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## **1. Introduction**

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) today is described as “an established paradigm in linguistics” (Wodak/ Meyer 2009: 4). Even more, it is said to have “become one of the most influential and visible branches of discourse analysis” (Blommaert/ Bulcaen 2000: 447). The pressing need to deal with the shortcomings of CDA is also grounded in the emergence of a new critical paradigm that is stretching over the entire field of language study. By now CDA is the dominant approach in the study of language in the media discourse, and due to its appeal to interdisciplinarity it is spreading to other areas outside linguistics as well. However, not only are the adherents of CDA growing in number, but also its critics. There are several strands of criticism which will not all be discussed here. Instead, I will focus on the question whether CDA meets the standards of scholarly inquiry and whether it is legitimate to call it an academic theory, discipline or method. Thereby I will put CDA to the test and see whether it meets scientific standards. Therefore it will be necessary to discuss to which extent the approach is open to falsification, which also leads to questions about consistency and systematicity.

I want to make clear that my argument is not that the work of critical linguistics is useless. On the contrary, I believe that it can point to some laudable accomplishments. Language can undoubtedly be used strategically and is therefore inevitably connected to power. Critical linguistics contributed to more language awareness through its work, but also through its practitioners’ commitment in language awareness programs. Furthermore, the work is thought-stimulating about the way language is used. However, the sole contribution to the development of more consciousness does not justify an enterprise to have the status of an academic discipline, theory or method. In order to be considered as that, certain criteria have to be met. Otherwise the enterprise stays mere political activism and may, despite its good intentions, eventually even bring long-term damage to the ‘good cause’ critical linguists claim to be fighting for. By giving up scholarly principles, they risk gambling away the authority of science. I cannot but echo Widdowson’s (2004: 163) concern:

the only reason why anybody should pay any attention to what scholars have to say about such issues is that they are assumed to have the intellectual authority



to do so, and this authority depends on an adherence to the principles of scholarly enquiry.

Initially, I was a bit suspicious of CDA and so I intended to test the assumptions that are made by critical linguists. However, this soon turned out to be a hopeless enterprise, since its practitioners have set up an approach that is immune to any kind of criticism. One of my plans was to consult real informants in order to find out whether the effects that are ascribed to particular linguistic features correspond to the interpretation of the average reader. But in the course of familiarizing myself with the literature on the subject it turned out that this way of testing, like all other ways that I could think of, was invalidated from the start, in this case because CDA assumes a cumulative impact of ideological influence. Hence, an ethnographic account is not regarded as a possible way of refutation. Many more of such critique obstructing premises will be presented in this thesis, whereby I will be concerned with demonstrating how CDA incorporated a number of theoretical resources (and its flaws) in order to reach the status of an academic discipline, while avoiding the risk of its theories getting falsified. An important issue with this regard is the transition from Critical Linguistics (henceforth CL) to CDA, which is characterized by an enlargement of the theoretical basis. The question that I will try to answer in this thesis is whether these changes and claimed improvements really occurred, or whether the only thing that was improved were the tactics of argument. Is CDA at its core different to CL, or are the changes only embellishments?

Here is a brief overview of the structure of the thesis. In the beginning the development of the approach and its distinctiveness in relation to other approaches to discourse analysis will be covered. Subsequently, I will present the theoretical underpinning of my thesis, which is critical rationalism. Its crux is the principle of falsification, according to which a theory or hypothesis is not to be regarded as scientific if it is not formulated in a way that allows testing via empirical data. I will also touch upon two major issues that can be found in nearly all critiques of CDA, namely validity and reliability. Throughout the paper I will discuss problems that arise with regard to these two criteria. Then I will present what I identified as the two major strategies for obstructing criticism. This happens on the one hand by the subordination of academic principles to morally or rather politically motivated goals and on the other hand by eclecticism on the level of analysis as well as in the formulation of the theoretical approach. Not only in the linguistic analysis can the analyst

pick and choose whatever comes in handy, but he can do the same when integrating various theoretical resources.

In section 4. I address the fusion of multiple theoretical approaches, where I will show how elements from the study of literature, sociology and linguistics were combined, followed by an examination of how this affects the scientific value of CDA. Here I will particularly deal with the adoption of the critical perspective and Systemic Functional Linguistics' legacy of the functional fallacy, the two aspects that cause the most severe problems for CDA. While the critical element brings in the danger of placing political belief over academic principles, the functional fallacy is said to lead CDA practitioners to regard meaning as something that the analyst can extract from the text, rather than something that is constructed by the reader. Furthermore, I will investigate how these problems that are posed to reliability are influenced by the lack of systematic and replicable procedures. This abstract discussion will then be illustrated via the example of transformations, a central device from the critical linguistics' toolkit. Subsequently, some of the major contradictions within critical linguistics will be presented. There is a tremendous discrepancy between what CDA practitioners preach and what they practice. Another paradox lies in the competences that are assigned to the analysts. Additionally, I will show how this shutting off from critique resulted in CDA becoming itself the very kind of hegemonic power within the study of discourse that it claims to oppose.

In section 6. an analysis will be conducted on the basis of Fairclough's influential three-dimensional model for the investigation of discourse. The goal is to show that depending on the researcher's pretext, the analysis will yield different results. So here it will be examined whether the analytic tools are reliable or whether the only thing they can bring to light is the researcher's pretext. The analysis will be carried out on press releases, since they are a form of persuasive communication, and that is why it can be assumed that they are heavily invested with ideology and it is also clear what the strategic goal of the issuer is. The sample consists of a number of press releases from different sources (i.e. representing different positions within this controversy), that were issued in 2010 in relation to the British Health Act 2009. Thereby I will seek to prove that with the methodology that is provided by CDA, it is possible to substantiate the claim that the press releases actually convey ideology against themselves. Finally, possible solutions for

remedying these flaws are assessed, such as the use of corpus linguistics or O'Halloran's (2003) idealized reader framework.

Just a note on the terminology in this paper: CL and CDA both can be described as belonging to the category critical linguistics. In this paper I will use 'Critical Linguistics' or 'CL' (written with capital letters) to refer to the specific approach that came up in the 1970-ies, whereas 'critical linguistics' written without capital letters refers to all approaches that examine style critically. Due to the heterogeneity of the work within the frame of CDA, in this thesis CDA stands for the branches that have developed out of Fairclough's work, unless marked otherwise. I will touch upon a number of concepts and approaches in this thesis, but due to the limited space I will not have the opportunity to discuss each one in detail. Rather, the focus will be on those aspects that are relevant to my major argumentation.

## **2. The critical approaches to style**

In the following sections I will give an overview of the key tenets of CDA. Therefore it will be necessary to look at the characteristics of its predecessor CL, since it constitutes the foundation of CDA. Due to the fact that CL introduced the critical investigation of style, many of its key tenets are still central in CDA. Hence, I will first look at the characteristics that it shares with CDA (and that set it off from other forms of discourse analysis) and in the subsequent section it will be discussed as to how far CDA is different or at least claims to be different from CL. This is followed by the discussion of the most important branches of CDA.

### **2.1. Setting the agenda: Critical Linguistics**

CL can be traced back to the works of Roger Fowler and his associates at the University of East Anglia in the 1970-ies. Two publications, namely Fowler et al. (1979) and Kress and Hodge (1979) have been the basis for almost all studies with a CL background and even the vast majority of CDA's textual analyses is based on the tools suggested in these two books. The emergence of CL constituted a break with traditional forms of discourse analysis (i.e. not critical), which date back to the publication of Harris's famous article *Discourse analysis* in 1952. Before CL the area of discourse study was a linguistically and sociolinguistically dominated ground and CL positioned itself explicitly against these two areas. CL was distinct in a number of ways. As Fowler and Kress (1979b: 186) state, CL was innovative in that it rejected

two prevalent and related dualisms in current linguistic theory [...]. One is the belief that 'meaning' can be separated from 'style' or 'expression'. [...] The second [...] is that between 'linguistics' and 'sociolinguistic' patterning in texts and utterances.

The latter dualism refers to the separation of a language's structure and its usage, whereby especially the standpoint of Noam Chomsky is rejected. Instead a functional view of language is taken (ibid.: 187). Three assumptions in particular are central to CL, which are supposed to replace these two dualisms: First, in accordance with Hallidayan mind-set language is regarded as having multiple functions. Assuming a tripartite nature of the language functions, Critical Linguists differentiate between the ideational, interpersonal and textual function (e.g. Fowler and Kress 1979b: 188). As a consequence, in CL the

primary focus of attention is the clause, for it is in the clause that all three metafunctions of language come together. According to O'Halloran (2003: 16) CL, as well as CDA, is most concerned with the ideational function. He exemplifies this with the analysis of passivizations, where CL does not focus on the deletion of information that the reader already possesses (which would be the textual function of language), but on the mystification of agents (ibid.: 18). The second major assumption of CL is that individuals decide systematically which language form they will choose, whereby it makes no difference whether the choices are made consciously or not. Hence, when people select one of the possible options, this choice is significant. Finally, CL believes "that the meanings are carried and expressed in the syntactic forms and processes, that is, that the analyst can 'read off' meaning from the syntax" (Fowler/ Kress 1979b: 197). All of these three claims are still present in CDA, albeit to a different extent.

These three assumptions are important with regard to the task of critical linguistics, namely to unveil ideology. Due to sociological influences critical linguistics centers on concepts such as 'power', 'ideology' and 'domination'. Language use is always embedded in a socio-political context and each context is loaded with a certain ideology. Ergo, language is said to reflect this ideology. Even more: ideology is both, constructed and shaped by language use. Therefore, language is seen as a site of struggle and so linguistic analysis becomes crucial for bringing about the change CDA and CL practitioners desire. It helps the dominant group to maintain the existing power relations. Consequently, practitioners of critical linguistic approaches do not regard it as sufficient only to describe the discourse, but they also want to bring about change (Simpson 1993: 6). Therefore, CL, unlike former approaches, is not limited to descriptive discourse analysis. This is probably the most distinct feature of CL as compared to former approaches to discourse. Whereas before the language was only set into relation to social factors (e.g. in sociolinguistics), CL also set them into relation to social inequality (Pennycook 1994: 121).

Critical linguists also argue that very often these power relations are already institutionalized in the discourse and therefore they remain unquestioned. Fairclough (2001: 2) illustrates this with the example of the doctor-patient conversation. Nobody questions that there is a hierarchical situation in which the doctor is above the patient, because the conventions imply that he is in the position of the powerful, the one who is in possession of the relevant knowledge. Consequently, it is best for the patient's health to

accept this imbalance of power. This is what Fairclough calls “‘common-sense’ assumptions” (ibid.), a concept that was also central in Fowler et al. (1979). According to critical linguistics such assumptions and conventions can be encoded into linguistic form. The existence of ideologies is by no means only limited to language, but language is seen to be extremely important, since it is “the commonest form of social behavior” and since it heavily relies on these common sense assumptions (Fairclough 2001: 2). Here Fairclough echoes Fowler and Kress (1979b: 190), who say that “language serves to confirm and consolidate the organizations which shape it”. Language is not only regarded as a means for communicating, but also as “an instrument of control” (Kress/ Hodge 1979: 6). Consequently, CL and CD analyses try to bring to light the subliminal meaning that is encoded in the language use rather than focusing on the content, which sets them apart from other areas of research.

So in CL it is believed that the powerful use language as a tool for exercising control over the less powerful. However, the issue of power is a more complex one. In critical linguistics two kinds of power are distinguished, namely power within discourse and power outside of it. The latter is said to be reinforced by the former and vice versa i.e. those groups that are socially more powerful (primarily due to socio-political circumstances) can also control the power relations in the discourse, which then again serve to consolidate the power relations outside of the discourse (Fairclough 2001: 46). In short, it is assumed that there is a very close connection between discourse and society. For that reason, an understanding of discourse is necessary for the understanding of society. This assumption that the central task of social sciences is to transform society goes back to the influence of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which inherited this view from Marxism. For this reason there is such a strong connection between critical science and political practice (Maingueneau 2006: 229).

The task that CL sets itself, viz. to make people aware of the alleged manipulation, can only be achieved by a wide circulation of the critical linguistic ideas. Consequently, they do not regard it as sufficient to be limited to linguistics, rather its practitioners want to make it accessible to non-linguists as well (e.g. Fowler et al. 1979: 4), which is why the approach is constructed in a way that also enables researchers from other disciplines to apply it. Due to the emancipatory goal, there are constant appeals to interdisciplinarity, which can be found throughout CL (e.g. Kress and Hodge 1979: 3), but the theoretical

basis is itself marked by the inclusion of elements from other disciplines such as sociology. Also there is an expansion of traditional theoretical linguistics, which was criticized for being limited to syntactic theory. CL particularly included cognitive and social aspects, for its practitioners (ibid: 13) believe that “a fuller understanding of social and psychological reality is the real goal of linguistics”. This framework about ideology has a number of other consequences, for example, that the focus of the research rests almost solely on the text, while processes of production and consumption are not adequately analyzed. Additionally, the dominance of the ideology issue is responsible for the choice of the material that is examined. Since ideology is said to be omnipresent, potentially all kinds of texts can be subjected to a CL analysis. Yet most research is conducted on media texts, primarily because they have a large circulation. Apart from that, another characteristic of the material is that CL-practitioners are “taking as their subjects real, socially situated and usually complete texts” (Fowler/ Kress 1979b: 195) i.e. the analysis of invented text cannot yield any insight in ideological manipulation.

Halliday’s work was already mentioned, but he gave more to CL than just the assumption about the multifunctionality of language. His Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) provided the enterprise with the tools for uncovering the ideology that was assumed to be in the text. By picking those elements from SFL that seemed the most fruitful and combining them with concepts from other approaches (such as transformations), a critical linguistic toolkit for textual analysis was generated. Most prominent for analyzing the concealment of truth, were the concepts of transitivity, nominalization, and passivization (O’Halloran 2003: 16). All of these three concepts stayed central in CDA and therefore a closer discussion will follow in the course of this thesis. The emphasis on these devices is grounded in the fact that CL sees ideological manipulation as particularly happening by mystification i.e. the major concern in CL is the question whether responsible agents of actions or responsibility as such are obfuscated or deemphasized.

## **2.2. Elaboration of the approach: Critical Discourse Analysis**

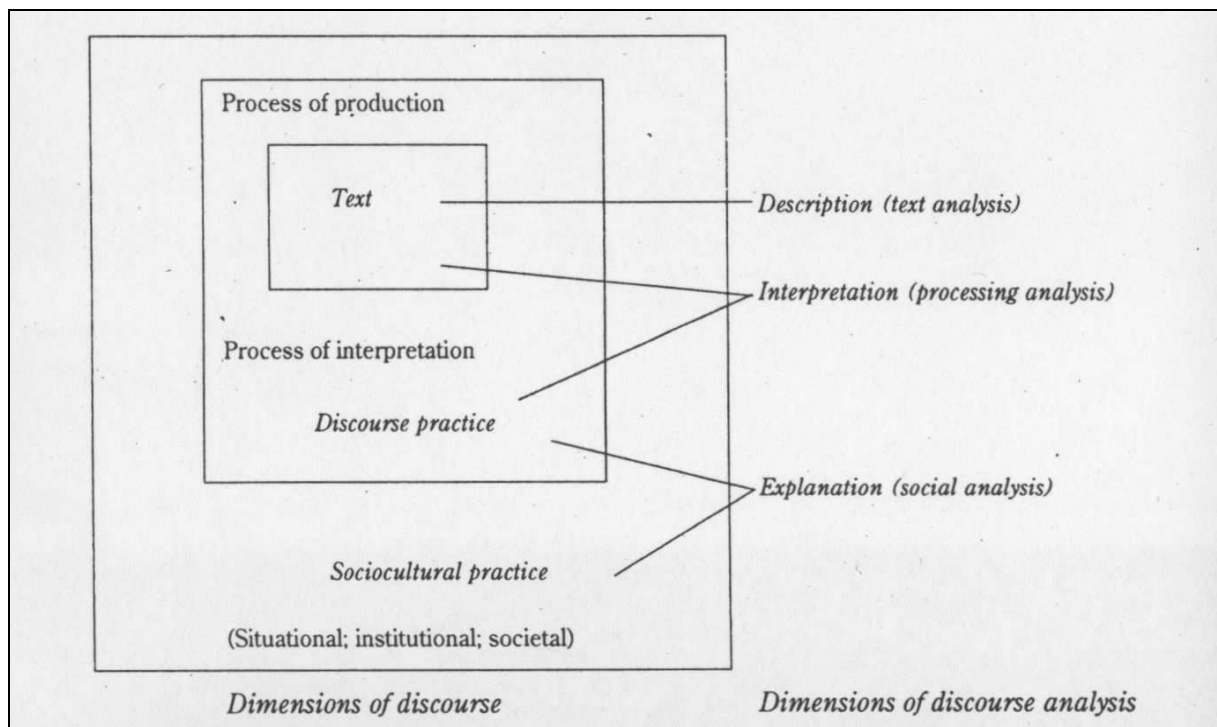
Many weak spots of critical linguistics were pointed out, but this only meant the end of CL, not of the critical linguistic project as such. Instead a new approach called CDA has developed out of the work that was done by Critical Linguists, primarily as a result of the

alleged remedying of CL's weaknesses (which will be discussed in more detail below). The term CDA was first used in 1985 by Norman Fairclough, the person who is considered to be the most significant in bringing CDA into being (e.g. Widdowson 1996: 57). Particularly two of his publications were responsible for the development of CDA, namely *Language and Power* (1989) and *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), whereby in the latter Fairclough sets forth an outline of the method to which prospective CD analysts can refer to. The rise of CDA was also fueled by the emergence of the journal *Discourse & Society* (which was started by Van Dijk in 1990). According to Fairclough (2001: 5), the approach was created by taking elements from various areas of linguistics such as "sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive psychology, and artificial intelligence, conversation and discourse analysis" and adding a critical perspective. Here it already becomes evident that the key tenets of CL were taken over (such as the critical way of looking at society), while at the same time a wide range of further approaches were integrated as well. Nowadays CDA is an extremely popular approach. In his second edition of *Language and Power*, Fairclough (2001: ix) writes that it has even expanded to other disciplines than linguistics, attracting "considerable interest". A possible reason for this popularity may be "the linguistic turn in philosophy and the social sciences, which has shaped much twentieth century thought" (Hammersley 1997: 237).

The distinctiveness of CDA as compared to CL is said to lie particularly in the supposed improvements that were made with regard to CL's problematic aspects. In CL, Fairclough (1992: 28) complains, the analysis of discourse is almost exclusively concerned with the textual analysis, thus leaving its production and interpretation (in the sense of text consumption) unconsidered. This weakness of CL has already been observed by Boyd-Barnett (1994: 31) when he described the works by Fowler as having "a tendency towards the classic fallacy of attributing particular 'readings' to readers or media 'effects', solely on the basis of textual analysis". So CD analysts claim to be different to CL, because they include a more elaborate investigation of the context. However, in reality the context only serves as a supplement for the textual analysis. By regarding the visual representation of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, we can already see that the processes of consumption and production play a subordinate role to the text and its linguistic features. The model will be discussed later, but here it is important to note that the text is still at the core, while the discursive and the social practices constitute the outer layers. Elsewhere



Fairclough (1992: 232) also explicitly admits that the investigation of text is the most crucial of the three dimensions.



**Figure 1: Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse (taken from: Fairclough 1995b: 98)**

Widdowson (2004: 166) draws attention to another weakness with this regard: there is no unified framework for analyzing the context. No indication is given as to which contextual aspects are relevant to which textual features. From the following account by Fairclough (1995b: 9) it becomes evident that this major focus on the textual level has not yet been overcome: the

principle that textual analysis should be combined with analysis of practices of production and consumption has not been adequately operationalized in the papers collected here.

So, in spite of the constant insistence that the context is crucial, Fairclough admits that the tools he provides do not suffice to analyze it. But this does not seem to bother Fairclough. Instead, the subsequent analyses (and most of the other works that build on Fairclough's model) simply include an unsystematic description of the context. Not only do they avoid

collecting any empirical data about the context, but in many cases they do not even refer to research that might help to contextualize the analyzed data. So the theoretical framework seems richer than that of CL, but the failure to operationalize it poses serious dangers to its validity as an analytic tool. There is another problem with the predominance of the analysis of the textual dimension. Despite its centrality, the techniques for the linguistic analysis have hardly been developed further since they were adopted from CL, thus leaving the very core of the method outdated (O'Halloran 2003: 15). Although the linguistic analysis remained the most crucial dimension, it has not been expanded and developed, while a plethora of theoretical considerations have been merged into an extension of the preceding works of CL. Thus Toolan (1997: 93) comments that "[t]oo often, an elaborate theoretical and interpretative superstructure is build upon the frailest of text-linguistic foundations." But even though so many theoretical works were added in the transition to CDA, the core theoretical underpinning was not altered. The major resources that informed CL are still essential to CDA, which are primarily the critical perspective, Halliday's SFL and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The only theoretical resource that was added in CDA and seems to be of equal importance, are the works by Foucault.

Another flaw of CL that CDA has overcome according to Fairclough (1995a: 28), is that the analysis in CL is limited to clauses. Strictly speaking, CL would not even qualify as a form of discourse analysis, because discourse analysis, according to CDA standards (e.g. Stubbs 1983: 2), is used to refer to studying language above the clause or above the sentence. Thus CDA claims not to deal solely with isolated clauses, but with the organization of the whole text and other larger linguistic units. Fairclough (1992: 29) believes that ideological significance can also be found in other aspects than grammar and vocabulary, for example in the argumentative or narrative structures of a text.

Moreover, CDA dismisses the idea of a monocausal effect of discourse. Instead it is viewed as a space of social struggle. Hence, social and cultural change can take place and this change has to be analyzed as well (Fairclough 1992: 29). Again, what CDA says is not what CDA does. As I will show in the course of this thesis, much of CDA work builds on the assumption that the readers are absolutely powerless and that they have hardly any role to play in the construction of meaning.

To put it in a nutshell, the key tenets of CL are also the key tenets of CDA. The groundbreaking innovations are to be found in the emergence of CL, not in its development to CDA. Moreover, the shortcomings of CL that are claimed to have been remedied are in fact still present. So it is at least highly doubtful whether CL and CDA are different to an extent that justifies them to be treated as different approaches, like it is being done by Fairclough. The argument that they are similar is substantiated by the fact that some of the founders of CL nowadays have no difficulty to consider themselves to be CD analysts. Hodge and Kress (e.g. 1988), for example, work within the frame of an approach that has been labeled 'social semiotics', which Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 264) regard as an approach to CDA. As a matter of fact, CDA representatives themselves do not always find it necessary to make a distinction between CL and CDA. Van Leeuwen (1996: 38) makes reference to a classic CL article by Trew (1979) as a traditional article of CDA. Van Dijk (2007: xxiv-xxv) suggests that CL is a subdiscipline of CDA:

At the end of the 1970s, another direction of research emerged in the study of discourse: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), originally introduced in a seminal book by Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress, Bob Hodge and Tony Trew, *Language and Control* (1979)

Subsequently, the contributions of Fairclough, Wodak and Van Dijk himself are described as developments of CL. This is an indication that CDA representatives themselves are in disagreement about the relation between CL and CDA, which can be explained by the fact that the development of CDA in the last few decades is characterized by processes of divergence. Even within CDA it is claimed that there are significant differences between certain branches of research, which will be the topic of the next section.

