ✓ The approach is interdisciplinary. With regard to its interdisciplinary feature, Amoussou & Allagbe (2018) note, the description of the object of investigation of CDA is carried out from a widely differing perspective. Wodak (ibid) explains that interdisciplinary involves theory, methods, methodology, research practice, and practical application.
- ✓ The approach is problem-oriented. The DHA, like any other theoretical and methodological approach, is relevant as long as it is able to successfully study relevant social problems such as sexism, racism, and other forms of social inequality.
- ✓ Various theories and methods are combined wherever integration leads to an adequate understanding and explanation of the research object.
- ✓ The research incorporates fieldwork and ethnography (study from "inside") where this is required for a thorough analysis and theorizing of the object under investigation.
- ✓ The research necessarily moves recursively between theory and empirical data. As emphasized by Meyer (2001), "data collection is not a phase that must be finished before analysis starts but might be a permanently ongoing procedure" (Meyer, 2001, p. 18).
- ✓ Numerous genres and public spaces as well as intertextual and interdiscursive relationships are studied.

✓ The historical context is taken into account in interpreting texts and discourses. In this regard, Wodak (2011: 628) states that the DHA enables the systematic, explicit and transparent (thus retroductable) analysis of the historical (i.e. *intertextual*) dimension of discursive practices by exploring the ways in which particular genres of discourse are subject to change over time, and also by integrating social theories to explain context. It follows from this that the historical orientation implies the reconstruction of how recontextualization functions as an important process linking texts and discourses intertextually and interdiscursively over time.

✓ Categories and tools are not fixed once and for all. Their framing for each analysis is outstandingly determined by the specific problem under investigation.

✓ "Grand theories" (also called "General social theories") often serve as a foundation. They try to conceptualize the relations between social structure and social action and thus link micro-and macro-sociological phenomena. In the specific analyses, however, "middle-range theories" frequently supply a better theoretical basis. "Middle-range theories", Wodak (2009) highlights, focus either upon specific social phenomena (e.g. conflict, cognition social networks) or on specific subsystems of society (e.g. economy, politics, religion).

✓ The application of results is an important target. Results should be made available to and applied by experts and should be communicated to the public.

✓ In the light of those principles, one is tempted to seek to know the different areas or fields DHA embraces in the modern life. The answer to this concern will be provided in the coming subsection.

## 2.2. *Research Interests*

Despite the vital place the historical dimension holds in the DHA, Reisigl (2017) notes that it is-more extensively- concerned with the following areas of discourse studies:

- discourse and discrimination (e.g. racism, ethnicism, nationalism, xenophobia, islamophobia, sexism);
- language barriers in various social institutions (such as hospitals, court rooms, authorities, academic language, media);
- discourse and politics/policy/polity (e.g., politics of the past/political commemoration, nation-building, European Union, migration, asylum, multilingualism, language policy, populism);
- discourse and identity (e.g., national and supranational/European identity, linguistic identity);
- discourse and history (e.g., National Socialism, fascism, commemoration, history of discourse studies);
- discourse in the media (both classical print and new social media);
- organizational communication (e.g., in institutions of the European Union);
- discourse and ecology (climate change).

✓ It is important to stress that the DHA views discourse analysis not just as a method of language analysis, but as a multidimensional project including theory, methods, methodology and empirically based research practices that yields concrete social applications. Before undertaking any practical application whatsoever, the (discourse

historical) researcher needs to get familiar with some central concepts that are commonly used in DHA (as well as in other critical discourse strands).

## 3.    Focal Concepts

There are three major and constitutive concepts that are recurrently used by the discourse-historical analysts (Wodak, 2009: 1). These are critique, ideology and power.

### 3.1. *Critique*

The DHA adheres to the sociophilosophical orientation of critical theory. Critical, in Wodak's (2001, cited in Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018) sense, means "not taking things for granted, opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies,  being self-reflexive in one's research, and through these processes, making opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest" (p.12).In that perspective, the DHA suggests a science that includes critique in all of its stages, i.e., in the context of discovery, of justification and of application. As Resigl (2017) and Wodak (2015a) put it, the DHA follows a concept of social critique that integrates three related aspects. These are the *text or discourse immanent critique*, the *socio-diagnostic critique* and the *prospective critique*.

*Text or discourse immanent critique* is primarily knowledge-related. It assesses conflicts, contradictions and inconsistencies in text-internal or discourse-internal structures, for example with respect to cohesion, presuppositions, argumentation and turn-taking structures.