### **2.3. Branches of CDA**

CDA is an extremely heterogeneous approach. Yet, in CDA literature often three major strands are identified, namely the dialectical-relational approach, the socio-cognitive approach and the discourse-historical approach. In this section I will present these branches and their alleged distinctive features, followed by a brief discussion about whether they are in fact as distinct as it is claimed. Generally, the differences are said to be present on three levels. They deviate in the material that is analyzed, the methodology, and in the some of the theoretical key thinkers.

The first and definitely most influential form of CDA is represented by Norman Fairclough (e.g. 1989, 1992), who labels the branch the “dialectical-relational approach” (e.g. Fairclough 2009). It is the strand of CDA which bears the closest connection to CL, especially because the textual features are still at the center of the analysis. Consequently, the SFL of Halliday is essential to Fairclough, whereas it is less significant for Wodak and Van Dijk. Another central input for Fairclough are the works of Marx (ibid.). “Fairclough focuses upon social conflict in the Marxian tradition and tries to detect its linguistic manifestation in discourse” (Wodak/ Meyer 2009: 27). His interest lies in the “relationship between socio-cultural change and discursive change” (Fairclough/ Wodak 1997: 264).

The second branch is primarily associated with Teun Van Dijk, which he himself labels “‘sociocognitive’ discourse analysis” (e.g. Van Dijk 2009: 64). Like Fairclough, Van Dijk has a tripartite conception of discourse, but his work is the investigation of a “discourse-cognition-society triangle” (ibid.), which means that apart from the analysis of text and wider social structures, he also concentrates on cognition processes (e.g. Van Dijk 1995a: 30). It is the focus on cognition that he claims makes the branch different to others. He is concerned with the “mental representations and the processes of language users when they produce and comprehend discourse and participate in verbal interaction” (Van Dijk 2009: 64). He also sets himself the task to relate this cognitive analysis to discourse and society, whereby the issues of inequality in power stay central (ibid.). Due to the different focus, Van Dijk also draws on theoretical resources that are not common to Fairclough’s version of CDA, for example on Moscovici. It is also notable that he pays little attention to Halliday (Wodak/ Meyer 2009: 20-21), which can be explained by the fact that Van Dijk puts his focus on lexis and larger textual structures instead of carrying out investigations on the clause level. In short, Van Dijk, like Wodak, takes works about social cognition as the impetus for his research, rather than linguistic theories such as SFL.

The third major strand of CDA is known as the ‘discourse-historical approach’ (e.g. Wodak 2009) and its most prominent representative is Ruth Wodak (e.g. 1995, 2009). As the name suggests, Wodak’s primary object of study are non-contemporary texts, which is why the process of contextualization is stressed more than in other CDA research. According to Wodak (1996: 3) the context and the text are assigned equal weight. So the methodological focus slightly shifts from the analysis of the text to the collection and integration of background knowledge (ibid.: 209). Yet there still is no operationalization

i.e. no method to investigate the context systematically. The theoretical underpinning for the discourse-historical approach is primarily provided by the critical theory and to a lesser extent also by symbolic interactionism (Wodak/ Meyer 2009: 20).

There are also differences in the material these three researchers investigate: Fairclough is dealing with topics such as neo-liberalism or globalization (e.g. 2000), Van Dijk primarily focuses on racism and discrimination of minorities in mass media communication (e.g. 1980, 1991), and Wodak examines anti-Semitism (e.g. 1990) and sexism (e.g. 1997). According to Wodak and Meyer (2009: 19-20) the choice of topics makes a difference with regard to the perspectives of the analyses. Whereas Fairclough and to a lesser extent Van Dijk are concerned with macro topics, Wodak deals with meso-topics. This has the effect that the former tend to work deductively and more abstractly, whereas the latter's activities can be characterized as inductive, which also means that detailed case studies often serve as a starting point.

In this thesis for the most part I will be dealing with Fairclough's branch of CDA, for two reasons: first, his approach is the closest to linguistics. Secondly, he can be identified as CDA's "most impressive and influential practitioner" (Widdowson 2004: 90). Since I will be dealing with press releases in my analysis, I will refer to some of Van Dijk's works as well, because he is the central figure in the discipline when it comes down to the study of mass media discourse. Nevertheless, I assume that the criticism I utter may be equally applied to all strands of CDA. As a matter of fact, the disparities between the individual strands seem to be insignificant, since the procedure and the core assumptions appear to be the same. Consider, for example, Van Dijk's argument that his research is different, because it takes into account aspects of cognition. On closer examination it gets clear that the same is done by other CD analysts as well. To them questions about the connection between language forms and the way people think are also central. Therefore the creation of mental representation through discourse is something that all CD analysts try to explore. Despite the different discourse triangles that Fairclough and Van Dijk provide, the key components in their research stay the same, such as text, social structures, and cognitive aspects. The only difference is that Van Dijk stresses the cognitive aspects more often and is more explicit about them. The work of Wodak is also not significantly different from that of Fairclough. She does shift her attention away from the text towards the collection of data for contextualization, but in the end her practices are similar to those of Fairclough.

The contextual data are gathered unsystematically and serve the same purpose in both strands, viz. to support the interpretation of the researcher, which is the crux of a CD analysis. So the major difference between the three branches seems to lie in the material that they analyze, whereas the procedures of analysis and the theoretical underpinning are similar to a large extent. Hence, all strands share the same problematic aspects.

### **3. Theoretical foundation of the thesis**

A large number of problems about CDA have already been pointed out since its emergence. There are three main standpoints from which these criticisms have been uttered. First, there is critique from CD analysts themselves (e.g. Michael Stubbs). The second sort of criticism comes from the field of applied linguistics (e.g. Henry Widdowson). Finally, some authors observe shortcomings with regard to the philosophical aspects of CDA (e.g. Martyn Hammersley). I will touch upon several of them in the course of my argumentation, but my focus is on CDA's deficits as regards its scientific value. The theory that lies behind my entire argument, namely that CDA is to be dismissed as an academic discipline, is critical rationalism, which for the most part was developed by Karl Popper. At the core of the approach lies the principle of falsification. With regard to this principle theories can never be proven to be absolutely true and therefore they have to be constantly exposed to refutation efforts (Popper 1982: 225). Theories are only valid as long as they are not proven to be wrong and it is expected that the falsification of each theory is inevitable. So the work of a scientist is seen as the proposing of tentative solutions to a problem. The important thing to note here is that the probability of a theory being true cannot be increased by resisting multiple attempts to falsification (Popper 1987: 106). Nevertheless, there is scientific progress, because each theory that is superior to its predecessor is a bit closer to truth, albeit it is probably wrong (Chalmers 1999: 157). Scientific progress can therefore be viewed as an asymptotic approximation to truth. It is in this principle, in the tradition of being skeptical, that Popper sees the only way of attaining objectivity in science. Hence, objectivity cannot be achieved through objective researchers – this is unattainable, since it is not possible to perceive the world free from subjective determinants –, but in the mutual critique of different scientists (Popper 1987: 112). Critical rationalism excludes from science those approaches that do not meet the requirement of refutability. There is also a grading of the quality of a theory. A theory is better the more prone it is to falsification. This of course leads to the situation that more precise and unambiguous assumptions are preferred to those that are vague (Chalmers 1999: 44-45).

This implies that each theory and hypothesis needs to be formulated in a way where refutation is possible, meaning that it is obliged to meet scientific criteria such as a clear

theoretical basis, methodology and operationalizable definitions. CDA has deficits in all of these areas. In this sense I will try to show how CL and CDA make unchallengeable assumptions and are therefore not to be regarded as scientific approaches. Nevertheless, I want to stress once more that I believe that critical approaches to style can be extremely thought provoking, but it is their claim to be an academic discipline that I refute. Unlike Feyerabend (e.g. 1987), I am convinced that science has certain distinct features that other 'ideologies' (as he calls them) do not possess.

One major argument against critical linguistics will be based on the critique of the critical perspective. This may seem like a contradiction at the first glance, since my thesis is also a critical account, but "the term critical can denote intellectual analysis as distinct from ideological interpretation" (Widdowson 1995: 159). The word critical in CL and CDA implies, among other things, that there is a strong mixing of science and non-science (in the case of critical linguistics there is no clear distinction between political conviction and academic work), something that Popper (1987: 114) sees as a serious weakness in the scientific area. He states that there are clearly scientific and clearly non-scientific values. Even though their mingling is inevitable, it is the duty of a researcher to resist it as much as possible, something that is clearly not the case in research from a critical perspective. But Popper acknowledges that the demand for value-free research is in itself a value and therefore paradoxical. Hence, the most important thing is again to make the approach accessible to criticism in order to enable others to point to this mixing of scientific and non-scientific values (ibid.: 115). On that account the academic ideal of objectivity, even though unattainable by a single researcher, can be achieved by mutual challenging within the scientific community.

### **3.1. The distinction between science and non-science**

In this section I shall look at what the critical rationalists' views about the specific characteristics of science are. There are two opposing viewpoints about what is considered as science and what not, viz. the 'relationalists' and the 'rationalists'. Falsificationism (apart from inductivism) is the most influential approach within the latter category. Relationalism on the other hand is constituted by works such as those of Thomas Kuhn (e.g. 1979), who describes the change of research paradigms. Rationalists assume that there



is an eternal criterion that can be used to assess the value of a theory and its status as science. In Popper's case the criterion is the falsifiability of a theory i.e. this is the yardstick for evaluating all theories in history (Chalmers 1999: 103). According to relativistic thought, the evaluation of scientific theories is determined by the individual or the society, whereby the criteria depend on what the individual and the society decide to be important (ibid.: 104). Representative of this thinking is Kuhn's (1979: 106) statement that the highest norm of assessment is the acceptance by the society. His works about the structure of scientific revolutions suggest that scientific standards vary according to the prevailing research paradigm. A paradigm is an unquestioned general orientation in whose light research is carried out. Different paradigms are incommensurable, meaning that a person can only work within one paradigm at a time and therefore it is impossible to compare different paradigms in order to determine which one is superior (Poser 2004: 150-151). So scientific standards vary with regard to the paradigm and therefore there are no eternally fixed requirements which the theories have to meet in order to pass as scientific. Poser (2004: 144-145) illustrates Kuhn's work with the different paradigms in the study of literature. In different periods, different ideals of interpretation existed such as the interpretation on solely text-internal features, the interpretation on the basis of the author's life and so forth. In each of these paradigms the way of interpreting is different, but also the standards that determine whether something is scientific work.

But Kuhn's conception is problematic. Due to the incommensurability idea it becomes impossible to utter critique about the criteria that are used to distinguish science from non-science, from outside the paradigm. So a relationalist approach does not provide a theoretical underpinning that can help to evaluate the scientific value of CDA and to compare it to other approaches to discourse analysis. Therefore, my thesis is guided by the distinction proposed by the rationalists, more exactly: the question whether something is to be considered as scientific depends on the possibility to refute the claims that are being made. As I will show, a high falsifiability goes hand in hand with the systematicity and preciseness of an approach, which are issues that I will be exploring in this thesis. But I will not limit myself to the investigation of CDA as a theory. Fairclough (1995b: 1) insists that besides being a theory, CDA is also a method. In order to assess its value as a method I will work with the criteria of validity and reliability.

### **3.2. Assessing CDA's quality with the criteria of validity and reliability**

First, it needs to be specified what kind of method CDA is or wants to be with regard to the classic dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research. Even though this distinction is questioned increasingly nowadays (Hammersley 1992: 159-173; Früh 2001: 67; Mayring 2003: 19), the critical analyses of style can be said to be rather leaning towards the qualitative paradigm, albeit the increased tendency to use corpus linguistics strengthens the quantitative dimension. Still, most of the work is done without the help of corpora and even if they are used, they play only a supportive role, since the way the isolated features function with regard to each other cannot be explained only by counting their occurrences. This is why the quality of CDA, like that of all qualitative methods, has to be evaluated with regard to two major criteria, namely 'validity' and 'reliability'. The former indicates whether the method measures what it should, whereas the latter describes how exact the results of the measurement are (Kirk/ Miller 1986: 19). CDA, like its predecessor CL, has weaknesses in both areas. In the humanities it is impossible to obtain absolute validity, but there is a continuum along which the validities of different methods can be compared. Validity is mainly, but not exclusively, a problem due to CDA's wrong assumption (although denied in the theoretical discussions) that one is able to read off meanings from the text itself. As I will discuss in section 4.3.2.3., it is not the interpretation of the reader that the CD practitioner examines, but rather his own. Therefore CDA does not deliver valid data i.e. the analysis does not bring to light what it claims to do.

CDA also fails to meet the standards of reliability. In order to achieve a high reliability, different researchers using the same instrument should arrive at the same results. Again the problem in the humanities is that absolutely homogenous measurements are unattainable, but the closer the results get, the more reliable the method. My quasi-analysis, as well as various re-readings of texts that CDA practitioners analyzed, demonstrate that the method is weak on reliability. If a method can be used to prove two diametrically opposed assumptions, then it is not reliable and therefore its usefulness as a scientific method is doubtful. We would also stop using a thermometer that delivers two extremely divergent results even though the measurement is performed on the same person within the same context. CD analysts admit that the methodology they provide can be used for different ways of reading, which is eventually the confession that CDA is not to be considered as a

method. However, its representatives know how to turn the disadvantages into advantages. In section 3.5. I will show how this weakness is obfuscated.

### **3.3. Getting immune to criticism**

Now that I have sketched the development of CDA and made clear that I will judge the scientific value of the approach according to falsifiability, validity and reliability, I will suggest that CDA uses two meta-strategies to obscure some of its weaknesses. The first is the suppression of rationality by charging the discussion with emotional elements. CDA practitioners present science as a battlefield against injustice and oppression. The systems of morality and science are mixed. This mixing is not problematic per se, but in CDA the appeal to the moral is put above the rational. The second strategy is to make the approach insusceptible to falsification attempts, which is achieved by having a broad theoretical basis, which enables CD analysts to select those elements that suit their argumentation. I will present these two strategies in more detail in the subsequent sections, whereby the latter one will also be given the entire fourth section for the purpose of illustration.

#### **3.3.1. Emancipation: Using the good cause as a shield against critique**

CDA's already described conception of ideology leads to the fostering of the fear about subconscious manipulation, which is crucial for bringing in aspects of emotionality. This works in two ways. First, spreading fear by the argument of possible subconscious manipulation and, secondly, by portraying CDA as the solution to this problem. Regarding the former, here is what Fairclough (1992: 90) has to say:

It should not be assumed that people are aware of the ideological dimensions of their own practice. Ideologies built into conventions may be more or less naturalized and automatized, and people may find it difficult to comprehend that their normal practices could have specific ideological investments.

So ideologies are transmitted subconsciously in our everyday practices and they prevent the individual from emancipation. The only possibility of making people aware of the ways they are manipulated is by critical linguistic investigations of texts. By proposing CDA as a tool for uncovering these negative ideologies, the CDA approach automatically becomes emotionally charged. This is a key characteristic of critical linguistics that Widdowson (1998: 149) calls "an appeal to moral conscience". By representing this branch of research

as something deeply moral, the questions whether the arguments are coherent and whether procedures are valid become obsolete (ibid.). Therefore it is not surprising that CDA is described as “a movement whose adherents (‘experts’ or not) are often less interested in discovering the truth than in proclaiming it” (Tyrwhitt-Drake 1999: 1088). Widdowson (1995b: 512) goes even further when he calls it an “exercise in persuasion”.

Of course it is tempting to believe that by engaging into critical linguistics one might contribute to a good cause by showing how inequalities and discrimination work in order to improve the situation of the suppressed. However, the distinction between good and bad is not as clear as it is presented. Van Dijk’s comments about the aims of scholarship illustrate the lack of explicitness. He argues that change is necessary in the world (Van Dijk 1993a: 131). Elsewhere (1994: 436), he describes changing the world of discourse as “the ultimate scholarly aim”. However, on both occasions he fails to effectively describe the direction and the nature of the change he is seeking to achieve. Two problematic aspects are involved here: first, the less specific a claim, goal or hypothesis, the harder it can be refuted and therefore the scientific value decreases. Secondly, Van Dijk is imposing his (political) opinion that change is necessary and dismisses all research that does not aim for changing the world (e.g. descriptive linguistics). By doing so, CDA is occupying the moral high ground, which for Tyrwhitt-Drake (1999: 1087) is the most worrying element of the theory. These scholars “set themselves up as a kind of gatekeepers of the truth” (ibid.: 1088). He supports his argument with a Popperian point, namely that doubt and debate are what is needed for human progress: “being a critical discourse analyst does not and cannot qualify one individual to say what is right or wrong more than any other individual” (ibid.). Critical linguists put their moral standards over the principle of rationality. One might argue that this does not make a difference as long as it helps to improve the world, but the problem is more complex than that. By providing a toolkit that can give scientific support for any preconceived claim, it also becomes accessible to those that might misuse it for not so noble causes (Widdowson 1998: 150, 2004: 164). Poole (2010: 149-151) demonstrated that it is indeed possible to use CDA to support all sorts of beliefs i.e. also such beliefs that are opposed to those of CD analysts. Poole critically examined an article from the *Socialist Worker*, a left-wing newspaper. By employing the selective linguistic analysis that is the major tool of CDA, he “revealed” a left-wing ideology.

Two ways can be observed in which the moral element is exploited to contribute to CDA's immunization against critique. The first way is to mark any criticism about the method as an attack on the good cause. This is extremely dangerous, since it creates a totalizing discourse of itself that does not allow for academic debates. Immunizing opinions from critical reflection is in fact a direct attack on scientific progress. For that reason the critics of CDA are constantly forced to legitimize their critique. The most prominent critic Henry Widdowson, for instance, does not tire of explaining that it is not the goals he disagrees with, but only the method. Here is his stance:

what I want to stress here is that it is not the cause of CDA that I call into question, for it is one that, as will be evident from my earlier comments, I wholeheartedly endorse. Where I take issue with CDA is in the mode of analysis and interpretation it adopts by way of promoting this cause" (Widdowson 2004: ix).

The second way in which CDA obstructs diversified scientific discussion becomes evident in Fairclough's response to Widdowson's argument that CDA is itself ideological. Fairclough (1996: 53) asserts that Widdowson sees the social subject as constituted before the discourse and that he works with the concept of a free society, constituted by free individuals. Here Fairclough draws up a binary opposition between approaches that believe that social practices can be used to do ideological work and those who do not. As a result, all opposed approaches are seen as transmitting ideology themselves, since they claim that social practices do not help to strengthen ideologies. Hence, CDA constructs a 'with us' or 'against us' situation, in which a reasonable consideration of the other side's arguments is impossible. Note though, that again there is a discrepancy between what CD analysts argue and what their approach in fact implies. Here is Fairclough's (2003: 15) comment about critical and non-critical social sciences:

Neither approach is 'objective' in a simple sense, both approaches are based in particular interests and perspectives, but that does not prevent either of them being perfectly good social science.

But as I have demonstrated, according to the logic of critical research this is not the case. Non-critical sciences are seen as either manipulated themselves by the ideology – this would suggest that they cannot see past the ideology and therefore their work cannot make a contribution to emancipation – or even worse, as consciously supporting the existing power relations.

Now the question needs to be asked as to what qualifies the CD analyst more than any other reader to be the judge over moral issues. Of course nobody would argue that, for instance, the fight against racism in the mass media is not laudable, but not all causes are that clear. Let me illustrate this with Fairclough's struggle against globalization. A large number of people do not share his views, but Fairclough argues as if it were self evident that globalization does more harm than good. The point I am trying to make is that as soon as you place moral judgments (no matter how obvious they might be) over academic principles, you have taken the first step to drifting down the slippery slope towards science losing its distinctiveness from other realms such as politics.

Finally, I would argue that neglecting scientific standards does damage to scientific inquiry and to its authority. The distinctive characteristic of academic work is that it is bound by conventions such as replicability, intersubjectivity and the striving for objectivity<sup>1</sup>. Science has a certain authority, because it keeps to those principles and if it ceases to do so, it loses its specific advantage to be able to contribute to the progress of the world. Hence, I suggest that CDA risks gambling away this privileged position. If scientific research does not follow systematic principles, but only interprets and gives isolated textual examples to support its view, the question must be asked as to what makes a CDA reading more valid than any other. The answer is that preference should not be given to the interpretation of CD analysts, since they are only pretending to carry out analyses, when in fact they are doing the same as people in everyday life. Each of us will notice certain formal features once in a while and will have the feeling that they have a particular effect, but this does not make us analysts. Scientific inquiry needs to be characterized by systematicity, but as the subsequent sections will demonstrate, this is not the case in CDA.

### **3.3.2. The patchwork principle**

This section is intended to point to the shortcomings regarding the lack of systematicity. It serves to develop my main argument in this thesis, which will then be illustrated throughout the entire fourth section. The only thing that CDA is consistent in is its inconsistency, for it works with what Widdowson (2000b: 17) calls the "patchwork principle". It means that you pick whatever suits your argumentation, while disregarding

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that most researchers doubt that absolute objectivity can be reached, it still functions as a directive.

what is inconvenient. Widdowson uses the term with regard to the actual analyses that are carried out, but I will employ it in a broader sense. I will demonstrate how the multitude of theoretical resources is incorporated according to this principle. Whatever is advantageous is taken over. At the same time other elements of the theories are either disregarded or substituted by other theoretical references. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 454) have already noticed that the theoretical sources are not integrated systematically: “[o]ne can also note that the universe of mobilized sources invoked to support the CDA program is selective”.

I will start by discussing those problematic elements that have been derived by CDA from literary criticism and stylistics. Then the most significant contributions from the very broad range of sociological approaches will be portrayed, followed by a discussion of the linguistic resources that are drawn upon. The primary focus will be on how the patchwork principle is used to obstruct attempts of falsification. Finally, I will move to the actual analysis and show how the contributions from linguistics are put to expedient use.

A very strong indicator for the lack of systematicity is the absence of a rigid theoretical framework. A number of collections of essays have been published in order to give potential students and researchers in the area an idea of what the analyses should look like, but instead of clear guidance only check-lists are provided (e.g. Fowler and Kress 1979b: 198-213, Fairclough 1992: 225-240; 2001: 92-116; 2003: 191-194). But these checklists do not have to be followed. Rather they are to be seen as a collection of tools from which the researcher can choose whatever he need in order to prove his interpretation. Here is Fairclough (1992: 89) telling prospective CD analysts that they are not bound to any ex ante defined procedures in their analysis:

A rigid opposition between ‘content’ or ‘meaning’ and ‘form’, is misleading because the meanings of texts are closely intertwined with the forms of texts, and formal features of texts at various levels may be ideologically invested.

The important thing to notice in this passage is in the last line, where Fairclough implies that it is not expedient to define a procedure that should be used for each and every analysis, since there may be, but does not have to be ideological investment at more levels and the texts also differ as to which degree a particular level is invested. Instead, it is up to the CDA practitioner to decide what feature should be analyzed. And it is exactly this lack of rigid guidelines that may be one of the reasons for the attractiveness of the approach.

## **4. The groundwork of CDA and its problems**

As I will show, CDA works by selecting different theoretical resources and by fusing them together, but nowhere is it acknowledged that each of the contributing theories has its own shortcomings. Moreover, the impression is conveyed that there are no difficulties in mixing the works of so many different scholars such as Marx, Foucault or Habermas, and their application in CDA is not discussed. The best example of this is Hallidayan grammar, which is presented as the major linguistic resource, but there is no discussion about its problems and its transferability to critical linguistics. Therefore questions such as which elements of it to apply and which not, are completely disregarded. The list of such seemingly direct and simple incorporations is much longer. Nothing is presented as problematic “There is no grappling here with intellectual uncertainties, no confrontation of opposing paradigms” (Widdowson 2004: 168). That these issues are not broached by CDA representatives is once more emblematic of their failure to be an academic discipline. It is the absence of skepticism and self reflection, and above all of openness to testability, that makes it so problematic. Before I turn to the individual contributions, it is necessary to discuss another problem that arises from the fusion of such a large number of approaches, namely the heterogeneity.

### **4.1. The lack of uniformity**

The deficit CDA has concerning systematicity and clear procedures is exacerbated by its diversity of theoretical influences. The focus of the enterprise is uncertain and Toolan (1997: 99) says that it has already become methodologically fragmented. Hence Fowler’s (1996: 12) fear that “the compactness of the original analytic methodology will dissipate”, has come true. What holds CDA together is not a unified methodological framework, but the critical way of looking at society. In Van Dijk’s (1993a: 131) words: CDA is “a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis”. Apart from the same political conviction, all practitioners share the belief that there is a strong link between language and power<sup>2</sup>. But the missing uniformity is problematic with regard to Fairclough’s (1995b: 1) claim that CDA is “an analytic framework – a theory and method

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<sup>2</sup> This is by no means something that only linguistics has experienced: there is hardly any academic field where no critical perspective exists (Hammersley 1997: 237).



– for studying language in its relation to power and ideology”. If, as Fairclough notes elsewhere (2003: 210), CDA is able to absorb and appropriate methods such as corpus linguistics, then it is at best a collection of methodologies. CDA works with anything-goes guidelines: as long as it helps the purpose, the methodology is irrelevant. So it is not justified to call it a method. But it is not exactly a theory either. Fairclough’s *Language and Power* (1989), despite claims to the contrary, did not develop a theory, but was rather a “corpus of analytic techniques” (Luke 2002: 98). Pennycook (2001: 25) even speaks of an “animosity to theory”. Moreover, it has to be kept in mind that retrospectively there were efforts to make CDA more plausible and more coherent by integrating other works from the field of discourse analysis (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000: 454). Van Dijk’s (2007: xxxvii) insistence that CDA “is *not* a method but a discipline [his emphasis]” seems more plausible, since it accounts for the theoretical and methodological heterogeneity. But regardless of the label, the lack of uniformity causes problems that Fowler (1996: 6) foresaw when he uttered his concern about this weak spot in critical linguistics and called for unification, primarily based on a Hallidayan framework. For him the danger was

that ‘critical linguistics’ in the hands of practitioners of diverse intellectual persuasions will come to mean loosely any politically well-intentioned analytic work on language and ideology, regardless of method, technical grasp of linguistic theory, or historical validity of interpretations.

But the transition to CDA meant an even greater theoretical heterogeneity, rather than making the method more compact and more systematic. Instead of establishing clear guidelines and developing a fully-fledged theory, expansion has made the approach more elusive. But Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 17) argue explicitly against a stabilization of CDA, because they fear that this would “compromise the developing capacity of CDA to shed light on the dialectic of the semiotic and the social in a wide variety of social practices”. Therefore methodological and theoretical consistency is strictly rejected. But this contradicts what Fairclough argued with Wodak two years earlier (1997: 259), namely that in order for CDA to be a scholarly discipline it is necessary that “standards of careful, rigorous and systematic analysis apply with equal force to CDA as to other approaches”. But are systematic and rigorous standards not the major driving forces behind stabilization?

But the importance of unified and systematic procedures is downplayed by CD representatives. In spite of their repudiation of methodological homogenization,

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 17) do acknowledge that it would be advantageous for pedagogy. However, they miss an essential point: stability and standardization of method are not only an advantage for pedagogy, but a cornerstone of any scientific research, since it enables other members of the scientific community to judge the value of the work that is being carried out. Without it, there is no empirical procedure that fulfills the criterion of accountability (Widdowson 2004: 168).

In the following I will look at theoretical resources from three areas, namely literary criticism, sociology and linguistics. Concerning the latter two the argument will be that the sociological aspects prevail and make CDA less rigorous. But before that, I will consider CDA's connection to the study of literature, where a number of problems arise in the absorption of analyzing techniques.

#### **4.2. The roots in the study of literature**

Critical linguistics owes much to the study of literature and even though this might not be stressed very often by CDA practitioners, there are many indicators of this connection. Within the study of literature there are two approaches that had an impact on critical linguistics, namely traditional literary criticism and stylistics. From both CDA inherited some problematic elements. As Widdowson (1998: 136) observes, critical linguistics is still reminiscent of their roots in literary criticism. But they hardly ever admit it, nor do they bother to mention the connection between these two areas. This is interesting, since interdisciplinarity is proclaimed to be a major issue in the whole enterprise. However, CDA is predominantly concerned with references to socio-political research, while the links to literary criticism (and even linguistics) are constantly ignored (ibid.: 149). This can be explained by the fact that critical linguistics regards a distinction between literary and non-literary texts as unjustified, since all criticism is seen as linguistic (e.g. Fowler 1986: 10). As a result, for them literary criticism does not exist (Widdowson 2000: 156). Nevertheless, there are some instances in CL where the shared past is mentioned quite explicitly (e.g. Fowler 1996: 4). Fowler actually did not see the practices of literary criticism as much different to those of CL, except that the latter was in the possession of a better toolkit. And they indeed have in common a number of characteristics. Both are convinced that there is an underlying meaning in a text, whereby genre and intertextuality

are significant. Furthermore, both claim to have a special authority in shedding light on the concealed meaning of a text (Widdowson 2000: 157). Traditional literary critics were often accused of using strongly evaluative language. Tyrwhitt-Drake (1999: 1084) shows CD analysts to be doing the same thing in their analyses<sup>3</sup>. But why is there, despite all these similarities, such a reluctance to point to these connections? The reason can be found in a remark by Fowler et al. (1979: 4), where it is recognized that the hermeneutic element, which is predominant in literary criticism, has had an impact on the CL movement. Hermeneutic here indicates that whenever in a text multiple understandings are possible, this equivocation is solved by examining the language of a text. Ergo, the analyst is concerned with the interpretation of the reader, but without actually consulting him. The hermeneutic task is to read meaning from the text itself and this is a problem that I will be discussing throughout this thesis. Engaging in hermeneutic practices also has the effect that the researcher's claim cannot be disproven, since no way of eliciting data is accepted apart from the interpretation of the researcher. The hermeneutic activities are not what CL and particularly CDA practitioners would want to be associated with, hence the effort to present their work as analysis. And it is here that we can find the reason why such reluctance exists among critical linguists to talk about the connection to literary criticism.

However, in literary studies the advent of stylistics changed the research area and this transformation is also reflected in critical linguistics. Literary criticism was increasingly regarded as impressionistic and as insufficiently scientific. Combining the criticism of texts with linguistic methodology was an attempt to deliver a more secure scientific footing for the examination of literature. This was called 'stylistics'. Due to the primacy of the linguistic elements and the resulting tools for analysis, some authors regard stylistics as more objective than traditional literary criticism (Simpson 1993: 3). But not everybody agrees with that definition of stylistics. Widdowson (1975: 117) does not see stylistics as a substitute for literary criticism, rather "it can prepare the way for it to operate more efficiently". He defines stylistics as occupying an inclined position between literary criticism and linguistics, it "is an area of mediation between [these] two disciplines" (ibid.: 4). In his view particularly learners can profit from it, because stylistics "provide[s] the means whereby the learner can relate a piece of literary writing with his own experience of

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the use of evaluative language is not only berated in literary criticism, but in CDA it is also seen as a tool for introducing ideologically charged presuppositions into a text.

language and so extend that experience” (ibid.: 117). But the definition of stylistics that critical linguists work with is rather the former. Fowler (1986: 3) quotes Halliday (1967), who regards the application of linguistic models to literature as superior to common literary criticism, because it is more systematic and does not allow for citing only convenient aspects of the text in order to prove a preconceived hypothesis. But regardless of its scientific appearance, many see stylistics as not more solid or objective than traditional literary criticism. Here is Fish (1981: 98) assailing a stylistic analysis by Ohmann (1969):

the enterprise is in trouble, not because it will fail, but because it will, in every case, succeed [...] his interpretations will be as arbitrary and unverifiable as those of the most impressionistic critics.

As will become clear, this is also the principle that CDA works with. The allegedly impressionistic element of literary criticism has, despite constant claims to the contrary, neither been remedied in stylistics, nor in critical linguistics. The analytic toolkit provides a systematic terminology, regardless of the fact that in the case of Ohmann it is generative grammar and in the case of CDA it is systemic-functional grammar. But despite a systematic terminology, the analytic procedure still may be characterized by eclecticism. Secondly, often assumptions are made about the effects of particular grammatical structures or lexis, which per definition cannot be substantiated by a grammar. There has been no improvement in this area as compared to traditional literary criticism. But there is also one troubling aspect in CDA that is solely inherited from stylistics: the absoluteness with which the claims are made. The central issue is the disguise as solid science, while it is not. Fish (1981: 107) accuses stylicians of being more subjective than their forerunners, because for “an open impressionism, they substitute the covert impressionism of anchorless statistics and self-referring categories”, which finally results in a “pseudoscientific paraphernalia”. Replacing the evaluative language by technical terms and supporting the interpretations by figures makes the methods appear more authoritative, thereby disguising the fact that the meaning is not enshrined in the text.

So CDA and stylistics share a very similar methodology and also its weaknesses. Nevertheless, due to the difference in the material that is examined, CDA has to struggle with further problems that stylistics does not. The common denominator between CDA and stylistics is the importance of the linguistic analysis when approaching texts i.e. both

assign importance to the linguistic form and both are concerned about the effect a particular language feature has. The difference is that stylistics is rather associated with literature, while CL and CDA are concerned with non-fictional texts (Leech/ Short 1981: 11). Consequently, we need to look at the difference between literary and non-literary texts.

So what difference does it make whether literary or non-literary texts are examined? The answer is context. Non-fictional texts have a context that must not be neglected, whereas literary texts are designed to be without a specific context. This is the reason why it is not justified to analyze both kinds of texts with the same approach (Widdowson 2000a: 167). Widdowson (2000a: 164) asserts that literary texts have no referential function to reality and therefore they are not understood in accordance to the cooperation principle. It is irrelevant whether the Gricean maxims are obeyed<sup>4</sup>. In short: literature is not like other forms of communication, because it is not characterized by processes of meaning negotiation. A similar distinction between literature and non-literature is also proposed by Klein and Martinez (2009: 1), who claim that texts within the media discourse have a referential point in the world we live in, i.e. they refer to people, actions and processes from a non-fictional reality. It is not the actual correspondence to reality that is decisive here, but the claim to be referring to a non-fictional world (ibid.: 5). The distinctive element is that “we could, if we chose, check up on the accuracy of the information we are given” (Widdowson 2000a: 160).

The question whether a text is bound to a context is significant. First and foremost it makes a difference in the reading process, because “to identify texts as literary is to adopt a certain attitude and a certain way of reading them” (ibid.: 157). Widdowson’s (2004: chap. 5) notion of ‘pretext’ enables us to distinguish literary from non-literary texts. How we approach a text depends on how we position ourselves to it and also what we expect to find in it. This means that the process of meaning generation is influenced by our experiences, as well as by our goals with which we approach a text. If we, for example, recognize a text as a poem, our focal point will be on the language, whereas when reading a referential text we shift the attention to forms “to the extent that they are referentially effective” (ibid.: 161). So the nature of a text determines the pretext of the reader. While stylistics has an

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<sup>4</sup> For a closer discussion of Grice’s cooperative principle see Grice (1975).

aesthetic pretext, critical linguistics starts off from a political pretext and this makes the latter a more problematic enterprise than the former. To have an aesthetic pretext means that you look particularly for effects that the use of language has on you. This is a form of interpretation, but it is interpretation that is derived after reading a text. If you have a political pretext, you assign a certain political stance to the writer (and therefore the text) already before the reading. The examination of the language is then fitted to support your belief. In stylistics an a priori interpretation is out of the question, because the text does not refer to the real world i.e. it is contextless. The difference can be illustrated on one such contextual factor, viz. the author. The author of a literary work cannot be held accountable for what he writes, whereas in referential texts he can, because here “[a]uthors assume first-person responsibility” (Widdowson 2000: 165). A similar point is made by Klein and Martinez (2009: 3) when they argue that in non-literary texts the author is also the narrator, while in literature the narrator is invented by the author. If, as in Edgar Allan Poe’s *The tell-tale heart*, the narrator tells us lies, Poe cannot be accused of distorting the truth. On the other hand, if a newspaper article misrepresents an event, the responsible journalist is liable and in the worst case can face legal consequences. In other words, in a literary text assumptions about the ideological position of the author are irrelevant, since he is not the narrator. It may as well be, for example, that the author creates a narrator, whose political conviction the author condemns. In critical linguistics presupposition of the author are of importance. To put it in a nutshell, stylisticians use the pseudo-scientific method to give weight to the effect that the text has on them, while critical linguists use the same techniques for supporting an interpretation that they arrived at even before they looked at the text. Both are problematic, but in the latter case, the linguistic reading is subordinated to a political reading. As a result, admitting partiality does not pose a problem to stylisticians (e.g. Toolan 1990: 11), but it does to critical linguists.

But let me briefly turn again to text consumption. Fish (2004: 217) addressed another crucial issue about literary criticism, which applies even more to the analysis of non-fictional texts. Different readers have different interpretive strategies and therefore each of us reads a text that he has generated with his own interpretation strategies. These strategies can not only differ from person to person, but sometimes the same individual chooses different strategies. This makes it possible that the same person can read the same text in different ways and notice different things depending on what he is looking for. Ergo, the

analyst and the average reader will with the utmost probability make different sense of the same material. The concept of the interpretative strategies resembles that of the pretext. The difference is simply that the former are a result of the pretext i.e. the pretext denotes the position of the analyst, which is responsible for selecting particular interpretative strategies. This is one of the problematic aspects that have been taken over from stylistics to the critical analyses of style, where the divergence, I would argue, is even greater due to the political motivation and the self-imposed task of changing the world. However, it has to be mentioned that multiple people may also read a text identically or nearly-identically if the same interpretative strategies are used. Therefore Fish (ibid: 219) develops the notion of the “interpretative communities”, which are groups of individuals sharing the same interpretive strategies. With reference to this concept, the practitioners of CL and CDA can be said to belong to similar interpretative communities. The problem with their work is that they do not account for the existence of multiple interpretative strategies, but impose their own and disguise them as those of the average readers. The following quote by Flowerdew (1999: 1094), a CD analyst, illustrates my point: “[p]lausibility is also enhanced in CDA if similar pragmatic phenomena have previously been identified by other researchers.” According to him, the plausibility of CDA research increases if it is consistent with former work in the field, but the only thing that this proves is a consensus within one interpretative community. The leap to the untrained reader of a text is not made. Instead of trying to seek consensus with the ‘real’ consumers of a text, the premise that they are blind to the exertion of ideology prevents taking their interpretative strategies from being considered.

### **4.3. The contribution of sociological resources**

But the roots in literary criticism are not the only contributors to the predominance of the interpretative element in critical linguistics. In the following I will focus on two things: first, I will demonstrate that in CDA sociological elements have gained the upper hand over linguistic elements. Some authors (e.g. Santander 2009, Blommaert/ Bulcaen 2000), mainly non-linguists, consider the approach to be still too focused on the language. However, it will become clear that it is rather the sociological perspective that prevails. The second thing that I will argue is that it is exactly this sociological influence that played a major role in moving CDA away from academic standards. Toolan (1997: 88) also

observes that the elements that CDA added to the linguistic basis are more problematic. He says

that many of the more interesting (robust, falsifiable) descriptive claims and distinctions used by CDA come directly from the broader disciplines of linguistics and discourse analysis, and that those elements added by CDA in its own right tend to be unfalsifiable and impressionistic.

Most of these elements that CDA is said to have added are taken over from sociology. This is not problematic because the sociological elements are unscientific per se, but because they have been torn out of their genuine theoretical environment, which is a central weakness of the patchwork principle. One such sociological influence can be encountered in the very conception of discourse, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

#### **4.3.1. Adding a sociological conception of discourse**

Since 1952 discourse has been a well studied phenomenon in linguistics. The emergence of critical linguistics represented a break with the traditional way of studying discourse. Some of the distinct features of critical linguistics have been discussed already (such as the political engagement or the inclusion of the connection between language and power), but there is another significant difference that has to be clarified, namely the very conception of discourse. Discourse, Fairclough (2001: 20) argues, is not the same as text. The language material is only called discourse when it is combined with the processes of production and consumption. In this respect the usage of the term corresponds to that in linguistics. However, there is yet another conception of the word, one that is very much influenced by the social sciences. In the latter sense ‘discourse’ is used as a count noun to denote “particular ways of representing part of the world” (Fairclough 2003: 26). A commonly referred example in Fairclough’s work for discourse in that sense is the neoliberal discourse. O’ Halloran (2003: 12) describes the distinction between Discourse (1) and (2) in the following way:

Discourse (1) refers to the coherent understanding the reader makes from a text. [...] ‘Foucauldian discourse’, or discourse (2), refers instead to the way in which knowledge is organised, talked about and acted upon in different institutions.

Whereas discourse in the first sense corresponds to the discourse practice (i.e. the text combined with the processes of production and consumption), discourse (2) corresponds to



the sociocultural practice (i.e. the wider context) (ibid.). Discourse (1) and discourse (2) are seen as being mutually constitutive. So the wider institutionalized practices determine the form of the individual text, as well as its production and consumption practices. On the other hand the transmission of ideology through discourse (1) is important to keep up the power relations that exist within discourse (2) (Fairclough 1992: 65). Here Fairclough echoes the argument of Fowler et al. (1979: 1), who argue that “language usage is not merely an effect or reflex of social organization and process, it is a *part* of social process [their italics]”.

This multiple notions were subject to critique. Of course it is legitimate to have more than one meaning attached to a term, but the problem is that Fairclough, as well as most other CD analysts, often does not make clear which discourse he is dealing with. As a matter of fact, he seems not to be able to make up his mind which definition of discourse to choose. O’Dwyer (2007: 374) observes that it is a common phenomenon that CD analysts are torn apart between the conception of discourse provided by cultural theory and by linguistics. But it is hard to reconcile the traditional applied linguistics view with the critical view. Pennycook (1994: 54) even argues that they are incommensurable. What seems to be evident is that each analysis gives preference to one of these conceptions and this is exactly the contentious issue. The criticism that CDA has to face is that it is too focused on the social and institutional determination of discourse, thus not adequately analyzing its pragmatic realization. Here is CDA’s argument against the pragmatic treatment of discourse: in pragmatics discourse is not seen as having the ability to constitute contexts and subjects. These are established outside discourse and before it, while CDA wants to investigate how their construction in discourse takes place (Fairclough 1996: 54). However, this is a too simplified depiction of pragmatics that Fairclough makes. The social perspective is not left out, but social elements are only seen as one factor among many, therefore denying the reduction of individuals to actors of their social roles. Important for this discussion is the following distinction proposed by Widdowson (1996: 58), which bears strong resemblance to the one discussed above. As “Discourse 1” Widdowson sees the discourse process in the definition of pragmatics, and the label “Discourse 2” is given to the sum of the discourses within which an individual has been socialized. CDA’s major problem is that it deals with Discourse 2 exclusively. Individuals are regarded as completely controlled by the social circumstances. Thereby Widdowson (ibid.) does not

argue against “the existence of discourses in the Foucault sense”, however “these discourses are abstract constructs. They can only be activated through discourse as I have defined it, as the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation (i.e. Discourse 1)” (ibid.). Keeping Fairclough’s three-dimensional model in mind, it can be asserted that CDA makes a leap from the textual level to the sociocultural practice, while disregarding the discourse practice.

This terminological confusion has the effect of making the assertions less concrete. Poole (2010: 141) draws our attention to the fact that in many cases CD analysts do not make explicitly clear with which definition of discourse they work. They simply take it for granted, which in the end makes their work harder to understand. A similar point is made by Hammersley (1997: 245), who observes that CDA takes over concepts such as ‘oppression’, ‘equality’ and ‘emancipation’, without even mentioning that none of them is as straightforward it might seem at the first glance. But for the sake of protecting the method, words and concepts are not only redefined, but also newly invented. New word creations are used to cover shortcomings of the method. A perfect example thereof is Fairclough’s use of the term ‘meaning’, which helps CDA to bypass dealing with the question how the semantic and the pragmatic side of things relate to each other. As Widdowson (1995b: 514-515) points out, this distinction has kept linguists occupied for very long, but Fairclough just does away with it by using the term ‘meaning’ to refer to both, the meaning potentials of a form and the particular meaning that is realized in the act of reader interpretation. What is needed, but what Fairclough does not provide, is a theory that indicates the pragmatic conditions under which a reader decides to realize a particular meaning rather than another.

#### **4.3.2. The primacy of sociological work**

Fairclough (1992: 4) describes his approach as a “social theory of discourse”, because he combines views of discourse from social sciences and linguistics. This combination is nothing new and the social aspects of language have been included in linguistic inquiry for a long time, for instance in subdisciplines such as sociolinguistics. But critical linguistics has distanced itself from sociolinguistics since the beginning. In Fowler et al. (1979: 2) it is criticized for the acceptance of social structures and also for conveying the impression that

it is impossible to change them. Santander (2009: 195-196) sums up the major difference as follows: while the starting point in sociolinguistics is the social aspect of language, CDA is concerned with language because it is an element of the social. In other words, CDA is only interested in language, for it is seen as an opportunity to explain (and change) the social. The fact that Fairclough favors the sociological side of CDA becomes clear while reading his *Discourse and social change* (1992), where he combines the sociological and linguistic views of discourse. As Widdowson (1995b: 510) notes, there is a special chapter about Foucault, while there is no such extensive reference to a linguist. Fairclough's rather dismissive attitude towards mainstream linguistics is also apparent when he says that it is "an asocial way of studying language, which has nothing to say about relationships between language and power and ideology" (Fairclough 2001: 6). There is no comparable comment about social theory. Bear in mind that the branch of CDA that Fairclough advocates is the one which is still the closest to linguistics. In the other branches language plays an even minor role. Here is a definition of CDA provided by Van Dijk (2001: 352), where it becomes clear that language takes an undoubtedly subordinate position:

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.

So the text is only important as a site of struggle, while the use and abuse of power is central. The primary interest lies in power and ideology, which simply happen to be constructed in language. This intrusion of the social sciences is often equated with political motivation and biased research. But we have to keep in mind that as Widdowson (1995a: 159) notes, social theory and political commitment are not the same thing, albeit they are easily confused. The question of commitment rather has to be discussed in connection to the critical perspective which is also taken over from sociology.