*Socio- diagnostic critique* is concerned with demystifying the -manifest or latent- persuasive or "manipulative" character of discursive practices. In other words, this type of critique aims at exposing manipulation in and by discourse, at revealing ethically problematic aspects of discursive practices. It focuses on discrepancies between discursive and other social practices and functions as a form of social control. This critique involves the critique of ideology, the critique of the ethos of social actors, pragmatic critique, political critique and "social critique.

*Prospective critique* (also known as *future-related prospective critique*) is strongly application-oriented. It is practical and seeks to contribute to the improvement of communication (for example, by elaborating guidelines against sexist language behavior or by reducing "language barriers" in schools; hospitals and so forth). Such a model should keep loyalty to at least three things: (i) to principles of rationality; (ii) to principles of justice; (iii) to the awareness of suffering and to the empathy as well as solidarity with victims of discrimination and disadvantaged fellow human beings.

It follows from the foregoing to infer that the understanding of critique implies that the DHA should make the object under investigation and the analyst's own position transparent and should justify theoretically why certain interpretations and readings of discursive events seem more valid than others. What about the understanding of the concept 'ideology'?

### 3.2. *Ideology*

In general parlance, the word 'ideology' refers to some kinds of 'ideas', or value systems or systems of beliefs, which reside in language. Fowler (1986) defines ideology as worldviews,

or mind-sets. Drawing on this, Simpson (1993) posits that an ideology derives from the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value-systems which are shared collectively by social groups.

However, Jahedi, Abdullah & Mukundan (2014) underscore that in CDS, "ideologies" are not viewed "as a nebulous of realm of 'ideas' but as tied to material practices embedded in social institutions" (p. 28). Wodak (2015b) endorses that assertion and claims that "it is, however, not that explicit type of ideology that interests CDS, it is rather the more hidden and latent inherent in everyday-beliefs, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies, thus attracting linguists' attention" (p. 8).

Within the CDS perspective Van Dijk (2006a) sociocognitively perceives ideologies as "shared representations of social groups" (p.115) which are "acquired, confirmed, changed and perpetuated through discourse" (ibid). As for Fairclough, he has a more Marxist view of ideologies.

Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation. They may be enacted in ways of interacting (and therefore in *genres*) and inculcated in ways of being or identities (and therefore in *styles*). Analysis of texts … is an important aspect of ideological analysis and critique, provided it is framed within a broader social analysis of events and social practices. (Fairclough, 2003: 218)

Protagonists of DHA rather regard ideology as one-sided perspective or world view made of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group. From this, Wodak (2009) remarks that it is the functioning of ideology in everyday life that intrigues CDA researchers. Therefore, in view to creating awareness in agents of their own needs and interests, Weiss & Wodak (2003: 14) suggest that the critical analyst 'demystify' discourses by deciphering ideologies.

### 3.3. *Power*

Power is another concept that is of great concern for CDS. Regarded as an asymmetric relationship among social actors who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups (Wodak, 2015a), power is explicitly delineated by Watt (1991, cited in Mai & Al-Shaymaa, 2015) as follows:

[Considering A and B are two different people,] A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's initially perceived interests, regardless of whether B later comes to accept the desirability of A's actions (p. 62).

However, Van Dijk (2003) observes that power is not always exercised in obviously abusive acts of dominant group members, but may be enacted in the myriad of taken-for-granted actions of everyday life. In this case, language is the vehicle through which power is exerted. Weiss & Wodak thus explain:

> Language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive

from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and the long term (Weiss & Wodak 2003: 15).

It can be inferred from the above statement that power is not an absolute datum; it can be resisted. In that respect, Fairclough (1989: 68) sustains that power, 'in' discourse or 'behind' discourse, is not a permanent and undisputed attribute of any one person or social grouping. Based on this, Wodak (2015a) argues that texts are often sites of social struggle in that they manifest traces of differing ideological fights for dominance and hegemony. The scholar pursues thus that in the in-depth analysis of texts, the DHA focuses on the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power. After the study of the key notions in DHA, the next concern is to know whether there is a specific pathway to follow while undertaking an analysis on a specific text or discourse.