#### **4.3.3. The critical perspective**

As the names suggest, CL and CDA belong to the tradition of the critical social sciences, which have developed mainly on the basis of Marxism (Van Dijk 1993b: 251). Fairclough (2003: 15) describes them as "social science which is motivated by the aim of providing a

scientific basis for a critical questioning of social life in moral and political terms”. The enterprise is thereby fueled by a political motive: “[c]ritical social research designs and changes its research programme to try to respond to the great issues and problems of the day” (Fairclough 2003: 203). What these issues and problems are is left to the judgment of the critical analyst. For Fairclough the great antagonists of today’s world are new capitalism, globalization and neo-liberalism. Since he is convinced that they damage the human condition, Fairclough sees it as his task to change these ‘problems’ and to develop alternatives (ibid.). Other researchers in the field have a different focus. Van Dijk’s work, for example, is for the most part concerned with racism in the mass media.

From these goals it is already evident that the term ‘critical’ signals another kind of criticism than that which is required by conventional science. What critical science and critical rationalism have in common is that both start their work by the perception of a problem. There is, however, a difference between the notion of problem in the sense of these two. Popper (ibid.: 105) views the problem as a contradiction between what we know and what we experience. In critical research on the other hand, the tensions are not understood to be between the observed and the known, but rather between the observed and the desired. CDA does not limit itself to the challenging of other research, but also extends to criticizing the social phenomena that are the object of study (Hammersley 1997: 240). As a critical social science, CDA has a clearly defined way of achieving the desired change: making people conscious about how the use of language helps one group to dominate another, because it is only when this consciousness is achieved, that emancipation becomes possible in a next step (Fairclough 2001: 1). Critical science, according to Fairclough (ibid.: 193), is particularly needed in our times, because in modern societies domination works “through ‘consent’ rather than ‘coercion’, through ideology, and through language”. But these claims that are made about the connection of language and ideology necessarily lead to contradictions and problems. If we believe Trew (1979: 95), there is no use of language without ideological implication. Under the premise of the all-pervasiveness of ideology every feature carries with it an ideological load and as a result there is no possibility of knowing which features to concentrate on in the analysis (Widdowson 2004: 166). Besides the obvious problem of feasibility – not every feature can be analyzed and especially not its relation to every other feature – the question of how to decide which linguistic realizations are considered to be more significant than others poses

an unsolvable problem. There is yet another contradiction within this framework about ideology. If there is no neutral language use, not only texts such as newspaper articles are ideologically invested, but also the linguistic analyses, including critical analyses. Consequently, ideology can never be discovered without conveying another ideology (Widdowson 1998: 148). CDA has reacted to the critique that was made against CL with regard to the ideology issue. The quite radical position of Trew has been replaced by more cautious descriptions of the language-ideology relation. Here is Fairclough (1992: 91): “[b]ut all discourse is not thereby irredeemably ideological.” In his view ideology only exists due to societal inequalities. He then goes on to make a utopian point by saying that humans have the capability of leaving behind societies dominated by ideology, thereby rejecting Althusser’s view that there is no society without ideology. This is utopian, since domination can only be replaced by domination, but this is something I want to keep beyond the scope of the present discussion. Instead it is interesting to observe how Fairclough uses the second of the two major strategies to promote the critical linguistics project, namely the inconsistency in the application of theory.

The above described properties are not unique to CL and CDA. Within many fields of language study such as pragmatics, linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, work is being done increasingly from a critical perspective. It is the focus on the relationship of social structure and language that they all have in common. That is why Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 456) talk about the rise of a “new critical paradigm” in linguistics. There are three features that are characteristic of work within this paradigm: the centrality of the ideology issue, the attention that is given to power and inequality, and the validation by social theory (ibid.: 456- 460).

This partiality and desire for change that arise out of this critical perspective lead to a serious objection against CDA: it is doubtful whether an approach that has a declared political agenda can be considered as part of academic debate. Fairclough (1992: 9) defends the fact that his research is critical by stating that there are hidden causes and connections which need to be brought to light. From its beginnings CL was a political project, a project with a clear agenda. Fairclough (1989: 5) does not see this as problematic, because in his view CD analysts still have to provide evidence for the claims they make. Even though all researchers are humans and are not indifferent about the object they are researching, according to Hammersley (1997: 239) there is one crucial difference

to CL and CDA practitioners: critical scientists give preference to their beliefs over the data. As a result, research becomes only a servant of the political agenda. But there is even a more serious problem with this regard: “[i]ndeed, the argument of CDA is that research is defective, methodologically as well as politically, if it does not fulfill this function. This is a much more controversial claim” (ibid.). What Hammersley touches upon here is the absolutist claim that CDA makes. The claim that objective research is impossible without social research enables those working in the critical tradition not only to defend their enterprise, but also to discredit non-critical scholarship. Neutrality is regarded as impossible, thus a non-critical approach is seen as leading to a reinforcement of the dominant ideology (Hammersley 1997: 238-239). The possibility that non-critical research could deliver more valuable results is excluded from the start. This is a serious deficit with regard to the principle of falsification, since its practitioners do not try to falsify their theories, but rather their quest lies in verification. Defenders of CDA and CL could object that within the frame of critical rationalism a clearly biased research is legitimate, because in the multiplicity of positions that exist within the scientific discourse the best one will survive. After all Popper himself was keen on supporting his falsification principle. But this argumentation would not hold, since this competition of ideas only works if the theories are open to falsification. If they are not, as it is the case in critical linguistics, then there are no rules of how to tell which of the competing theories are closer to reality. If we follow Hammersley (1997: 241-242), then the major problem of this absolutism lies in the orthodox Marxist view of a telos being designed into history, thus making ideology critique necessary. But this is a totalizing theory and representatives of the Frankfurt School rejected Marx’s radical position. Nevertheless, they did not propose “an effective alternative philosophical basis for ‘critical’ research” (ibid.), which in the end poses an essential problem for CDA. But like many other problematic aspects, this is ignored by CDA.

The debate that lies beneath the discussions about critical and partial research is the philosophical conflict between realism and constructivism. Since I will not be able to resolve the question whether it is possible to arrive at an objective representation of the world or not, the next few paragraphs should illustrate how CDA fails to take a clear stand in this debate. Due to their critical background, CL and CDA are necessarily constructivist. They deny that the world can be represented faithfully and that science can be objective.

This is, for instance, evident in the rejection of positivistic methodology or by the insistence on the researcher's partiality. Fairclough (1996: 52) echoes this constructivist argument to justify his own bias, when Widdowson confronts him with the issue:

What Widdowson is offering here is a version of the classic liberal distinction between ideology and science (or theory): on the one hand, ideology, commitment, prejudice and partiality (CDA); and on the other hand, science and impartiality (e.g. Widdowson).

But it is exactly the other way round. Widdowson (e.g. 1996: 68) does acknowledge that his assumptions are partial and that different readers can arrive at different interpretations. But scholarly inquiry needs to meet certain standards that distinguish it from everyday experience. Fairclough's argument seems to be that since it is impossible to represent the world faithfully, nothing speaks against abandoning replicable procedures or rigorous application of theory and method.

Even though Fairclough defends his position so vigorously, a closer examination of his work lays bare some quite realistic ideas and positivistic working routines. This is how Patterson (1997: 425) describes the procedure of positivistic research: it "claims to read the truth of the object off the surface of the data". This is exactly what is being done in CDA, regardless of the claim to do otherwise. I will demonstrate this in section 4.4.4.2., which is entirely dedicated to this issue. Another indication of CDA's closeness to realism can be found in the belief that some language features are ideologically more heavily charged than others. A very illustrative example of this realist idea is the way critical linguists deal with transformations. Unlike Chomsky, they do not assume that all sentences have undergone transformation processes. Some have been changed and are therefore less close to the representation of the world. This suggests that certain linguistic forms are closer to reality than others. For instance, the representation of a process as a noun is believed to be less natural than when it is represented as a verb.

But there are further problems caused by the critical perspective. It is the primacy of the political opinion that is responsible for a number of erroneous claims that are made. In some cases it could be argued that these are simply caused by the lack of expertise in a certain area. Van Dijk (1995b: 38), for example, calls the Austrian newspaper *Kronenzeitung* a broadsheet, although it is the prototype of a tabloid. Other researchers have observed such erroneous claims as well. Santander (2009: 190) draws attention to

Van Dijk saying that headlines summarize a newspaper article. This is often the case, but by far not always. Santander's argument is that such mistakes happen, because the focus is still on the text and the context is not studied as extensively as it should. We could argue that these mistakes are rooted in the lack of qualification or the lack of attention that is given to the investigation of context, but at some occasions it seems that the judgment is simply clouded by the political stance of the analyst. How else could Van Dijk's (1995b: 42) assertion be explained, that the vast majority of media have a right-wing orientation. This is one of the most debated topics within media studies, but Van Dijk presents his opinion as being a fact. Like in the textual analysis, CDA practitioners simply impose their interpretation of things, without bothering to supply evidence. Poole (2010: 139-140) shows Fairclough to be equally partial when it comes down to 'new capitalism'. His argumentation is one-sided, even though there is research suggesting that there are in fact quite positive effects of the phenomenon Fairclough despises so much. However, this does not fit into Fairclough's argumentation and is therefore ignored. Again, CDA works with a black and white portioning of the world. Therefore convergent evidence is presented, while divergent is disregarded,

There is yet another crucial problem, one that lies within the very concept of critical research. According to the critical view, people are forced into submission by the subliminal transmission of ideology and only the critical researcher is in the position to make people aware of that manipulation. But if it is true, as CD representatives claim, that nothing can be constituted outside discourse, "then how [do] we put the critical into critical discourse studies from a position 'within discourse'" (O'Regan 2006: 233)? In other words: what enables the CD analyst to see past the alleged ideological indoctrination?

#### **4.3.3.1. Problems dating back to the beginning**

In the last section I dealt with the critical perspective, a cornerstone of CDA. Now I will look at where the critical perspective came from, because even in the beginning a number of approaches were integrated that are responsible for some problematic aspects. In a very influential essay Hammersley (1997) detects some weaknesses that the critical analyses of style carry with them since their foundation. There are multiple philosophical bases of CDA, each bringing in new flaws to the approach. Although this is not directly connected



to the analytical practices, it is necessary to examine these roots, since they determine the attitude towards the empirical inquiry. As the most probable foundations of CDA Hammersley lists Marxism, decisionism and universal pragmatics (the latter two go back to Habermas). Marxist influences entered CDA mainly through the Frankfurt School and its critical theory. The acceptance of Marxism brings in a number of problems, which are discussed in the course of this paper. However, at this point I would like to draw attention to the major flaw that is inherited from critical theory. The assumption of the Marxist meta-narrative is not falsifiable. It is not open for criticism, since it is not specified what kind of evidence can be brought up against it. Scientific standards such as the requirement to make predictions about the future are rejected (ibid.: 241). Therefore my claim that critical linguistics is to be dismissed as an academic discipline can, *inter alia*, be traced back to the inclusion of Marxist elements.

But there are indications that the Frankfurt theory is not the sole philosophical basis for CDA, which is why Hammersley (1997: 242) identifies the decisionism of Jürgen Habermas as another major philosophical source that CDA draws upon. Unlike Marxism, “decisionism denies that values are open to rational justification” (ibid.). The closeness to the ideas of decisionism can be seen in the fact that CDA practitioners make explicitly clear what their agenda is and they also acknowledge that their tools could be used for an analysis with another political motive in the background, for instance, to protect the powerful (Flowerdew 1999: 1093) or by advocates of the political right (Fairclough 1996: 52). The incorporation of elements of decisionism is advantageous in multiple ways. First, it helps to invalidate the works that showed that with different pretexts it is possible to arrive at different conclusions (e.g. Widdowson 1996, Poole 2010, and my analysis as well). By building on this decisionist assumption, these quasi CD analyses are not perceived as being falsifications. The other advantage is derived from making the value commitment explicit, which is depicted as a reason for the superiority over non-critical science. While Kress (1990: 85) argues that critical linguistics is one step ahead of conventional research due to the conscious reflection of the researcher’s background, Fairclough goes even further. He believes CDA to be more honest than those approaches that claim to be neutral while they are not<sup>5</sup>. Consider the following quote:

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<sup>5</sup> This argument is very prominent in the whole critical movement. See Hammersley (1997: 239) for a closer discussion.

But illusions about the neutrality of academic research should surely have been shattered by now [...] The issue is not whether universities will privilege links to particular other parts of society, but which links they will privilege. But privileging links does not mean 'abandoning academic standards' (Fairclough 2001: 216).

The question is just which academic standards Fairclough is talking about here, because CDA does not meet criteria such as replicability of procedures or openness to falsification. Again we are not dealing with academic argumentation, but a rhetorical strategy. CDA tries to impose its moral standards by making a distinction between honest and dishonest science. All researchers are forced to take sides. If they do not, their work is said to be deceitful. If they do, CDA again is in a convenient position since it has already occupied moral high ground by claiming to protect the powerless and the discriminated. By pushing forward this dichotomy attention is shifted away from one of the major problems that CDA faces, one that Hammersley (1997: 240) observes: "[w]hile [...] other kinds of research also sometimes draw normative conclusions, in the case of critical inquiry evaluation is an integral part of the analytic process". It may be unrealistic to expect the researcher to completely leave out his personal background, but there is still a difference whether his work as a researcher is influenced by the personal background or whether its only function is to deliver scientific 'evidence' to support it.

There is yet a third possible cornerstone that Hammersley (*ibid.*: 243-244) detects, namely the 'universal pragmatics', which was also developed by Habermas. A central element CDA took over from Habermas was that not labor, but communication is seen as the most fundamental element for human co-ordination. Political decisions should be made on the basis of agreement, which can happen only if there is an 'ideal speech situation', meaning that neither of the communicating parties is privileged over the others (*ibid.*). This is one of the theoretical resources that has enabled CDA to apply a Marxist mind-set to the study of language. Moreover, CDA has inherited Habermas' utopian conviction that is evident when they talk about the possibility of an ideology-free discourse. Hence, the belief that there is an ideal speech situation that is not dominated by power relations helps to resolve some of the contradictions that have already been discussed with regard to the omnipresence of ideology (even though Habermas' concept itself leads to a circular argument).

This discussion shows that the philosophical foundations of CDA are characteristic of the entire approach: different elements from different theoretical bases are adopted as they fit the purpose. Two problems arise by this kind of cherry-picking practice: first, CDA work gets less prone to falsification and, secondly, none of these foundations is without its problems and many of these are taken over into critical linguistics. But the critical element as such has negative effects on CDA. In the two subsequent sections I will point out two of these, namely the oversimplification of power relations and the substitution of analysis with interpretation.

#### **4.3.3.2. The oversimplification of power relations.**

Often in CDA matters are depicted as straightforward and unproblematic. Clear black and white oppositions are established, thus leading to oversimplifications, particularly concerning the issue of power. Pennycook (1994: 45) detects the reductive aspect in the focus on class issues. According to him the influence of Marxism is responsible for this simplistic view of power relations, because seeing all inequalities through the looking-glass of class and socio-economic situation does not account for things such as discrimination based on characteristics such as race.

Probably more important are the problems that arise when we consider the dualistic situation between dominant and dominated. Hammersley (1997: 245) identifies the problem that by taking over “macro-sociological theory in which there are only two parties – the oppressors and the oppressed – and only one relationship between them: domination”. But language is used to cooperate, not only to dominate. Moreover, the alleged oppressed does not have to play according to the rules of the alleged oppressor. Widdowson (1995a: 169) argues that one possible reason for diverging discourses is that some readers “simply refuse to converge, insist on the primacy of their own ideological position, and so derive from the text the discourse which fits their preconceived ideological commitment”. What Widdowson is talking about at this point is the option a reader or listener or viewer has to violate the principle of co-operation. The human component in the process of reception is completely left out in CDA.

But there are further fundamental problems. If a researcher wants to measure manipulation, he would have to know in all situations who the oppressor is and who is being oppressed

(Tyrwhitt-Drake 1999: 1083). Besides the fact that this is often a question of degree, it also has to be noted that sometimes a text has more than two parties acting upon it. The genre that I will examine in my analysis, namely press releases, illustrates this aspect very well. There are three parties that are affected by this kind of text. First, there is the sender of the message which is a company, organization or institution. Then there are the journalists, who have the power of deciding whether they will use the text, how they will use it and also how they will modify it. The third involved party is constituted by the media consumers, who read the texts that have been created by both, journalists and public relation experts. In this case it is naïve to talk about an oppressor and an oppressed. Although journalists have control over what Van Dijk (2006: 362) calls “scarce social resources“ i.e. they are in the position to decide which news will enter the media and in which form, media producers are not automatically the most powerful group within this triangle of the issuer, the journalist and the reader of the article. The media need this input as much as the public relation sections need the publication in the newspapers. Hence the conceptions of struggle and domination do not adequately describe the relation between the press and public relation sections. It is more a cooperation from which both (or in this case all three) sides profit. The same is true for all kinds of human communication. It is not solely a tool for domination.

Moreover, CDA forgets that even the media consumers have a certain influence on what the text will look like. The audience is more than just an atomized mass of individuals, who consume everything that is given to them. The point I am trying to make here is that journalists are also influenced by their audience. The writing style, for example, is tailored to the need of the consumers. There is a reason why journalistic stylebooks warn you about things such as technical vocabulary, too long and too complex sentences, and so forth. Media recipients can stop reading a particular newspaper. The image CDA has of the average media consumer is one that reflects the outdated stimulus-response paradigm. Nowadays media studies assign a much more active role to the consumers. The idea of omnipotent media has been abandoned since the 1940-ies and the recipient has increasingly received attention (for a more detailed discussion see Bonfadelli 2004). Hence, when CDA representatives like Van Dijk (2006: 362) assert that “journalists [are] manipulating the recipients of media discourse” it becomes clear that the approach has failed to integrate recent research in the field of media studies. Even though Van Dijk

(ibid.) does acknowledge that those who he claims to be the oppressed can manipulate the oppressors, he denies them any kind of power. Instead manipulation is said to be possible “not because of their position of power, but as a form of opposition or dissent”. But as I have demonstrated, media audiences are in fact powerful and their power is considered every time a journalist writes a text. Following the works of Franck (e.g. 1998), they are in possession of the limited resource ‘attention’ and it is the consumers themselves who decide which media and which texts are going to receive their attention. After all, it is the audience that finances most of the media enterprises and their power is increasing with each new competitor that enters the media market. A similar point is made by Sleurs and Jacobs (2005: 1254), when they assert that “in the end it is the general public, the newspaper readers and the TV spectators, who decide on the acceptability of a particular item and in the end may resist this control-taking”. The more rivals a media enterprise has, the more it has to take care of the needs of its customers. It is a common pattern in the work of CDA to disregard inconvenient empirical evidence. In studying the language there is a reluctance to integrate results from areas such as cognitive linguistics and here the very basic findings about the reception of media texts are completely ignored.

#### **4.3.3.3. Analysis or interpretation**

Critical research is fueled by political motivation and its goal is to change society by delivering scientific evidence for manipulation. Hence it would be counterproductive to obtain results that are not in accordance with their convictions. Therefore it is expedient to work mainly by deploying practices of interpretation (which cannot yield contradicting results), while pretending to be carrying out an analysis. In this section I will argue that the ‘A’ in CDA, which stands for analysis, should be replaced with an ‘I’ for interpretation. This argument was already introduced by other researchers such as Jones (2007: 364), who says that “[i]n reality, the ‘method of analysis’ in question is simply a way of cloaking particular interpretative preferences”. But the concern that CDA is not analysis was already expressed before. Widdowson (1995a: 159) points to the importance of keeping analysis and interpretation apart, because even though no research is a hundred percent object, there is a vital difference between these two:

interpretation is a matter of converging on a particular meaning as having some kind of privileged validity. The point about analysis is that it seeks to reveal those factors which lead to a divergence of possible meanings, each conditionally valid. (ibid.)

This means that the analysts should be self-conscious and accept their own partiality, as well as the possible falsity of their assumptions. Therefore the name CDA is in itself contradictory (ibid.). I know of no Critical Linguist or CD analyst who actually rejected his assumption after performing the “analysis”. In other research it is common practice that the hypotheses are rejected if the empirical inquiry does not yield the expected results. Not so in critical linguistics, where the procedures allow you to search as long as is necessary to find affirmative data.

Consequently, the best thing the academic can do is to put forward the multiple possible ways of reading without depicting one as more correct or justified by textual evidence than the other. But this is not the case with critical linguistics. Widdowson (2000b: 22) observes that CDA texts imply that their interpretation is the one which is supported by the ‘textual facts’. The authority is also suggested by a broad theoretical basis. I believe that this high degree of abstraction and complexity helps to establish a special authority of CDA interpretations over others. The high density of technical terms does indeed convey the impression of authority and so helps to cover that in reality it is interpretation that is hiding under the name of analysis. Tyrwhitt-Drake (1999: 1083) sums up the problem in this way:

For some writers, the temptation to work backwards from their conclusion, seeking the evidence that makes it inevitable, rather than forward to it, from objectively examined data, is one they find themselves unable to resist.

Tyrwhitt-Drake (ibid.) then goes on to describe the approach of CDA as “anti-empirical” and “anti-rational”. In a reply to his article, Flowerdew (1999: 1091) accuses Tyrwhitt-Drake of working with positivistic criteria. This, he argues, is not appropriate, since “[p]ragmatics, which underpins all discourse analysis (critical or otherwise), unless it is a dull formalism, is concerned with implicature, not facts”. However, this is not an argument that can defend CDA against the criticism with regard to its openly confessed bias. Just because there is more than one truth, it does not mean that clear and intersubjectively testable analyses ought to be omitted in favor of an impressionistic description.

Accusing others of working with positivistic criteria seems to be a common strategy among CD analysts. Fairclough (2001: 6) rejects the use of methods comparable to those in

natural sciences. This, he claims, can only deliver results about the ‘what’ questions. The ‘why’ and the ‘how’ are disregarded. CD analysts do have a point in arguing that it is necessary to examine questions such as how ideology is transmitted, but the problem is that it is not investigated whether there is ideological manipulation at all. Rather CD analysts assume something (for example that the author of a newspaper wants to convey racist ideology) and then they try to prove it by searching for supportive textual features. Let me illustrate this with a passage in which Fairclough (2003: 202) talks about the guiding questions in CDA: “how do existing societies provide people with the possibilities and resources for rich and fulfilling lives, how on the other hand do they deny people these possibilities and resources?” So here Fairclough does not ask whether these possibilities and resources are denied (nor does he provide any other evidence for this claim), but immediately jumps to the ‘how’-question. So if the conclusion is already reached before the actual collection of empirical data and the question whether it is true or not is not even asked, it is clear that this initial assumption cannot be refuted. Therefore it is indeed a method that “works backwards” by taking its conclusions as the starting point. Here is an argument in defense of the a priori assumptions, given by Flowerdew (1999: 1093): the researcher knows the ideological stance of a certain person, institution etc. because he was exposed to its discourse on a macro level (i.e. outside of the text). However, I do not see how this argument can help. On the contrary: Flowerdew claims that it suffices to get an impression by superficial examination of the macro level and then to try to prove it with evidence from the micro level i.e. the text. This means that rigorous analysis is subordinated to unsystematic and unscientific observation. It also implies that the ‘what’ question should be answered by an unsystematic intuitive evaluation and that the ‘how’ needs to be explained by closer analysis. But this is illogical, since the ‘how’ question is a subordinate one i.e. it is useless if the premise proves to be wrong that a text is representing a certain ideological position. Asking how manipulation works is absurd if it turns out that there is no manipulation. But the problem about the plausibility of the data goes on. According to Flowerdew (1999: 1094) the literature review is a vital element in increasing plausibility. This is, no doubt, true for all areas of research, but the problem with CDA is that the former studies are also flawed by preconceived interpretation. Consequently, you end up legitimizing wrong assumptions by pointing to other wrong assumptions.

So what should a text-based discourse analysis look like? Keeping in mind Widdowson's claim that analysis is characterized by divergence, a number of different plausible interpretations would need to be described, backing up each one of them by linguistic evidence. Moreover, analysis would explain the ways in which different discourses are generated from one text. The opposite is done by CDA. No alternatives are offered. As a matter of fact, the impression is conveyed that the proposed reading is the only one that is supported by the textual analysis (Widdowson 1995a: 169). However, this is not the definition of analysis that Fairclough wants to work with, or rather a definition he can work with: "CDA cannot be analysis on this definition, because this happens not to be what CDA does" (Fairclough 1996: 51). Of course CDA cannot do this, but that is exactly the point. Like all critical research, CDA tries to promote its own readings. Fairclough (ibid.: 51-52) therefore proposes another definition of 'analysis':

It is more normal [note the evaluative language] to define as analysis any reasonably systematic application of reasonably well-defined procedures to a reasonably well-defined body of data. On that count CDA is analysis.

Where in CDA, one might ask, can we find a 'systematic application' of procedures of any kind? As has been and will be demonstrated in this thesis, the work of CD analysts resembles an exercise in cherry-picking. Already the introduction to one of the "well-defined procedures" makes it clear that systematic research is unnecessary in CDA: "the procedure should not be treated as holy writ – it is a guide and not a blueprint" (Fairclough 2001: 92). Fairclough then goes on to declare that many of the proposed features will probably be irrelevant and that it is up to the analyst, which he wants to include and to what extent (ibid.). But even after the practitioner has selected a certain feature to investigate, the procedure is often unsystematic. Here is one example that Widdowson (1996: 65) draws our attention to: In the analysis of a pregnancy booklet Fairclough (1992: 173) highlights terminology that he considers to be "evidently closer to the lifeworld than equivalent ones in *The Baby Book*", such as *make sure* or *going wrong*. This is not done consistently. Words from *The Baby Book* such as *check-up*, which are clearly not part of medico-scientific ethos, are not considered by Fairclough (Widdowson 1996: 65). Here eclecticism takes effect even in the selection of occurrences within one feature. Yet the definition creates even more problems. Besides the fact that Fairclough believes he knows best what is to be considered as 'normal', who is to decide what 'reasonably well-defined' procedures and bodies of data are? Fairclough does not specify them. So the definition is



left to the analyst. However, there is one requirement for CD analysts: transparency. In order for the data to be plausible, the researcher needs to make transparent things such as context, data collection and data selection (Flowerdew 1999: 1094). But as Widdowson (1996) has demonstrated, these issues are often neglected in CDA. In a critical discussion of Fairclough's (1992: Chap. 6) investigation of texts taken from of a pregnancy booklet, Widdowson (1996: 62) notes that the first text is only a fragment. Three extracts are examined and it is not explained why exactly these parts are taken, while others are left out.

Elements that could indicate divergence are ignored and in some cases convergence is enhanced by giving preference to subjective beliefs over linguistic evidence. The following example will illustrate this point. Fairclough (1995a) analyzes a news report on TV, which is about poor people living in the Philippines. His argument is that passivity is assigned to the poor and this time it is not only at the level of syntax, but also on the level of semantics. Fairclough (ibid.: 113) claims that by the description *poor people flock the city*, even though the passive is not used, the semantic association of the word *flock* depicts the poor people as passive, because it is a term that is usually used to refer to sheep. Apart from the unexplained switch that Fairclough makes from syntax to lexis (Widdowson 2000b: 17), his statement turns out to contradict linguistic evidence. Widdowson (ibid.: 18) consulted the British National Corpus and looked at the collocational co-occurrences of these two words. The result was that there was no general connection between *flock* and sheep or any other notion of passivity (this analysis by Fairclough is also discussed in O'Halloran 2003: 69-70). And such intuitive and unsubstantiated interpretations are common practice in CDA. Poole (2010) did a similar thing. In analyzing a BBC report about Libya, Fairclough (2003: 53) claimed that the phrase *hand over something or someone* is used to denote that the person acts under duress. By consulting the British National Corpus Poole (2010: 144) exposed this intuitive commentary to be wrong. And even though we have to be careful when labeling his assertions as 'wrong' – since people might indeed associate the expression with force – it still is backed up by third person data, whereas in Fairclough's CDA we only have a first person impression. So in order to prove that *hand over* evokes the associations Fairclough believes, an ethnographic approach would be necessary. Summing up, we could say that CDA is neither analysis in the sense

of Widdowson (i.e. encouraging divergence), nor in the sense of Fairclough (i.e. a systematic application of procedures).

#### **4.4. The contribution of linguistic resources**

This collage-like process of building CDA is not limited to the sociological influences. The approaches that are included from the field of language study are also only partially integrated. The linguistic crux is Halliday's systemic-functional grammar, but in some instances CL and CDA are closer to formalism than they might want to acknowledge. But before I turn to the debate about formalist and functionalist influence on CDA, I will look at the implications of another central idea from linguistics, one that also fuels functionalism, viz. linguistic relativism, for the incorporation of this theoretical resource leads to fundamental underlying problems with regard to falsification.

##### **4.4.1. Linguistic relativity: The irrefutable premise**

Linguistic relativism or the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a major premise of both CL and CDA, without which critical linguistics would not be possible. Being on the nexus of linguistics and philosophy, this is an idea, which assumes that different languages set forth different categories and consequently influence our way of thinking. This again has an effect on the way people act (Yule 1985: 218). It was named after two researchers with an anthropological background, namely Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir.

That the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis plays a major role in critical linguistics is evident from the frequent references to the work of Whorf (e.g. Fowler 1991: 30). Yet there is a slight modification of the hypothesis in the critical approaches to style: whereas Sapir and Whorf were concerned about different languages, critical linguists argue that different varieties of the same language can have a similar effect (Fairclough 1992: 26). Here it has to be pointed out that the linguistic relativity principle is not one unified approach. As Lakoff (1987: 304) stresses, there is not one form of linguistic relativism, but hundreds of them. Nevertheless, two main positions can be identified, namely its weak form and its radical form, the latter also being known as linguistic determinism. Linguistic determinism assumes that the structure of a language has a total and absolute influence on thought, thus

making the speaker unable to perceive anything that cannot be expressed in his language (Penn 1972: 28-32).<sup>6</sup>

Devastating evidence against linguistic determinism (e.g. Rosch 1973, Berlin and Kay 1969, Malotki 1983) has practically extinguished the extreme form of the hypothesis, but the weak version has still survived and it has found one of its battlegrounds in critical linguistics. Nevertheless, some early writings in CL even suggest closeness to the extreme form of the hypothesis (see Widdowson 1998: 139). In an article called 'Whorf's children', Stubbs (1997: 210) draws an interesting parallel between Whorf and CDA. If really the deterministic view is taken, then both entangle themselves in contradictions by their own work. While Whorf was arguing that, for example, the grammar of Hopi determines the speakers' world-view, he was explaining this world-view in English. The same is true for Wodak (e.g. Wodak/ De Cillia/ Reisigl 1999) when she uses translated texts or concepts for her CD analysis (ibid.).

The extreme view was untenable and critical linguistics therefore turned to the weak form, thereby making it almost impossible to falsify their basic assumption, namely that different ways of encoding experience into language has some effect on our way of thinking and our perception of the world. Again I have to refer to critical rationalism in whose light the weak form of linguistic relativism would not be a valid hypothesis due to the lacking possibility of falsification. And this is another reason for the huge success CL and CDA are having. By telling people that they might be the victims of manipulation and subconsciously forced into submission, critical linguistics appeals to their fear, and since it cannot be proven wrong, suspicion will not end. To disprove this assumption becomes even harder when Fairclough (2003: 8) asserts that texts "also have longer-term causal effects". Due to the infinite number of possible intervening variables that could have triggered a long term change, this claim is not open to scientific testing. People's ways of thinking are constantly modified by various factors. So the major problem is, as Stubbs (1997: 208) detects, that CDA does not really operationalize the question of how language use influences human thought. Which mechanisms are responsible for shaping habitual thought and how often does a language form have to be repeated in order to have an

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<sup>6</sup> The discussion about the various forms of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is even more complex, since it is not clear how radical Whorf was himself. For a more detailed discussion about the topic see Allan (2009) and Robins (1976).

influence? These and other questions are not even addressed. Instead, the relation between thought and language is left unspecified. Additionally, there is reluctance in CDA to include the results of work about the relation between language and cognition (ibid.: 211). This would be crucial, because it would prevent CDA from falling into circularity. It is not possible to see what effects a language feature has on the cognition of a person by only analyzing the language (ibid.: 208). Therefore CDA is not only reluctant to include data about the reception process in its empirical inquiries, but also in the theoretical parts. The analyst's perception of the effects of certain linguistic features stays central and this issue leads us to the next input from linguistics.

#### **4.4.2. The undesired closeness to Chomsky's formalism**

CDA representatives claim to build primarily on Halliday's work (e.g. Fairclough 2001: 11), which belongs to the functional approaches to language. Widdowson (1998: 138) argues that even though formalism and functionalism are two opposing approaches, CDA also bears some resemblance to the formalism represented by Noam Chomsky. Concepts such as transitivity are taken up, yet critical linguistics is not fusing the formalist and the functionalist approach. Rather formalist ideas are pressed into a functional form. Chomsky saw every sentence as having undergone a transformation processes. Critical linguists do not share this view. Here one kind of sentence is changed into another in order to achieve a goal, thus implying that there is a neutral and therefore innocent version of each sentence (ibid.: 140). Two problems are caused by this appropriation of Chomsky's concept. First, the neutrality causes a contradiction to the often declared belief that there is no value-free language use (e.g. Trew 1979: 95). Secondly, we do not know how to tell apart a neutral from a transformed sentence (Widdowson 1998: 140). With regard to falsifiability the second problem is even more serious. Again, the choice is a matter of convenience. If there are no clear guidelines and no clear definitions, it is impossible to find contradicting evidence.

Widdowson (1996: 58) demonstrated yet other aspects of CDA that remind us of formalism. It reduces individuals to their social roles, but to deal with them as "representatives of such tokens of the type, is to deal in stereotypical constructs, well defined social categories" (ibid.). This bears a strong resemblance to the ideal speaker and

listener conception of formal linguists. Moreover, they resemble formalists in that they use themselves as informants (Widdowson 2000b: 19). Formalists claimed to be competent members of their own speech community and therefore capable of providing valid language data, thus eliminating the need to elicit second- or third person data. Similarly, critical linguists regard themselves as representative readers of the analyzed texts. Ergo, they argue to be able to make sense of a text in the way an average reader does, but also to have the privileged position of the analyst. This claim leads to some contradictions, but this will be discussed in more detail in the section ‘about the analyst’s omniscience in CDA.

#### **4.4.3. The core contributor: SFL**

In CDA, the tools for textual analysis have been taken over from its predecessor CL, which has derived them from SFL, as developed by Michael Halliday (e.g. 1978, 1985). Fowler (1996: 5) states that his work “provides the theoretical underpinning for critical linguistics”. Nevertheless, Fairclough (2003: 6) stresses that between CDA and SFL there are differences in the perspective and that their mutual relation can best be described as a “transdisciplinary dialogue”, which again is an indicator that critical linguistics works according to the patchwork principle. Halliday’s extensive work has not been entirely integrated into the critical linguistics toolkit for textual analysis. In the canonical work of Fowler et al. (1979: 8) it is claimed that it suffices to select only a few concepts such as transitivity, but we do not get an explanation why certain concepts are chosen, while others are not. It seems that those are selected that come in handy. Widdowson (1998: 137) puts it the following way:

This would suggest that analysis is not the systematic application of a theoretical model, but a rather less rigorous operation, in effect, a kind of *ad hoc* bricolage which takes from theory whatever concept comes usefully to hand.

The range from which the analyst can select is expanded by taking over tools from other approaches such as the cooperative principle, prototype theory, schema theory and so forth. As I already mentioned, even formalist concepts find their way into critical linguistics as long as they can be transformed to fit the purpose (Widdowson 2004: 97).

One of the innovative elements functional approaches to language have is a very pronounced social perspective (Halliday 1994: v). If we take Saussure’s ‘langue’ and

'parole' distinction, the innovation of functionalism is that it does not only account for the abstract 'langue'. It was not psychology that was seen as determining the system of a language, but rather social interaction. Moreover, functionalism starts off from the premise that semantic meaning and grammar are not two independent systems (Halliday 1994: xix). For structuralists the signs were defined as arbitrary, which means that there is no rational reason for the combination of a signifier to a signified. "As against this, critical approaches to discourse analysis make the assumption that signs are socially motivated" (Fairclough 1992: 74-75). But Fairclough misunderstands Saussure's distinction. He never argued that the use of a sign is marked by arbitrariness, only the relation of the sign's shape to the concept it refers to (Widdowson 1995b: 514). But the important thing for my discussion here is the basic assumption in SFL that language fulfills multiple functions. In CDA texts are therefore seen as "simultaneously representing reality, enacting social relations, and establishing identities" (Fairclough 1992: 9), like it is being done in the 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' functions that are described by Halliday. The ideational function has the purpose of representing entities in the world, such as events, people or objects. The interpersonal function serves for the speaker to convey his attitude to what is expressed in the ideational function. Both of these macro-functions then are combined in the textual function, which as Halliday (1994: xiii) says "breathes relevance into the other two". Thus, without a realization as text, the first two metafunctions are insignificant. Each of these metafunctions is realized in different grammatical organizing principles. The ideational function corresponds to the system of transitivity. This includes transformations, which belong to the most prominent tools that have been adopted from Halliday's SFL. According to Halliday (1985: 101) the "goings-on are sorted out in the semantic system of the language and expressed through the grammar of the clause". The interpersonal metafunction is expressed by the mood system, while the textual function centers on thematization i.e. on the split of the clause into the functional components 'theme' and 'rheme'. All three of these functions are realized within the clause. Hence SFL's focus on the clause (Fairclough 1992: 76).

Fairclough (1992) builds his model on this tri-partite semantic structure of language, but he adds some modifications to the model proposed by Halliday. Discourse has three forms of "constructive effect": the first is the construction of the social identity of oneself, the second constructs the way people relate socially to each other and the third concerns

constructing “systems of knowledge and belief” (Fairclough 1992: 64). Halliday’s, as well as Fairclough’s model incorporate the ideational function. However, the interpersonal function is split by Fairclough into two, namely the interpersonal function and identity function. Therefore Fairclough’s scheme misses the textual function. He does not regard it as a constitutive function of discourse, but rather as something that can be added to his three functions (ibid.: 65). Why Fairclough conducts these modifications and to what consequence this leads is not specified (Widdowson 2004: 90), but it is symptomatic of the inability to apply a concept consistently.

In the following I will not present the toolkit for the linguistic analysis that is derived from SFL, for such discussions exist in abundance. Instead, I will concentrate on the shortcomings that result from the incorporation of SFL. Subsequently, in order to illustrate the deficit in systematicity concerning textual analysis I will discuss one tool that was taken over from Transformational Grammar and pressed into functional form in more detail, namely transformations,.

#### **4.4.4. SFL generated problems**

Taking SFL as the linguistic base causes a number of problems for CDA. A major issue is shared with stylistics: Fish (1981: 59-64) has made one of the most prominent points against SFL methodology of text analysis in stylistics while commenting on Halliday’s famous essay, where he interprets William Golding’s *The Inheritors* (1971), a work that has brought systemic-functional grammar into stylistics. Fish accuses Halliday’s methods of something that Simpson (1993: 111) later labeled “interpretative positivism”. Fish (1981: 103) argues that Halliday only makes use of linguistic description to support his already existing beliefs. Via interpretation he has already made up his mind before actually collecting the data. Therefore the SFL-based text analysis is not used to generate new knowledge, but only as a tool that serves to convince as many people as possible that the analyst’s preconceived interpretation is right. Simpson (ibid.: 114) argues that the same “interpretative leaps” can be found when critical analysts are dealing with non-fictional texts. In this case the linguistic analysis does not serve to discover new things, but only functions as a support to what the analyst already believes. Thus the linguistic analysis is degraded to a tool that is used in addition to the political reading of a text (ibid.). Hence,

the only thing that is revealed by the analysis is actually the intention of the analyst (Widdowson 1995a: 169). Sharrock and Anderson (1981: 289) cut right to the heart of the matter by claiming that the procedure “is to look in the wrong place for something, then complain that they can’t find it, and suggest that it is being concealed from them”. So the problem that in CDA interpretation is disguised as analysis reflects the problems of SFL.

To build on SFL brings the advantage that it becomes possible to talk about language on a generalized level, but in the end the question remains whether SFL can contribute to the procedure to yield new insights. The answer amounts to an objection that Fish (1981: 101) has made about its value for stylistics. The text is taken apart, the constituents are labeled and in the end they are put together as they were before the analysis. “The procedure is a complicated one, and it requires a great many operations, but the critic who performs them has finally done nothing at all” (ibid.). Hallidayan grammar cannot tell us about the meaning that a reader will generate from a syntactic structure or a lexical choice. Categories and terms such as ‘transitive verbs’, ‘nominalization’ or ‘passivization’ have no connection to “anything outside their circle except by an arbitrary act of assertion” (ibid.: 100). This does not mean that SFL is useless per se, just that it is a grammar, and it is not the task of a grammar to make statements about the pragmatic realization (O’Halloran 2003: 260). Yet CDA practitioners act as if they do not bear this in mind.

#### **4.4.4.1. The functional fallacy**

The term “functional fallacy” was coined by Widdowson (1998: 139; 2004: 96) and denotes the wrong idea that there is a direct and simple link between semantic meanings of linguistic form and their pragmatic significance. In their analyses CDA practitioners proceed as if the discourse is in the text, but they forget that discourse is always the “function of the relationship between text, context and pretext” (Widdowson 2004: 166). Critical linguistics has inherited this fallacy from SFL. Halliday (1994: xv) explains that the analysis he proposes is to be carried out on two levels, namely the level of ‘understanding’ and the level of ‘evaluation’. Concerning the first Halliday (ibid.) writes the following: “the linguistic analysis enables one to show how, and why, the text means what it does”. This is a classic example of the functional fallacy, because in this passage it is implied that meaning is inherent in the text itself. Therefore it becomes unnecessary to



consult informants to see which discourses arise, since grammatical analysis can deliver that information. In the defense of Halliday it has to be said that the level of evaluation, which he regards as the higher level of analysis, denotes the step of setting the text in relation to the context, which corresponds to Fairclough's discursive practice. At this second stage we could say that Halliday talks about actual discourse, not text. Nevertheless, Widdowson (2004: 19) regards this dichotomy as problematic due to the isolation of the linguistic code from the context on the first level of analysis. In everyday processing people do not segregate these two when assigning meaning to a text.

This fallacy is a very serious flaw of critical approaches to style, because it cannot even be remedied by the inclusion of more quantitative work. Stubbs (e.g. 1994, 1996) is one of the few critical linguists that work with corpora and therefore it seems he could claim a higher reliability for his findings. However, due to the problematic of the functional fallacy, the validity of the enterprise is highly questionable. All that one can do with a corpus is to investigate how often a certain grammatical feature occurs within a text. On the one hand this kind of work helps to reduce the amount of arbitrariness, but on the other it creates two new or partly new problems. First, it excludes the linguistic co-text, which is the feature's context within the text. In other words, a corpus analysis can only measure the frequency of a form. The problem is to set the forms in relation to the other forms and explain how they co-operate. A corpus can do this, but only up to a certain point. The second problem of corpus linguistics in CDA (and in general) also has to deal with isolation, but this time the textual level is isolated from its context, meaning the extra-textual surrounding (Widdowson 2004: 120). It is a shortcoming that also dates back to SFL and that has never been overcome, namely that the focus still rests on the clause. This can be explained by the fact that the clause is the place where these three metafunctions of language appear in combination (Fairclough 1992: 76).

However, these shortcomings of SFL do not mean that corpus linguistics cannot be used as an aid for analyzing discourse. It is in fact necessary to relate the ascribed pragmatic meaning to the inscribed semantic meaning. As has been demonstrated, meaning cannot be read off from the textual features. Hence the question should concern the realization of potential. Widdowson (2004: 97) sees it the following way:

One might approach this question by the thorough and systematic application of the S/F model to the analysis of texts, seeking to show how semantically

inscribed meanings get realized – extended, modified, nullified even – in pragmatic ascriptions.

In this passage Widdowson points to a major problem in CDA that I have touched upon a few times in this thesis, namely the extreme selectivity of critical linguistics. This does not only apply to the application of SFL.

With regard to the functional fallacy CDA again does not fail to understand this difference in theory, only in practice. Its practitioners are aware of the fact that meaning is not intrinsic in the linguistic form. Here is a passage in which Fairclough (1992: 28) criticizes the predecessor CL:

But texts may be open to different interpretations depending on the context of the interpreter, which means that social meanings (including ideologies) of discourse cannot simply be read off from the text without considering patterns and variations in the social distribution, consumption and interaction of the text.

Nevertheless, what CDA practitioners claim to be doing and what they are actually doing, are often two different things. Widdowson's (1996) critique on an analysis performed by Fairclough (1992) is a helpful exemplification of this discrepancy: in Fairclough's analysis of extracts from *The Baby Book* and *The Pregnancy Book* (medical texts that are aimed at future mothers), Widdowson (1996: 62) notes, the only method of arriving at discourse significance is by Fairclough's interpretation of the textual features. Neither the production, nor the consumption processes are considered, which could, for example, have been done by contacting the authors and readers (i.e. pregnant women). Instead, the analysts seems to believe that he knows best how the readers make sense of the booklet. With regard to such analytic procedures Boyd-Barrett (1994: 31) talks about the "classical fallacy", which means that readings are attributed to the readers without consulting them. In the example of *The Baby Book* and *The Pregnancy Book*, the absurdity of the claim is extremely evident. In a newspaper article the claim to be a representative reader could somehow be justified, albeit this would also bear problems. In the case of the pre-natal booklets, however, we can be absolutely certain that Fairclough is not a representative reader. But sometimes even in the theoretical discussions CD analysts imply that pragmatic meaning is located within the text. In his argumentation Flowerdew (1999: 1090-1093) admits that texts are open to multiple readings and then he continues his argumentation as if the opposite was true. Later (ibid.: 1094) he maintains that "[i]f one is to accept multiple

readings, that is not to say that one should accept or assign equal value to them all”. This statement implies that although different readings are possible, some are more ‘right’ than others.

Hammersley (1997: 245) delivers a sound explanation for this inability to remedy the functional fallacy: “[o]verambition also encourages the presentation of what can only be speculations as if they were well-grounded knowledge”. He argues further that the pressure that is put on the researchers becomes institutionalized. It is not enough to describe discourse, but to produce findings that can help to improve social reality. As a result, scientists often are forced to an over-interpretation of the material (ibid.). Critical linguistics always regards the ‘micro’ structures to be connected to ‘macro’ structures. As a result, it does not suffice for them to look at the language for the language’s sake (Fairclough 2001: 9). The analyzed textual features always have to be related to the societal level and if they are not, the research is considered to be irrelevant. Consequently, CDA practitioners often find themselves in the need of overinterpreting their data. In this interpretation process one essential party is forgotten: the reader.