## 4. Some Tools of Analysis and Steps in DHA Research Practice
### 4.1. Analytical Tools

The CDS is not a sect and does not have the intention to become one. This implies that there is no practical guidelines for doing CDA. However, depending on the approach adopted, the research project and the research questions to solve, there are some guiding procedures to take into account. Concerning the current discourse analytical approach, Wodak (2015a) argues that the DHA is three-dimensional: after (1) having identified the specific contents or topics of a specific discourse, (2) discursive strategies are investigated. Then, (3) linguistic means are examined as types, and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realizations are examined as tokens. This suggests analyzing the coherence of the text by first detecting the macrotopics and related subtopics. Second, it is important to understand the aim of the text producer in a specific genre: Does the speaker intend to convince somebody and thus to realize a persuasive text? Depending on the aim, different strategies and linguistic, pragmatic, and rhetorical devices are used to realize the intended meaning.

Several strategies are identified when analyzing a specific discourse and related texts in relation to the discursive construction and representation of "us" and "them". Reisigl (2017) emphasizes that in order to approach various discursive features and strategies, discourse-historical analyses systematically go through five simple questions. These questions, as formulated by Wodak (2015a), are as follows:
- ✓ How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes, and actions named and referred to linguistically?
- ✓ What characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events, and processes?
- ✓ What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?
- ✓ From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, and arguments expressed?
- ✓ Are the respective utterances articulated overtly? Are they intensified or mitigated?

It should be emphasized that *at*tempting answers to the above questions helps the analyst to identify the linguistic or rhetoric means by which people are discriminated against. Based on these questions, five related types of discursive strategies can be distinguished. Note that by strategy it is meant a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices

(including discursive practices), adopted in order to achieve a particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic goal (Wodak, 2001). Accordingly, discursive strategies refer to systematic ways of using language. Table 1 below lists the important strategies and related linguistic devices.

**Table 1**. Discursive Strategies in the DHA (from Reisigl, 2017, p. 52)

| Questions to approach discursive features | Discursive strategies | Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| How are persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically in the discourse in question? | **Nomination** | Discursive construction of social actors Discursive construction of objects, phenomena, events Discursive construction of processes and actions |
| What characteristics or qualities are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions mentioned on the discourse? | **Predication** | Discursive characterization of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions (e.g., positively or negatively) |
| What arguments are employed in discourse? | **Argumentation** | Persuading addressees of the validity of specific claims of truth and normative rightness |
| From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, arguments expressed? | **Perspectivisation** | Positioning the speaker' or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance |
| Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated? | **Mitigation and Intensification** | Modifying the illocutionary force of utterances in respect to their epistemic or deontic status |

It can be inferred from the above table that the discursive strategies adopted in a given discourse cogently depends on the discourse purposes at stake. The question that still need be asked at this stage is to know how one can effectively do DHA.

### 4.2. The DHA in Eight Steps

In the light of the information thus far provided on discourse-historical CDA approach , it is expedient to devise a procedure likely to help analysts perform their work successfully. According to Wodak (2015a), ideally a thorough discourse-historical analysis follows an eight-stage program. Typically, the eight stages are implemented recursively and are summarized as follows.
   ✓ Literature review, activation of theoretical knowledge (i.e., recollection, reading, and discussion of previous research);

✓ Systematic collection of data and context information (depending on the research questions, various discourses, genres, and texts are focused on);

✓ Selection and preparation of data for specific analyses (selection and downsizing of data according to relevant criteria, transcription of tape recordings, etc.);

✓ Specification of the research questions and formulation of assumption (on the basis of a literature review and a first skimming of the data);

✓ Qualitative pilot analysis (this allows for testing categories and first assumptions as well as for the further specification of assumptions);

✓ Detailed case studies (of a whole range of data, primarily qualitatively, but in part also quantitatively);

✓ Formulation of critique (interpretation of results, taking into account the relevant context knowledge and referring to the three dimensions of critique);

✓ Application of the detailed analytical results (if possible, the results might be applied or proposed for application).

**Conclusion**

The current paper is, as initially mentioned in the very beginning, a theoretical account of the DHA strand. It has strived to shed light on the main tenets of this discourse analytical approach, and provided some tools and guidelines which could be of a good help in carrying out a historical analysis on a given discourse. However, the great range of information given on the DHA is not sufficient to allege that one actually masters how to do critical discourse analysis through Wodak's and Reisigl's approach. Therefore, it becomes imperative to seek to apply the DHA principles and strategies to a specific discourse. It is also important to stress that despite the fruitful information this article attempted to yield, it hasn't, for reasons of space and limitation, broached all the crucial concepts inherent to DHA. Thus, such notions as context (although swiftly discussed), intertextuality, interdiscursivity, decontextualization/ recontextualization, have escaped the scope of the present research work. Ideally, they could be topics of other papers.

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