#### **4.4.4.2. The neglected reader**

The critical linguist considers himself to be the expert and therefore he can detect the hidden meaning of the text. This implies that ideology is in the text and hence the role of the reader in meaning construction is denied. By relying solely on first person intuition with regard to what effect linguistic forms have, it becomes unnecessary to consult other people. This of course makes the risk of falsification vanish, since you cannot prove wrong the subjective feeling of the analyst if the approach does not allow for ethnographic evidence. Another explanation for this reluctance to grant the people such a significant role in meaning-making could be found in a reason that Fish (1981: 105) gives for stylistics: it is “the fear of being left alone with the self-renewing and unquantifiable power of human signifying”. But these are problems that other areas, such as those about language cognition, have to deal with as well. The integration of their results could help, but as O’Halloran (2003: 2) points out, the concepts about the cognition and interpretation of readers in critical linguistics have not been developed since the 1970-ies i.e. since the foundations of CL. Hence, CDA is not as different to CL as CDA practitioners present it to

be, at least not from the linguistic perspective. Weight was given to interdisciplinary work (primarily from sociocultural studies), which resulted in giving more attention to the explanation phase than the interpretation phase. Instead of being concerned about the way readers make sense of a text, they simply assume a particular way of text consumption and focus more on the connection between the interpretation and the wider social and cultural context (ibid.). But CDA practitioners forget that different people derive different discourses from a text, because not everybody shares the same reality. To speak with Widdowson (1995a: 169): “[w]hat is actually revealed is the particular discourse perspective of the interpreter”. This is a problem, since the analysts are often not even members of the discourse communities that a particular text is aimed at (Widdowson 1996: 62), as we have seen in the example of Fairclough’s analysis pre-natal booklets.

I will now present another example that illustrates how CD analysts mask their own reading as the reading of the average reader. Flowerdew (1997) analyzed a televised meeting where the people of Hong Kong had the chance of asking questions of the governor Chris Patten. In a later article (1999) Flowerdew tried to explain and defend the procedures of CDA. One of his arguments was that Patten ridiculed Deng Xiaoping, the former Chinese leader, by referring to him as the *Chairman of the All-China Bridge Federation*. After admitting that the implicature he describes is not that clear in this context, Flowerdew (1999: 1092) says the following:

Based on my extensive study of Patten’s use of language and its political context, it seems to me that this was a way of mildly ridiculing Deng and perhaps suggesting that he was no longer relevant as a representative of the Chinese government.

Even though Flowerdew acknowledges that his interpretation is the result of “extensive study”, it does not occur to him that the average viewer of this televised meeting does not have this background knowledge and the average viewer’s perception of Patten’s statement is different than the one of the critical discourse analyst. Even if Flowerdew is right about Patten’s intention to ridicule Deng, this does not mean that it has such an effect on the recipients. It is as Widdowson (1995a: 164) says: “what a writer means *by* a text is not the same as what a text means *to* a reader [his emphasis]”. Discourse is a form of meaning negotiation (Widdowson 1995a: 164; 2004: 8), and therefore it is insufficient if the communicator intends something, but the receiver does not cooperate.

Here is another example of CDA's analyst-centeredness: Fairclough (1992: 85) claims that intertextuality has an impact on the interpretation of a text. He then goes on to claim that this intertextuality is not only about the texts that constitute the analyzed text, but also those texts that each individual interpreter brings to the reading process. That is of course true, but it only demonstrates that it cannot be assumed that the readers will read the text the same way as the critical analyst, because their background knowledge is completely different. Yet, there are hardly any attempts by CD analysts to examine this background, but rather it is simply assigned to them by the analyst. And often the background is not even assigned to them, but the background of the analyst is taken instead, as was the case in Flowerdew's analysis.

As should be clear by now, a reader can have different ways of reading a text. Here it has to be added that even a lay-reader can be a critical reader, so the question is what distinguishes a suspicious reader from the trained CD analyst, who claims to have the authority of science on his side. According to O'Halloran (2003: 34), the difference should be systematicity. I would add a second distinctive feature, namely the limitation to those statements that are testable. Of course, systematicity and testability are interrelated, because a systematic procedure is more rigorous and the assumptions that are made are therefore more prone to testing. But, as has been demonstrated here, the procedure is not systematic at all and therefore shuts itself off from critique, thus confirming Widdowson's claim that we are not dealing with analysis, but with interpretation, since what the linguistic expert does is by no means different to what the non-trained reader does when he takes a suspicious stance towards a text.

#### **4.4.4.3. Selectivity in the analysis: The example of transformations**

So far I have been trying to demonstrate that the practices of CDA can be compared to a patchwork in which you chose whatever comes in handy, but this inevitably leads to a number of other problems besides the impossibility of falsification. In the course of section 3. I tried to illustrate how this works on the level of theory. By establishing a broad theoretical basis and picking out those elements that are convenient to the argumentation, an impressionistic, but influential approach could be generated. Now I will show how the same is done on the level of the linguistic analysis. A closer look at transformations will

serve to exemplify how this cherry-picking process functions on the level of application, but before a short remark needs to be made about the step before the analysis, namely the choice of the material.

In the analysis the eclecticism begins with the choice of the texts to be analyzed. There are no clear guidelines as to how you get to your sample, let alone procedures such as randomized sampling. Thus, only texts are selected on which the methodology might be used effectively. Moreover, only some discourse types are chosen, namely those that CDA analysts want to be critical of, such as those associated with neo-liberalism or globalization. Therefore CDA is not truly critical, because this would presuppose the examination of all kinds of texts, including, for example, socialist texts (Poole 2010: 152).

Transformations are a major point of focus in the critical approaches to style. As already noted in section 4.3.3., the concept is taken over from Chomsky, but then it was modified. Critical linguists see them as “operations on basic forms, deleting, substituting, combining or reordering a syntagm or its elements” (Kress/ Hodge 1979: 9). Their function is described as “distortion *and mystification, through the characteristic disjunction between surface form and implicit meanings* [emphasis in the original]” (ibid: 35). The two transformation types that critical linguists devote most of their attention to are ‘passivization’ and ‘nominalization’. The former means the generation of a new syntactic structure by using the passive voice. But passivity can also occur more perfidiously, as in so called passive adjectives. *Mobile in capital is mobile* is said to be a deceitful version of *companies and governments are moving capital*. Furthermore, passivity may also be encoded in passive verbs like *can be made* (Fairclough 2003: 13). Nominalizations on the other hand describe the process of reducing an entire clause to a verb, followed by a transformation into a noun (Fowler/ Kress 1979a: 39). Fairclough labels nominalizations “metaphorical” representations. The counterpart are “congruent” or “non-metaphorical” representations (ibid.: 143). So the expression *destruction* is a grammatical metaphor for the non-metaphorical representation *people destroy things*<sup>7</sup>. Transformations are regarded with skepticism since they are seen as tools for transmitting ideology.

One such ideologically invested consequence of both, passivization and nominalization, is that distancing occurs. But there is a problem at this point, namely that critical linguists fail

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the terms ‘metaphor’ and ‘congruency’ imply that a language form can be closer to reality than another.

to differentiate between the distancing effect on the ideational and on the interpersonal level. Interpersonal distance indicates how close the reader is to the author. Hence, this includes things such as formality and intimacy. The ideational distance, on the other hand, stands for the relationship between the event and the reader's perception of it. The problematic issue is that these two kinds of distancing do not have to occur every time. If the agent, for example, is absent in the text, but present in the discourse of the reader, then transformations do not automatically trigger ideational distancing.

The probably best studied consequence of transformations is agent deletion. Passivization, as well as nominalization, provides the author with the opportunity of talking or writing about a process without naming the responsible entity or at least placing it in a less prominent position. One well-known example is Trew's (1979) analysis of an article about the police shooting rioting blacks in *The Times*. He illustrates the effect of the passive with two newspaper headlines about the same event, namely *Rioting blacks shot dead by police as ANC leaders meet* and *Police shoot 11 dead in Salisbury riot*. His argument is that by using the passive, the agent is obfuscated in the first example. Ergo, the second depiction is said to show more sympathy with the black rioters than the first one. Nominalizations are used to make processes appear as if they were entities, thus leaving the agent unsaid. If an author uses the expression *due to the change in distribution* it is not mentioned who is changing it. This nominalization can be said to do even more than just to disguise the agent. In this example the change in the world is depicted as a thing happening all by itself. Consequently, the agent is not only obfuscated, but it is suggested that there is no agent at all (Fairclough 2003: 12-13).

The problematic thing with agent deletion, like with the most part of CDA research, is to know in which cases it is used strategically and in which cases the author was simply trying to avoid the violation of the Gricean maxim of quantity. In many cases it is absurd to talk about the obfuscation of the agent, namely when it can be inferred from the context or the linguistic co-text. But critical linguists have an explanation for that as well. In the above mentioned analysis, Trew (1979: 98-99) argues that even though the agent can be inferred, this forced inference leads to an alienation of the agent and the process. Moreover, he makes a claim that can be found in much writing of critical linguistics, namely that if the agent is not mentioned and the reader has to find it out by processes of inference, then this is regarded as a weaker form of the representation of an action or event.

In this case the agency is considered to be backgrounded. Nevertheless, this assumed effect seems to be a matter of convenience. Consider the following analysis, where Fairclough (2001: 44-45) comments on a newspaper article that describes the wife of an army-member:

Notice that at no point here (or in the rest of the article) is Jenny Keeble explicitly *said* to be a ‘good wife’, or an admirable person; the process depends entirely on an ‘ideal reader’s’ capacity to *infer* that from the list of attributes – she expresses confidence in her husband’s professional abilities, she is concerned for his safety, she ‘prays’ he has ‘done enough’, she tries to ‘maintain an air of normality for the children’s sake’. [his emphasis]

Here Fairclough’s argumentation is the complete opposite of Trew’s. Precisely because certain things are unsaid, they are claimed to be ideologically significant. The stereotypes are only enforced, because of the inference work that needs to be done by the reader. The effects of inference processes he depicts in this passage are antithetical to those that are usually assumed when the use of the passive is criticized.

Additionally, nominalizations have the effect of reification and therefore can act as an agent themselves (Fowler 1991: 80). This means that the transformation does not occur in the terms of grammatical categories exclusively. A process can thus not only be moved to the position of a noun, but it can also become the agent of another process. But at this point Billig (2008: 787-788) stresses another weakness concerning the analysis of nominalizations: no clear definition is provided that could serve as a basis for a proper analysis. According to him, there are five different kinds of nominalizations: linguistic, etymological, psychological, between-text and within-text nominalizations (ibid.). Neither in CL, nor in CDA a clear distinction is made between these five types. For everybody engaging in conducting a CD analysis this brings up methodological questions such as how to treat etymological nominalizations. These are nominalizations that came into existence when a verb has been turned into a noun a long time ago, and nowadays is already “a standard lexical item in the language” (ibid.: 787). Is it still a noteworthy transformation, or can it be disregarded? In other words: what is considered to be a nominalization depends solely on the analyst. Consequently, the analyst can choose those instances that fit his pretext and disregard those that do not. This poses another threat to the reliability of a CD analysis, because due to the absence of clear definitions and rigorous procedures, different



researchers will arrive at different results and these will reveal more about their pretext than they do about the examined text.

Nominalizations are yet said to have another effect that should be under scrutiny. Turning processes into nouns grants the author the possibility of omitting modality. Therefore it is not necessary to choose, for example, between *is*, *may be* or *should be*. The same is true for tense. The distinction between *was destroyed*, *is destroyed* and *will be destroyed* becomes obsolete (Fairclough 2003: 143). The problem is once more to determine whether it is used strategically or not, because in many nominalizations these things are clear to the reader. Consider this sentence: *Destruction of small businesses will be the consequence of this piece of legislation*. It could hardly be claimed that here the tense is being obfuscated. In other cases modality does not become clear from the co-text, but from the context. In this case it is extremely difficult to determine whether it is used for reasons of mystification or not.

It is hardly imaginable to use language without any nominalization or passivization. Even critical linguists do so in their works. Consider the following passage where Fowler and Kress (1979b: 207) talk about the effects of nominalizations: “It attenuates any feeling of activity in the language. [...] It makes for ‘impersonality’ in style; this is an effect of the deletions of participants [...]” They use the nominalization *feeling*, which could be replaced by *somebody feels activity in the language* i.e. the actor is left unspecified at this point. The same is true for *deletion*, which again leaves out who is deleting the participants. Of course this is only one illustrative example, but it is in no way an exception. Billig (2008: 788-789) shows a pattern. He demonstrates how critical linguists from Fowler to Fairclough make use of a number of nominalizations in the very same act of criticizing them as being a tool for the transmission of ideology. Here is Fairclough (1992: 27): “nominalization is the conversion of a clause into a nominal or noun”. If we take the stance of a CD analyst we might ask why he uses *conversion* and not *is converted*. Note also that the term nominalization is itself derived from a transformation process (Billig 2008: 790). The same kind of contradiction occurs when Fairclough (1992: 27) says about passivization that “it may be associated with ideologically significant features of texts such as the systematic mystification of agency”. He himself does away with the agent when he uses the passive form in *it may be associated*. Who is the agent in this case? Is it CD analysts? Or Fairclough? And does Fairclough have any ideological reasons to hide the

agent? Is he trying to obfuscate his hegemonic power in the field, since it is him assuming what effects passivization has? Of course these are unsubstantiated claims that only can arise due to the existence of a certain pretext and are not encoded in the text, but it is exactly such questions and such speculations that fuel each CD analysis.

Now the question arises as to what consequences apparently hypocritical passages have for the arguments of CDA. Here is a possible argumentation that Billig (2008: 796) sketches: critical linguists claim that nominalizations mystify and misrepresent reality. But since they also use this device, their claim is invalid itself. Eventually, Billig informs us that he does not support this line of argumentation and neither do I. Instead I suggest two things. First, CDA practitioners need to become more self-reflexive. They need to acknowledge that there is no neutral language, which of course poses a massive problem, since they believe that there are more and less ideologically charged language forms. Even though CD analysts claim that they can see past ideology, they need to acknowledge that they are themselves influenced by other conventions (such as those of academic writing, which simply presupposes a large number of transformations). The second thing that needs to be done is what I am arguing throughout this entire paper, namely that it is necessary to clarify and standardize the procedures of analysis and to provide definitions that help researchers. It is not sufficient to define nominalizations only as “turning verbs into nouns” (Hodge/ Fowler 1979: 14). This is not a definition researchers can work with. They need to operationalize the term, so that replicable procedures of analysis become possible. The problems that were discussed in this section are symptomatic for the entire critical linguistics movement. It is exactly this non-existing systematicity and rigor that makes the patchwork principle possible in the first place.

## **5. Further contradictions within the approach**

Due to the limited space, in section 4. I discussed only the most significant theoretical contributions to CDA. There are many more theories and approaches that could have been listed. Despite the inclusion of so many approaches it is also revealing to pose the question which kind of (linguistic) research was ignored by CDA. Hardly any reference is made to achievements by American linguistics, linguistic anthropology or any critical engagement in other areas of linguistics such as sociolinguistics or language in general (Blommaert/Bulcaen 2000: 456). It is not surprising that work from these areas did not find its way into CDA. Fairclough (2001: 6) himself berates linguistic branches such as sociolinguistics as being too positivistic. This is one of the indicators that rigorous and systematic approaches tend to be disregarded in CDA. It is illustrative of the rejection of systematicity. But with such working procedures the entanglement in contradictions is inevitable.

The major contradiction that CDA has to struggle with is between what its practitioners preach and what they practice. Frequently one thing is suggested in the theoretical discussion, while something else is done in the actual application of the suggested procedures. The most striking example of this phenomenon is the significance that is assigned to the textual dimension, in spite of the constant claim that practices of consumption and production need to be examined as well. CDA representatives do not tire of stressing that meaning cannot be read off from texts and yet it is exactly what they are doing, as was, for instance, shown by Widdowson (1996: 62). This shortcoming is even acknowledged by some CD analysts themselves, such as Stubbs (1997: 208), who admits that CDA does not manage to provide what it promises. This discrepancy has already been illustrated throughout this thesis, the probably most striking example therefore being Fairclough's (1992) analysis of an extract from *The Baby Book*. Since this aspect has already been discussed, I will turn to two other fundamental discrepancies in the following. The first concerns the position of the analyst, and the second the position of CDA.

### **5.1. The omniscient analyst**

Fairclough (1996: 49-50) differentiates between two kinds of interpretation. First, there is the interpretation process that occurs when an average reader derives meaning from a text (written, as well as spoken), which is labeled 'Interpretation-1'. The analyst is considered

to be involved into this process as well. However, he also has exclusive access to another form of interpretation, viz. 'Interpreation-2' (which can also be referred to as 'explanation'). Interpretation-2 is concerned with how interpretation-1 relates to textual features. CDA favors interpretation-2 due to its focus on the issue of ideology. But the problematic assumption is that CD analysts regard themselves as having access to both interpretation processes. It is contradictory, because you can either be an informant and know what effect this has, but not seeing the ideological implications, or you can detect the ideology, in which case you cannot know what the reader's interpretation process looks like. Therefore it is not possible to make interpretation-1 and interpretation-2 at the same time (Widdowson 1996: 60). What Fairclough does instead is to disguise his interpretation-1 as interpretation-2. But apparently the analyst can do more than that. Not only does he slide into the role of the reader, but also into the role of the text producer (ibid.: 63). This, however, is an impossible task, since the analysts themselves are embedded in a discourse that is socially determined. Hence the best they can offer is an interpretation grounded in their views. This leads us to the paradox situation that the CDA enterprise only works by denying its cardinal convictions, since the analysts did not grow up in a contextless vacuum i.e. they were influenced by their surroundings as well (Widdowson 1998: 148). Of course, there would be the possibility of consulting the readers themselves, but this is not done by CD analysts since ideological control is seen to work subliminally and across long time spans. Since it is impossible to know whether the assumed textual bias is indeed realized in the discourse of an individual, O'Halloran (2003: 20) proposes that CDA should rather be called "*critical text analysis*", and since it is not discourse but text that is examined, the analysis takes rather place on the level of description than on the level of interpretation. And indeed the distinction between text and discourse does not seem to be that important in CDA. This is evident in the fact that some CD analysts tend to mix text and discourse not only in their analyses. Stubbs, for example, uses the two terms interchangeably, even in the titles of his books. His 1983 book is labeled *Discourse analysis*, while his 1996 book is called *Text and corpus analysis*, although he is apparently dealing with the same thing (Widdowson 2004: 5).

## **5.2. Hegemony: The result of immunization**

The fact that in the last section, as in the rest of the paper, a relatively small number of critics of CDA were cited indicates that CDA has a dominant status within the interdisciplinary study of discourse. So it can be asserted that they are in the position that they criticize: hegemony. This can be explained by the fact that the discourse of CDA is also not free from ideology. As Simpson (1993: 115) puts it, “writing *about* ideology does not automatically mean release *from* ideology [his italics]”. However, this seems to be a problem that CD analysts are aware of. They explicitly state what their political motivation is. Fairclough (2001: 4), for example, describes himself “as a socialist with a generally low opinion of the social relationships in [his] society and a commitment to the emancipation of the people who are oppressed by them”. Being aware of the paradox that you have to criticize language use via language yourself is certainly a positive thing, but this does not make the problem vanish, especially not if the interpretation is then presented under the label ‘analysis’. As O’Regan (2006: 233) puts it: “[s]elf-reflexivity works only if it includes the admission at the start that one’s situated perspective precludes the possibility of making judgments of truth”. But in order to achieve this, the method has to meet certain criteria that will make your assumptions testable. Otherwise, it implies that it makes judgments of truth.

As I have mentioned earlier, in CDA there is a huge reluctance against those who are supposedly in power. They are always regarded as manipulative and even amoral. Tyrwhitt-Drake (1999: 1084) asks the question whether this also applies to critical linguists, since they too have a leading role within the discourse in their field. The same argument is also put forward by Widdowson (1996: 57), when he asserts that “paradoxically, it [CDA] exerts just the kind of discursive domination which it seeks to expose in other uses of language”. As he notes elsewhere (2004: 173), it is the absence of a methodology that paves the way for this hegemonic processes. If students cannot resort to a replicable form of analysis, then they are not only incapable of carrying out their own analyses, but they are also incapable of assessing already existing work. In short, if scholarly work is not open for criticism, because it does not have clear principles with which it works (or should work), divergence of opinions becomes impossible. As I have been arguing, they do so by including elements from different resources and combining them to a theory or method (or both) that is impossible to falsify. But it is also the

normativity of CDA that enables it to exercise this kind of control. As O'Regan (2006: 232) notices, by normative evaluation "you leave yourself vulnerable to the accusation that what you really desire is the colonization of truth itself". Consequently, all other positions can be right or wrong, with the own perspective serving as the yardstick. O'Regan (ibid.) goes on: "[t]he will to truth is thus a colonizing discourse, it colonises the discursive terrain according to its own perception of truth, based as it is on the apparent obviousness of its own moral correctness". That is also the reason why it becomes possible for CDA to defend itself by interpreting any attack on the approach as an attack on the cause.

CDA representatives deny that their approach has reached a hegemonic status. Flowerdew (1999: 1093-1094) argues that the best proof against the claim of hegemonic control is that authors such as Widdowson or Tyrwhitt-Drake are publishing works that challenge this approach. But this is rather a weak argument, because it contradicts CDA's assumption of struggle over hegemonic control. The existence of resistance does not automatically indicate that there is no hegemony. This situation is jeopardizing scientific progress. If there are no competing approaches, or if these competing approaches are insignificant, the principle of mutual skepticism fails.

## **6. Results determined by the pretext: The case of press releases**

In this part I will present a case study that I have undertaken to demonstrate that with CDA-methodology a scientist can prove any preconceived speculation that fits his personal pretext. According to Fairclough (1992: 232), when you are doing a CD analysis, “[t]he main way of justifying an interpretation is through text analysis, by showing that your interpretation is compatible with the features of the text”. With regard to this, I will show that the analyst is not reading meaning ‘off’ a text, but reading meaning ‘into’ the text. Hence, it becomes possible to interpret the text in any desired way. The analysis of text then only serves to prove what the researcher believes to know even before the actual analysis. In order to demonstrate this, I will try to show that it is even possible to prove what is obviously wrong, namely that a press release is more supporting of the opponent in a controversy than of the issuer itself. This means that for the sake of illustration I will adopt a pretext that is unusual.

First of all, I will briefly discuss why press releases are the ideal subject of study in this undertaking. Mass media discourse is an area that has ever since attracted critical linguists. Apart from the huge audience they find it particularly interesting because compared to face to face communication, media such as TV, newspapers or radio display “*hidden* relations of power [emphasis in the original]” (Fairclough 2001: 41) i.e. is not always clear who is enacting the power relations and how it is being enacted. The entire media discourse has an important distinguishing characteristic as compared to face-to-face situations, namely that there is a spatial or temporal or spatio-temporal distance between text production and text-consumption (Santander 2009: 191). Press releases continue to be an essential component in the news-making process, despite the changed working routines of journalists and despite the rise of the internet (Jacobs/ Sleurs 2005: 1253). There are many different terms for press releases, such as ‘press statement’ or ‘news release’. They have come to mean approximately the same, I will use them interchangeably.

The primary reason why press releases were chosen is that they can be assumed to have a clear and strong ideological bias. “It should not be too difficult to show that advertising is in broad terms more heavily invested than the physical sciences”, says Fairclough (1992: 91). This implies that certain text genres are more prone to be carrying ideology than others. In the press release genre overt praising of the company or organization has to be

avoided and yet it is crucial for those texts to be persuasive and to position their company or organization or their opponents in a certain way, since press releases, like advertisements, belong to the category of persuasive communication. Consequently, the persuasive element has to be more subtle i.e. the ideology of a certain company must be encoded on the linguistic level. Since critical approaches to style believe that ideology can be coded into the linguistic form, press releases are a genre that can be assumed to have plenty of ideology and it is also clear which position they represent. That is why I, additionally to the genre, chose press releases about a topic with two clearly opposing sides. The sample texts are about tobacco companies seeking a judicial review about a governmental ban on the display of tobacco products in shops. On one side there is the British Government, who wants to push through a piece of legislation and is supported by a number of allies such as health organizations, and on the other hand there is the alliance of those who do not want to see the ban implemented. The latter group includes tobacco companies, retailers and so forth.

### **6.1. Analysis based on Fairclough's three dimensional model**

As far as the methodology is concerned, I am starting out with Fairclough's prominent three-dimensional model (e.g. 1992: 62-96, 2001: 21)<sup>8</sup>, where he identifies three foci of analysis. Therefore the traditional text analysis (that has been taken over from Critical Linguistics) is supplemented by an examination of the discursive practice and discourse as social practice. A closer description of these levels will follow below. On the basis of this model three stages of CDA are developed. The first stage is the "description" of text, followed by the "interpretation" of the relationship of the text to interaction (which is discourse practice). Finally, the relationship of interaction and context (which is the sociocultural practice) is worked out by "explanation" (Fairclough 2001: 21-22).

The steps of the procedure are not as clear cut as the subsequent sections and the graphic three-dimensional model might suggest. Here is Fairclough's (1992: 231) description of the procedure:

Notice that it involves a progression from interpretation to description and back to interpretation: from interpretation of the discourse practice (processes of text production and consumption), to description of the text, to interpretation of

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<sup>8</sup> See also section 2.2. of this thesis for a graphic depiction of the model



both of these in the light of the social practice in which the discourse is embedded.

Nevertheless, I start out with the tripartition in different sections and each of these will focus on the respective dimension of discourse. Yet each of the three sections will also refer to the level's relationship to the other two dimensions. There is however one difference to real CDA analyses based on the fact that this is a quasi-analysis, namely on the level of the sociocultural practice. At this stage it is usually claimed that there is a dominant ideology, which is responsible for the text being manipulative. Since I read press releases from two opposing sides of a controversy against their grain, I would have to claim at the same time that a pro-smoking and an anti-smoking ideology are in a hegemonic position, which is impossible. So it is superfluous to look at the sociocultural context and therefore I will limit this section to a description of that stage.

There is no fixed order in which the three dimensions have to be examined, as long as in the end they "are shown to be mutually explanatory" (Janks 1999: 49). I have decided to begin with the social practices, since in the textual analysis I will refer to the production, reception and distribution of press releases. Hence it is necessary to introduce the major concepts first.

### **6.1.1. The analysis of the discourse practice**

There are three main questions that need to be asked about the discourse questions (e.g. Fairclough 1992: 71):

- What is the context of production?
- How is the text consumed?
- How is the text distributed?

With the texts of this case study it is not possible to reconstruct the answers to these questions for each text individually, but here it makes sense to look at these issues with regard to the genre of press releases, since there are general characteristics that are relevant to all of the releases. The subsequent section about production is primarily built on considerations about public relations professionals' concern to imitate the journalistic writing style, whereas the section about the reception of press releases will mainly be concerned with the multiple readership of press releases.

#### **6.1.1.1. The production of press releases**

In the media discourse the issue of production is often more complex than it seems. Authorship, even though it may be explicitly indicated, is not always that clear. Fairclough (1992: 78) illustrates this with the journalistic writing process, an illustration that may be applied to press releases as well. He takes over Goffman's distinction between the "animator", the "author" and the "principal". The animator is the person making the marks on the paper or pressing the keys of a computer. The author is the one who is in charge of the wording. The principal is the actor whose position is represented in a text. Frequently, in media discourse these three positions might not apply to one single person; sometimes the principal is not even part of the medium. In the case of press releases it is easier to determine the principal, since this text type does not have objectivity or balanced reporting as the primary goal. But the animators and authors are even less straightforward than in newspaper articles. Sleurs and Jacobs (2005) conducted a detailed investigation of the production process of press releases from an ethnographic perspective and gave a valuable insight into the process of press release production. Even though this was not a quantitative analysis, it is a perfect illustration of how complex and multi-layered the writing process is. In one case they analyzed, a draft of a press release that should be issued by a bank was modified by a person from the Young Customer Division, who is not a public relations professional and not even remotely connected to the public relations activities i.e. during its internal circulation the press release gets into the hands of a huge number of people (ibid.: 1259). In another example (ibid.: 1264-1268) the researchers traced an unusual occurrence of the pronoun 'you' in a press release to its genesis, which uncovered the complexity of the production of such a text. Tracing back numerous e-mail exchanges and conversations (internal as well as external), it became clear that considerations about news-values and business-partners were further major factors determining the composition of the press release. Further considerations that influence the production of a press release include the objective appearance of a media release. Press releases are essential for the journalistic work. As Walters and Walters (1996: 167) observe, journalists depend on them because of the limited resources and time constraints. But due to their partial nature, press releases are treated with a certain amount of skepticism by the journalists. To speak with Bell (1991: 58), they are "openly despised but heavily used". And the writers of press

releases are aware of this distrust themselves, which is the reason why they try making an objective impression (Van Slyke 1986: 26-27).

However, the major factor guiding the writing process is the so called 'preformulation' (e.g. Jacobs 1999a, 1999b.). While news releases were given attention in mass media and communication studies for a long time (e.g. Bell 1991), the linguistic level remained largely unstudied until the advent of the preformulation idea (Sleurs/ Jacobs 2005: 1253). It was only after Jacobs started using corpus linguistic methodology on this text genre and started to talk about public relations experts imitating journalistic writing style that linguistics took notice of this genre. The concept starts from the observation that the only reason for the issuing of press releases is the hope that they will be used in newspaper articles and the less modifications are performed by the journalists, the better (Jacobs 1999a: xi). According to this concept, there are "special metapragmatic features of the language of press releases", such as pseudo-quotations of the issuer itself or third person self reference (ibid.: 29-30). Further elements "include the use of powerful, newspaper-like headlines, followed by a comprehensive 'lead' paragraph" (Sleurs/ Jacobs 2005: 1254). The aim thereby is to push the own story into the news without being quoted (Jacobs 1999a: 307), thus making it a hybrid genre in the sense of Fairclough (see below). The resulting advantages are free publicity and the fact that media consumers encounter the company's material with less distrust than when reading an advertisement (that they also recognize as such). Jacobs (1999b: 233) identifies two reasons for the effectiveness of preformulation, a "double preformulating role" as he calls it. First, journalists do not have to lose time if the releases are already tailored to the formal requirements. Secondly, the release is given a more objective appearance.

According to preformulation, the goal of the issuers of a press release is not only to enter the media discourse, but also that their messages are "retold by them [journalists] as accurately as possible – preferably even verbatim – in their own news reporting" (ibid.: 219). One central problem is to transform the first person identity of the issuer into that of a presumably third party. This happens by replacing first person pronouns with third person pronouns (ibid.: 220), by using passives or nominalizations and finally by a completely different organization of the release. An example for the latter would be that a company praises its new products instead of stressing the company's centrality within this process (ibid.: 223). The authors eschew deixis, because they refer to a context and due to

the fact that press releases are part of a genre chain i.e. they will be converted into a newspaper text, the context is condemned to change. Press releases are therefore constructed more detached from context than other kinds of texts. They have a tendency to be deictically neutral concerning person, but also time and place (Jacobs 1999b: 228-229).

As I already said, the advent of the preformulation idea had a significant impact on the linguistic study of this text genre. But nowadays Jacobs' concept is increasingly questioned, and many, including Jacobs himself (Sleurs and Jacobs 2005: 1259), point to the limitations of the concept. In a study of press releases in the biotechnology sector McLaren and Gurau (2005) found out that the move structure in some instances deviates from that of news reports, thus showing that preformulation is not the only concern of the press release writers. Pander (2008: 111) is another critic of the absoluteness of the preformulation concept. According to him, press release writers do mimic journalistic style, but not at all costs. The goal to see the release published verbatim is subordinated to things such as the acceptance by internal stakeholders of the company or organization. Sleurs and Jacobs (2005: 1256) came to a comparable conclusion, namely that through the complexity of the production process and the multiplicity of involved interests, preformulation is not the only, but still the central, concern of PR specialists.

But there are yet other constraints to preformulation. The public relations professionals are not always in the situation to be able to mimic journalistic writing style, even though they know that journalists will rephrase certain elements. Things such as hedges (elements that guard the communicator from definite statements) are problematic. According to Pander (2008: 95) hedges have a negative effect on the readability of a text, while at the same time they are needed to preserve objectivity. This is a possible explanation for what McLaren (2008: 644) found out about hedging, namely that most of the hedges occur in the main section. This is the place where the major statements are made, since the lead is a summary of the release and the end only provides the audience with background information and details. Therefore public relations professionals find themselves in the situation that they have to use hedges, albeit they might be aware that they will probably be deleted by the journalists. Another such conflict between the concern for preformulation and other considerations is related to transformations. Jacobs (1999b: 233) argues that passivizations and nominalizations make the press release look more objective. According to Sleurs and Jacobs (2005: 1258), they are used in press releases in order to "avoid an explicit

attribution of success” i.e. to make the text sound less promotional. But often readability problems are rooted in the high formality of the register (Pander 2008: 108). So the desire to seem objective and competent conflicts with stylistic concerns. But despite the fact that this concept has been questioned, it still continues to be central in the majority of linguistic inquiries in this area (e.g. Lassen 2006, Catenaccio 2008).

#### **6.1.1.2. The consumption of press releases**

The issue of text consumption in press releases is not less complex than that of production. The writers of press releases need to address two audiences, which is why two different reception processes of press releases exist. The news release is directly read by journalists and indirectly by the average newspaper readers. In the following, I will primarily focus on the former reception process, because news releases are first of all a matter of negotiation between public relations departments and journalists and as studies have found out, the need to exert influence on the journalist exceeds the need to exert influence on the average reader (e.g. Pander 2008: 110).

The special reception situation also has an impact on the press release as a genre. Fairclough (2003: 70-71) argues that it is usual to define a genre with regard to its purpose, but it is possible that genres have multiple purposes in which there is a clear hierarchy among them. This is particularly important for press releases, since their primary goal cannot be achieved without the secondary. The primary is to present the company or organization in a good light to the consumers of media products, yet this can only be achieved by influencing the people working in the media. This is because they fulfill the function of a gatekeeper i.e. they are in the position to decide which news are taken over into the media coverage (the idea of the gatekeeper goes back to White 1950). Therefore, media releases have to appeal to the journalists in order to reach their ultimate goal, namely to address the public audience. The problem is that the ways of reaching both audiences have to be reconciled. Speaking with Fairclough (1992: 207), the press release could be labeled a “hybrid genre”, since it combines elements of a number of genres, for example the informative value of a news report and the persuasive intent of an advertisement. Due to the preformulation principle, the structure, style etc. need to be taken over from a newspaper article, “with the input of promotional discourse being mainly

limited to lexical and stylistic choices” (Catenaccio 2008: 5). Particularly interesting is that “the same feature can carry an informative AND promotional intent simultaneously” (Catenaccio 2008: 27). Additionally, the neutral elements are also to be seen as strategic tools, for they also serve a promotional purpose, namely that the press release (or at least its topic) finds the way into the media coverage (ibid.). Yet this hybridity does not cause heterogeneity. McLaren and Gurau (2005: 26) come to the conclusion that it is “a highly conventionalized and indeed static genre”. This conventionalized nature of press releases is crucial to their reception, since journalists have certain expectations towards a text from this genre.

Lately much research has been done with regard to whether press releases make their way into the news coverage or which lexical or grammatical elements are modified by the journalists (e.g. Lenaerts 2002, Pander 2008, Jansen 2008). Focusing on the journalistic work, Bell already in 1991 (70-74) described three major modification operations that are performed by journalists in order to approximate the press release to the ideal they work towards: first, the deletion of information. Secondly, the changing of words or expressions, and lastly a restructuring of the syntax. This kind of research provides us with a good insight about how journalists perceive press releases. Thereby they primarily try to switch to the perspective of the readers of the newspaper (or TV viewers etc.) and they anticipate how the readers might consume this text.

But what are the issues that journalists are concerned most about? Jansen (2008: 117) sums them up the following way: “Besides satisfying the comprehensibility norm, the text has to satisfy norms such as interesting content, concise style and objective presentation”. Here it already becomes clear that the readability and processability are central issues. This was, for instance, demonstrated by Pander (2008: 92), who found out that the length of the sentences in press releases is reduced in the news reports. Moreover, he (ibid.: 107) discovered that journalists tend to rearrange sentences in order to arrive at a syntactically less complex sentence. This happens on the one hand by splitting a long sentence into two, but also “merging two clauses or sentences into one may produce a shorter and more direct version” (ibid.). Jansen (2008: 140) discovered that the simplification of the syntactic structure of the text also happens by using restrictive appositions instead of non-restrictive appositions.

On a more general level Pander (2008: 93) identifies two major editing practices by journalists, viz. neutralizations and readability transformations. The latter are divided into deletions, substitutions and additions. It is interesting to note that deletions tend to occur on the micro-level and not on the clausal level. Entire sentences, however, are the unit that is most prone to shortening (ibid.: 97). Sometimes press releases are also rewritten, which not only contracts the sentences, but also enhances their readability (ibid.: 98). There are significantly less additions than substitutions and deletions (ibid.: 100), which also underlines that comprehensibility ranks high among journalistic concerns. Jansen (2008: 135) also shows that journalists are concerned with neutrality in their editing process. They filter almost all elements with promotional content, but on the whole press releases tend to be written neutrally anyway: of 237 examined appositions only 10 carried promotional content (and of these 10 only one made it into the newspaper). But apart from neutrality and readability concerns, journalists are also careful to ensure that their readers understand the reported events on a content level. Frequently appositions are inserted that serve to provide background knowledge that the journalist considers to be relevant for his readers (ibid.: 132).

#### **6.1.1.3. The distribution of press releases**

There are just a few things left to say about the issue of distribution. Here is what Fairclough (1992: 79) has to say about the distribution of texts in general: “Some texts have a simple distribution – a casual conversation belongs only to the immediate context of situation in which it occurs – whereas others have a complex distribution”. Press releases undoubtedly belong to the latter group, but their distribution situation is even more complex than that of articles in the press. This complexity is on the one hand created by the already discussed situation of the multiple audiences, but on the other hand also by the new possibility to make press releases available on the internet in their original form. Organizations and companies now have the possibility of making accessible the texts in their unaltered form to everybody, thereby sidestepping the journalists. Lassen (2006: 508) speaks of “unprecedented freedom” for press release writers, because the opinion of the journalist becomes irrelevant. But it has to be said that this does not mean that preformulation has become irrelevant. Many journalists increasingly use the internet to search stories and thereby directly access the news releases on the homepages. So this new

way of distribution is also connected to new functions. On the internet they are, for instance, increasingly used as a direct marketing tool for investors.

### **6.1.2. The analysis of the text**

As I mentioned at the very beginning of section 6., Fairclough (1992: 232) sees the textual analysis as the most crucial element in justifying one's interpretation. This is also why the textual examination is the crux of this analysis.

Fairclough (1992: 75) splits text analysis into four different sections, namely vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure. My examination takes all of these levels into account, but the major focus lies, like in most analyses conducted within the frame of CDA, on grammar. There is yet another reason why the focus is on grammar, viz. the issue of preformulation. As Sleurs and Jacobs (2005: 1263) assert, its importance seems to depend on the level of the features. In the case of lexis preformulation ranks higher than in the case of grammar. Ergo, it can be assumed that if ideology is encoded to influence the media consumers subliminally, then it is primarily on the level of grammar; lexis and content are only of secondary importance. Fairclough (1992: 75) distinguishes three further sections for the analysis: "force", "coherence" and "intertextuality", but as Widdowson (1995b: 511) points out, it is not clear in which relation the first group is to the second. Intertextuality plays a crucial role in the genre of press releases. First of all, their paramount goal is to be intertextuality integrated into the reporting. Secondly, they themselves build on other texts. Sleurs and Jacobs (2005: 1259-1263) demonstrated how other texts such as newsletters can have a significant impact on the form of a press release. These three aspects will of course also be touched upon in the subsequent analysis. For the textual analysis it is important to bear in mind that due to the roots in SFL, CDA starts from the assumption that each time the author chooses from multiple possible options of textual representation a significant decision is made. Therefore, the central question is whether the content could have been expressed differently and what effect this would have had (Fairclough 2001: 92).



#### **6.1.2.1. The sample**

The sample is made up of four press releases about the same topic, namely the British Health Act 2009 and its banning of the display of tobacco products. The anti-ban alliance, lead by the major three tobacco companies on the British market, British American Tobacco (henceforth BAT), the Imperial Tobacco Group PLC (henceforth ITG) and Japan Tobacco announced to seek a judicial review of the passages in question. I examined the contributions of the two opposing sides. Two press releases were issued by two of the three big tobacco companies, viz. BAT and ITG, who are the driving force behind the demand for a judicial review. The other two press releases were issued by the anti-smoking organization Action on Smoking and Health (henceforth ASH). I chose this sample because the agendas of both sides are clear and they are obviously opposed to each other. Press releases provide the company with a possibility of influencing the public discourse in a desired way. Therefore it is expected that the text positions itself accordingly. Hence, I will try to show that with CDA's tools I can argue that on the linguistic level the side of the adversary is taken. Apart from these two opposing sides, there are also important stakeholders that cannot be assigned to one of these sides easily. Here I am referring to the consumers of tobacco products and the retailers. It can be expected that the tobacco-ban alliance, as well as the anti-tobacco ban alliance will try to present themselves as allies to those two stakeholder groups.

#### **6.1.2.2. Press release 1**

Let us start with the news release issued by BAT, who in its press release also grants some space to its smaller co-plaintiffs Portland Food and Wine, who probably cannot afford such a public relations undertaking on their own.

**News Release**

**Judicial review sought on tobacco display ban**

**26 April 2010**

**British American Tobacco said today its UK subsidiary, two retailers and a German cigarette manufacturer are seeking a judicial review of the Government's ban on the display of tobacco products in shops.**

The Health Act 2009 requires cigarettes, cigars, pipe and roll-your-own tobacco to be hidden from view in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from October 2011 in large retailers and October 2013 in smaller outlets.

Michelle Healy, General Manager, British American Tobacco UK Limited, said: "The display ban will damage both competition and the livelihoods of tens of thousands of small businesses by imposing high compliance costs on them. Driving the legal trade from public view will also play into the hands of illegal traders.

"These unwelcome effects are unjustified as there is no credible evidence that it will reduce smoking rates in the UK."

British American Tobacco believes the display ban will prevent manufacturers from communicating to consumers the most basic product information and is anti-competitive under EU law as it will be impossible to tell consumers about new products available for sale.

Many newsagents and convenience stores have protested strongly against the ban. They are worried about loss of trade to supermarkets - which smokers may perceive as stocking more brands - or to counterfeit and smuggled cigarettes in a flourishing black market.

They are also concerned about costly shop point-of-sale refits and the impact on efficient customer service and security.

British American Tobacco's co-plaintiffs are Portland Food and Wine, owner of six London convenience stores, Harendra Bhatt who owns one store in North London and German cigarette maker Tobacco Management & Consulting Company which had to abandon plans to enter the UK market in light of the new regulations.

Hemang Patel of Portland Food and Wine said: "We are responsible retailers and we do not sell to minors. Why are we the ones being punished like this simply for selling a legal product? The display ban regulations are complex, will be difficult to comply with and our efficient customer service will suffer."

Leading barrister Lord Pannick QC has been instructed to represent British American Tobacco and the co-plaintiffs in their application.

**Enquiries**

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+44 (0) 20 7845 2888 (24 hours)

**Investor Relations**  
Ralph Edmondson / Maya Farhat  
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**Figure 2: Press Release 1<sup>9</sup>**

<sup>9</sup> This release is available on BAT's homepage:  
[http://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK\\_3MNFEN.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DO84VC7B?opendocument&SKN=1](http://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK_3MNFEN.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DO84VC7B?opendocument&SKN=1)

### **The question of power**

Usually press releases are used to present the organization as powerful and influential, but the opposite is true for the release in question. Here the tobacco display ban is the one who is represented as mighty and dynamic. Not only is the ban often the agent of a process, but for the most part it is also in the most prominent position in the clause. This prominent placing adds importance to the new regulations. Very telling are the verbs that are used in connection with the ban. They do not imply static relational processes that simply describe what the ban is, but the ban is involved in material processes. It *requires*, it is *imposing*, it forces companies *to comply* and it also has the potential of making huge companies *abandon* their plans of entering the UK market. The ban is said to be able to *prevent* manufacturers from something and it is described as having a damaging potential.

Notice also the line *Many newsagents and convenience stores have protested strongly against the ban*. Protesters are usually in the position of the powerless. This depiction of the anti-ban alliance as weak plays down the actual power relations. There is a strong alliance against the Health Act 2009, including a number of multinational tobacco companies (BAT, ITG, Japan Tobacco International, Tobacco Management & Consulting Company), retailers and even political parties like the Tories. The support of the Tories is not even mentioned in the press release, whereas in *The Daily Telegraph*<sup>10</sup>, for example, it is. So the company in this case is not solely at the mercy of the state, but the impression is conveyed that this is the case. This is counterproductive for BAT, because if the opposition to the ban is perceived as insignificant and only coming from powerless actors, it will be experienced as an unimportant controversy by the readers and the public attention for the controversy will diminish. Another indicator that hints at the distortion of the power relations is the omitting of the boilerplate, one of the most typical moves in the press release genre. This is usually the last paragraph where the basic facts of a company or organization are given and credentials are established (c.f. Catenaccio 2008: 24). The boilerplate particularly enjoys great popularity among huge companies, since they can present themselves as powerful. Interestingly, none of the four analyzed press releases has a boilerplate. In the case of example 3 and 4 it is less surprising, since they are issued by a

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<sup>10</sup> This article is available under:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/7635736/Tories-back-cigarette-companies-effort-to-turn-over-ban-on-display-of-tobacco-products.html>

rather insignificant organization, but in the case of BAT and ITG leaving out the boilerplate can only be a disadvantage.

The company on the other hand is portrayed as passive. For the most part it is involved in relational processes, which simply denote a relation of being. This applies to the plaintiffs and smokers as well, which is especially evident in the statement by Hemang Patel in the penultimate paragraph, where he only describes what his company is and what it is *not* doing. At best, members of the anti-ban alliance are represented as sensors in mental processes, thus evaluating things that other actors do, but staying passive themselves. Probably the most striking example of this can be found in the very last paragraph. Here BAT is performing an action – it is defending itself against the government regulations by hiring leading barrister Lord Pannick - but this is depicted by using the passive *has been instructed*. Even though barristers are usually not instructed directly by the clients, the company certainly had a huge influence on this and thus this instance of agent deletion only has the effect of depicting the company as less active.

However, there are two instances in the text where the anti-ban alliance is involved in material processes. The first is the title and the second is the lead, where the words *seeking* (in the lead) and *sought* (in the title) are used. But in the headline the agent is deleted. So here again BAT and its allies are the driving force behind a real action, but they are hidden. Of course it is BAT and the ban opponents that seek the judicial review, but this is obfuscated. As far as the lead is concerned we have an active sentence, but it is packed into a verbalization process. This has the effect that more emphasis is put on the process of saying than on the fact that BAT and its allies are seeking the judicial review.

### **Favorable depiction of the opponent**

A look at the transformation processes also points into the direction that the press release is not as opposed to the government as might be expected in the light of the circumstances. Consider the passage where the fear of illegal products is expressed: [...] *or to counterfeit and smuggled cigarettes in a flourishing black market*. Instead the author could, for instance, write *cigarettes are smuggled, which is worrying small convenience stores*. This alternative construction would put more emphasis on the nuisance, which would stress the government's bad management of the tobacco sector. The same is true for the formulation

*in a flourishing black market.* This can be seen as hiding a process. If the author on the other hand used the construction *the black market is flourishing*, this would have given more prominence and immediacy to the claim.

### **Reducing identification**

Generally, you search for pronouns such as *we* and *you* in vein. However, in the quote by Hemang Patel in the penultimate paragraph, an excessive use of the “‘exclusive’ *we*” (a term used by Fairclough 2001: 106 and Fowler/Kress 1979b: 201-202) can be observed. The exclusive ‘we’ is a ‘we’ that does not include the addressee(s), but rather refers to the company and its employees only. Now the question has to be asked, what effects this extreme amount of auto-references within only a few lines has. As opposed to the ‘inclusive we’, the ‘exclusive we’ reduces the probability of the readers’ identification with the entrepreneurs. This would be different if the statement looked like this: *Responsible retailers, who are not selling to minors, are punished simply for selling a legal product.* With this formulation readers could more easily place themselves in the position of the retailers. It is also telling that their problems are stressed more than those of the smokers. In the last sentence of the paragraph the smokers are peripherally touched upon in *our efficient customer service will suffer*. If the focus was instead on the customers (like in *smokers will have to deal with a worse customer service*), this would probably have lead to a higher emotional involvement of the readers who are smokers.

### **Evaluation over argumentation**

Content wise the text is full with arguments against the ban, but with regard to their placement these arguments are rather hidden. The issue of subordination is especially interesting here. In complex sentences the rational arguments against the ban are always placed in the subordinate clause, whereas the superordinate clause gives the evaluative comments about the ban. Consider the following examples: *The display ban will damage both competition and the livelihoods of tens of thousands of small businesses by imposing high compliance costs on them.* And: *These unwelcome effects are unjustified as there is no credible evidence that it will reduce smoking rates in the UK.* Both of these examples

have the real argument in the subordinate clause i.e. more weight is given to what BAT believes than to the actual arguments.

That the arguments are backgrounded can also be observed on the macro-structure of the text. The larger-scale structure is partly unusual for a press release. The headline and the lead are, as expected, about the event which contains the real news value, namely that a judicial review is being requested. The first paragraph, however, is atypical. It provides background information on the Health Act 2009. With regard to the inverted pyramid writing style one would rather expect this to be in the last paragraph, because it is the end where details are usually provided. That indeed happened in the newspapers. They did not place the description as prominently as the press release (compare, for instance, the article in *The Sunday Times*<sup>11</sup> or the already mentioned article in *The Daily Telegraph*) Compare also the following press release, where the first paragraph bears resemblance to a lead paragraph in a newspaper and where it is the last paragraph that does not carry any new information, but simply provides background knowledge on the development over the last few months.

But to return to example 1, the shift of the paragraph to such a prominent position could also be interpreted as rather negative for promoting the rejection of the ban. The arguments against the new regulations (such as damage to small businesses, the flourishing black-market etc.) are placed less prominently. This is problematic with regard to newspaper reading habits. Each paragraph is less likely to be read than the preceding. Therefore - if the article looked like this press release - many people would not even get to the arguments against the ban.

### **6.1.2.3. Press release 2**

The second example is another press release of a tobacco company, this time by the Imperial Tobacco Group (ITG). It was issued on the same date as the one by BAT i.e. on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April. Due to the fact that it deals with the same issue, the content is quite similar to BAT's news release.

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<sup>11</sup> The article is available under:  
[http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry\\_sectors/consumer\\_goods/article7108934.ece](http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/consumer_goods/article7108934.ece)

26 April 2010

**Imperial Tobacco Group PLC seeks judicial review of tobacco product display ban**

Imperial Tobacco Group PLC announces today that it is seeking a judicial review of the relevant sections of the Health Act 2009 and proposed regulations which seek to ban the display of tobacco products in retail outlets from October 2011.

Gareth Davis, Chief Executive, said: "Banning the display of tobacco products is a further example of the Government's unreasonable and disproportionate approach to regulating tobacco.

"There is no credible evidence to support the idea that children start smoking or that adult smokers continue to smoke as a result of the display of tobacco products.

"If this misguided legislation is implemented it will simply fuel the growth in the illicit trade of tobacco and create a huge cost burden for retailers who are already under considerable pressure as a result of the difficult economic climate."

In February 2010 Imperial Tobacco announced that its cigarette vending machine subsidiary Sinclair Collis was seeking a judicial review of the relevant sections of the Health Act 2009 which seek to ban sales of tobacco from vending machines from October 2011.

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Figure 3: Press Release 2<sup>12</sup>

**Doing away with responsibility**

The content is not the only similarity to BAT's release, but there are also resemblances as far as the language forms are concerned. For example, the lawmakers are also spared from an unfavorable depiction, primarily by the use of transformations. In many cases where the government is the agent in processes that are criticized, it is not present, at least not explicitly. An example therefore is the following passivization: *If this misguided legislation is implemented, it will [...]*. Here the use of the passive voice enables the author to omit the implementer of the legislation. Of course the reader can arrive at the conclusion

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<sup>12</sup> This release is available on ITG's homepage:  
<http://www.imperial-tobacco.com/index.asp?page=78&newsid=1173>

that only the government can be meant at this point, but by the loss of the agent in this construction the link between the government and the process (and its negative consequences) gets looser. This example is by no means an isolated case. The nominalization *proposed regulations* has a similar effect. But whereas in these cases the transformations are used for agent obfuscation, some transformations have additional consequences. The phrase *retailers, who are already under considerable pressure as a result of the difficult economic state* brings in a new dimension. In this dependant clause we find an attribution structure with a subject-verb-complement order. Instead, this could have been rewritten as an action with a subject-verb-object structure. It is in fact ideologically significant that we do not get to know who is putting this considerable pressure on the retailers. Indeed the sentence goes on, telling us that the pressure is a result of the economic climate, but the economic climate is an inanimate entity, which is created by somebody and this somebody is PLC's opponent, the government, which is in charge of regulating the economy. So why is it protected? But as I said, this transformation is even more complex than the former ones. The difference to other nominalizations such as *proposed regulations* is that we know that there has to be an agent who prepares and regulates something. This is not clear in the case of the retailers being under pressure. The same problem can be found in *growth in the illicit trade*, where the growing illicit trade is depicted as something that exists without an entity that is responsible for it, when in fact it is a result of political decisions that have been made in the past. So the really problematic issue is not that the agent is not named, but that the problems are presented via a relational process i.e. as processes that come into existence by themselves. To sum up, the sparing of the government contradicts all expectations, since this is the chance to present the government as incapable of regulating the tobacco sector.

As far as the rather negative stance towards the anti-ban alliance is concerned, there is another resemblance to the preceding release, namely that the tobacco company is hardly ever the agent in material processes. Interestingly, types of the token *seek* are used five times, three times to describe the actions of the anti-ban alliance, and twice they are used to specify the proposed regulations. In the cases referring to the anti-ban alliance, it is simply used to depict the aspirations of ITG, but neither ITG, nor its representatives are actually carrying out a concrete action. In this news release ITG is for the most part involved in verbalization processes, whereas the government bans, regulates and implements.



#### 6.1.2.4. Press release 3

Now CDA representatives could come up with the argument that there is an anti-smoking ideology in our society and therefore also the language of the press release writers of the tobacco companies is subliminally influenced by it. So now two press releases will be examined that were issued by a clearly opposing institution, whereby I will try to prove an opposing ideology as well.

**Tobacco companies use bully-boy tactics to challenge display ban**  
Monday 26 April 2010

Reacting to the news that Britain's three largest cigarette companies have announced their intention to challenge the ban on tobacco product display in shops in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, ASH said their action smacked of desperation and was typical of the industry's bully-boy tactics. [1] ASH strongly refutes the claims by the industry that the Point of Sale regulations will be ineffective and will adversely affect retailers' profits.

Martin Dockrell, ASH's Director of Research and Policy said:

"It is for Parliament to make British law, not tobacco industry lawyers. Tobacco displays are now the most visible forms of promotion and evidence shows that such displays have a direct impact on young people's smoking. [2]

Furthermore evidence from Ireland shows that the cost of implementing the display ban is extremely low – just 300 Euros per shop [3], while retailers report that it is easy to enforce and has had very little impact overall on trade." [4]

The industry claims to be acting in the interests of retailers yet this legal challenge is unlikely to make any difference to retailers' profits but, if successful, could hook thousands more children into a lifetime addiction to tobacco, resulting in needless premature death."

ENDS

Notes and links:

Notes:

[1] The tobacco advertising and promotion (display) (England) regulations 2010 were laid before Parliament on 2nd March 2010. See: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi\\_20100445\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20100445_en_1)

[2] ASH Briefing: Tobacco displays at the point of sale. [http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH\\_701.pdf](http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_701.pdf)

[3] A similar ban came in to effect in May 2009. In most cases (around 80%) there were special dispensers owned by the tobacco manufacturers and the industry paid to make them compliant. According to a survey by the Association of Convenience Stores those stores that did have to pay paid an average of £300 each. The ACS study observed no sudden drop in sales

[4] Retail Express. 20/4/2010

Figure 4: Press Release 3<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This press release is available on ASH's homepage:  
<http://www.ash.org.uk/media-room/press-releases/tobacco-companies-use-bully-boy-tactics-to-challenge-display-ban>

### **The lack of certainty about the negative effects of smoking**

One would expect one of the major arguments of this press release to be that smoking is harmful to its consumers' health, but a look at the mood system reveals that ASH does not push this argument. Regarding modality the last paragraph is particularly striking. It is full of uncertainty. The writers of the press release argue that the ban *is unlikely to make any difference to retailer's profits* and that it *could hook thousands more children into a lifetime addiction of tobacco*. The *could* and the *is unlikely to* are both very strong hedges and can easily be replaced by a *will*. One could argue that the *could* serves to take into account the possibility that the legal challenge will fail, but this is already done by the insertion of the phrase *if successful*. The confusion gets even worse when we notice that except these two, there are hardly any instances of hedging in the rest of the text, including the statements of the tobacco industry. Those are presented without modality as in *the claims by the industry that the Point of Sales regulations will be ineffective and will adversely affect retailers' profits*. There is yet one hedge about the statements of the tobacco companies, but this is a hedge that has no negative effects on the tobacco industry as such. In ASH's release it says that the *companies have announced their intention to challenge the ban*. This is noteworthy since the tobacco companies themselves were much more direct (ITG and BAT said that they were *seeking a judicial review*). The release refers to the intentions of the anti-ban alliance, but they have already challenged the regulations. So why is ASH more concerned to keep the chance of a pullback than the companies themselves?

But let us return to the hedges in the last paragraph. At this point their use is more than unusual. As Fairclough (2001: 106) notes, for the most part newspapers tend to leave out modality, for example by using the non-modal present tense, but also perfect forms. Nevertheless, modality is used in press releases, but only when it is of strategic importance, which is not the case in this case. The *could* and the *unlikely* do not solely conflict with an advantageous formulation, but also with the already discussed preformulation ideal. One possible argument is that the hedges in this press release are simply used to convey the impression of neutrality in order to enhance the probability of the news release being taken over into the media coverage. However, at this point the hedging is unnecessary, since the paragraph will not be copied verbatim anyway and the authors of the press release seem to be aware of that as well. First of all, it is the last

paragraph and that is why it can be assumed that its chances of entering the news coverage are much lower than those of the preceding passages. Moreover, *needless* is used in the same paragraph, which is an evaluating expression that usually is not found in news reports. Also the sentence is too long (it contains 43 words) and too complex to meet the requirements of preformulation. The only way it will find its way into the media coverage is as a quotation by the company, since, as Pander (2008: 103) showed, journalists frequently introduce the company as the source of statements they do not want to be held accountable for. If the last paragraph is taken over verbatim and assigned to ASH, it is inconveniently formulated, because it is not taking a clear stance against the ban. Instead, only the possibility of negative effects is stressed, but this is in strong contrast to the claim that they are making on the level of content, namely that there is evidence for the influence the displays have on the smoking of young people. Notice also the illogicality that uncertainty is expressed about whether the tobacco display leads to addiction or not, but no modality is used when premature death is represented as a consequence thereof.

Apart from being uncertain about the effects of smoking, ASH is also being vague. Here is an example: *displays have a direct impact on young people's smoking*. This is a prime example for how nominalization enables the authors to leave tense and modality unspecified. This compressed version does not make any statement about how certain the impact is and in what way it will come. It is also unspecified whether the young people already smoke and will continue, or whether the display of tobacco products will cause them to commence. This is a quite inconvenient formulation for ASH, since in the very same sentence it is claimed that there is evidence for the negative effects. Therefore it would be more natural to depict the process by writing *young people will start to smoke*, followed by a more detailed description based on this evidence.

### **Unexpected presuppositions**

Another surprise apart from modality can be detected with regard to the common sense assumptions that the text builds on. Note the preparatory 'it' in *It is for Parliament to make British law, not tobacco industry lawyers*. The thematic position is occupied by *it*, which pushes the rest of the sentence into the rheme position. This representation is a restructured version of *Parliament is to make British law, not tobacco industry lawyers*. This choice is

significant with respect to the given-new principle. Each author knows about the readers' expectation that first given information is presented, and only after that new information is conveyed. The former does not have to be given in the text, but the author can also assume that his readers already share certain knowledge or presuppositions with him. Speaking with Fairclough (e.g. 1992: 193), we could assert that the theme is indicative about the common sense assumptions of the author, because we can see what the writer takes for granted. To return to the example mentioned above, in the alternative version *parliament* would be presented as given information. So why then, do the authors of the press release choose to restructure the sentence by using this special clause structure? The only explanation is that they do not take it as a common sense assumption that the parliament is in charge of legislation, but that this is something that has to be pointed out extra.

### **The inconvenient structuring of information**

The text is not a defense of the ban, but a depiction of ASH's reaction. The anti-smoking organization positions itself as a solely reacting party. This is evident from the thematic structure. Already the headline commences with *Tobacco companies*. This theme does not only set the topic for the sentence, but the entire text. The first sentence also serves to position ASH accordingly. Not only that the first word, viz. *Reacting*, already sets the agenda, it is also of relevance that the actions of the tobacco industry are described first. The dependant clause is pulled out from behind, so that the independent clause is shifted backwards, thus delaying the mentioning of ASH to the third line. The same structure occurs in the last sentence, where first the claims of the opposing side are presented and only afterwards we get to know about the views of ASH:

The industry claims to be acting in the interests of retailers yet this legal challenge is unlikely to make any difference to retailers' profits but, if successful, could hook thousands more children into a lifetime addiction to tobacco, resulting in needless premature death.

But this complex-compound sentence is also interesting with regard to how information is structured. After these two independent clauses are juxtaposed, the sentence then goes on to present the negative consequences that ASH fears. Notable here is the ellipsis of the agent that hooks children into addiction. It needs to be recalled from the very beginning of the second independent clause. This is an advantageous syntactic structure for the tobacco

industry, because the causal connection between the legal challenge and the addiction gets weaker if those two elements are not in each-other's immediate co-textual environment. The argument is then modified by a dependant clause that informs us about the possible death of thousands of children. This is definitely the most powerful argument that ASH brings up in this release, but it is only packed into a dependent clause. Thus more prominence is given to refuting the claim that retailers are damaged than the risk of premature death. As a matter of fact, the argument that thousands of children could die gets the worst placement in the entire text, because it is moved to the very last clause of the press release. Notice that even the danger of addiction is more prominently placed than the danger of premature death, which could have easily been switched.

But it seems to be a pattern in this news release that the strong points are banned from the prominent places in the sentence. Notice the coordination in the second sentence in the statement of Martin Dockrell. It commences with background information and it is only afterwards that the real argument is put forward, namely that displays have an influence on young people. The more persuasive way would have been to start with the latter clause.

### **An uncommon bully boy**

But that reactionary view of ASH is not only present on the level of grammar, but also by the metaphor that underlies the text, namely that the tobacco companies are bully boys. The centrality of this metaphor becomes clear by the fact that it is used in the headline, which already channels the reader's perception of the rest of the text into a certain direction. This is indicative of the larger metaphor in this text, viz. that the tobacco industry and ASH are in a battle against each other<sup>14</sup>. The act of seeking a judicial review is referred to as a *legal challenge*, also a term associated with a battle. Similarly, the phrase *smacked of desperation* links the dispute over the tobacco ban to the concept of a fight. Even though this is a commonly used phrase and by itself does not carry any associations to *smack* in the sense of *punch* or *hit*, in the context of the underlying metaphor the reader immediately associates it with the meaning. So there are a number of lexis and expressions that are not unusual by themselves, but due to the conceptual metaphor that is pushed from

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<sup>14</sup> Here I refer to the definition of metaphor by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who suggest that metaphor means to reason about one conceptual domain in the sense of another.

the very beginning of the text, multiple meanings get activated, which then lead to the perception of the dispute as a battle. On the first glance it seems that it is convenient for ASH that the tobacco industry is thought about in the terms of a bully boy, since people usually associate them with trouble. But the parallelism in this text is not so straightforward. In the headline the tobacco industry is said to be using *bully-boy tactics*, which is quite an unusual usage of the term. The British National Corpus lists only 15 occurrences of *bully boy* (note that the version with the hyphen did not yield any result). Of these 15 occurrences, eight are written with capital letters i.e. they refer to names, thus only seven relevant occurrences remain. In the corpus *bully boy* is never used as a modifier as in the headline of the news release. Moreover, in none of the corpus examples is the term linked to any kind of strategic thinking as in the headline, where it precedes *tactics*. So apart from the negative associations, also a number of positive associations such as that of reason and rationality are triggered. But let me briefly return to the use of *smacked of desperation*, because here the bad association is also put into perspective. Although both semantic associations are recalled, there is a crucial syntactic difference between the two usages of the term. There is no agency or volition in *smacked of desperation*. It simply denotes a state of being, not an activity that is controlled by an actor. Also there is no change that is triggered in another entity. So the tobacco companies on a syntactic level are not presented as inflicting damage to anybody. Instead, the term *desperate* rather evokes pity and compassion. Consequently, the apparently inconvenient metaphor for the tobacco industry eventually turns out not to be that unfavorable.

#### **6.1.2.5. Press release 4**

Unlike the examples 1-3, this press release was not issued on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, but about approximately a month later, namely on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May and it does not directly deal with the announced challenge of the tobacco display ban, but has a slightly different topic. It presents a survey that ASH commissioned in order to gauge the control the tobacco industry has over the retailers. I chose this release because it is also, although indirectly, connected to the display ban and the clear opposition between the tobacco industry and anti-smoking organization is present as well.

**Shop survey reveals tight control of tobacco product display by UK tobacco companies**  
Friday 21 May 2010

A survey of over 100 small shops in England has revealed that tobacco companies have almost total control over the way tobacco is displayed and marketed. Nearly eight out of ten (79%) of retailers who had a tobacco industry funded gantry were forced to comply with certain conditions relating to the size and type of display, and positioning of key brands.

The survey, commissioned by ASH, was conducted to gauge the extent to which the tobacco companies control the display of tobacco products in British shops in advance of the legislation that will ban point of sale displays from 2011. [2] The majority of the current gantries were eye-catching, typically with colourful lit top panels and lighting of the products, while some had illuminated strips down the side. Some displays included tobacco-branded paraphernalia such as clocks.

Although the majority of small retailers had gantries provided by the tobacco industry, some expressed concern about the conditions imposed on them by the industry, particularly the need to stock more products than they would otherwise choose to do. According to one retailer, the industry rep's insistence that he kept his display fully stocked meant that he had "£3,000 of dead cash".

The survey of 113 shops located in London and Nottingham found that around a third of independent retailers reported receiving an incentive from the tobacco company reps for selling their products. These ranged from small gifts such as pens, free packs of cigarettes and offers on products to larger schemes such as competitions with prizes including a complete shop re-fit.

Retailer John McClure commented: "We are always under pressure from the industry reps to broaden our range of stock and try out new products. This means we're often required to stock products that we wouldn't otherwise choose to hold. It's the industry rather than our customers who determine what's on sale."

Martin Dockrell, ASH's Director of Research and Policy said: "The extensive involvement of the industry in providing and monitoring retail displays underlines the importance of implementing policies to end this form of promotion."

Dr Anna Gilmore, researcher at the University of Bath said: "This study reveals the stranglehold that tobacco companies have over the retail environment. Retailers are not only told what tobacco products to stock but are also subjected to tests and incentive schemes to boost company sales. Many of the practices revealed contravene a 2003 EU Council Recommendation and underline the need for greater restrictions on industry marketing practices." [3] [4]

ENDS

Notes and links:

[1] Rooke, C. et al. Tobacco point of sale (PoS) displays in England: a snapshot survey of current practices. Tobacco Control 2010; doi: 10.1136/tc.2009.034447

[2] The tobacco point of sale display ban, enacted as part of the Health Act 2009, will enter into force in October 2011 for large shops (eg supermarkets) and in October 2013 for small shops.

[3] For example, according to a report in the trade journal, Talking Retail this week, a "Marlboro mystery shopper will be looking to see whether retailers are up to speed on this latest brand development from Marlboro". The inspector will check whether retailers are aware of the new pack design for the Marlboro Gold brand. Retailers passing the mystery shopper test will win an instant prize. (Talking Retail, 18 May 2010)

[4] Council Recommendation (2003/54/EC) recommended member states adopt various tobacco control measures including those to prohibit "the use and communication of sales promotion, such as a discount, a free gift, a premium or an opportunity to participate in a promotional contest or game."

Figure 5: Press Release 4<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This press release is available on ASH's homepage:

<http://www.ash.org.uk/media-room/press-releases/shop-survey-reveals-tight-control-of-tobacco-product-display-by-uk-tobacco-companies>

### **Hesitation to name the adversary**

In this news release there would have been a number of opportunities to criticize the anti-tobacco alliance more directly, but they remained unused. Note especially the paragraph where the retailer is quoted. Generally his talk has typical features of informal language such as the use of contractions like in *wouldn't* or *what's* and by lexical choices such as *try out* and *choose* instead of *test* and *select*. But at times his language seems quite formal, for example when he says *we're often required to stock products*. Despite the contraction, the passive voice turns this part of the sentence into a rather formal unit. Obviously the passive does not fit at this point. It is improbable that the retailer used exactly the same words. Instead, it can be assumed that the press release writers are responsible for the particular wording. So the question might be asked as to why they inserted a passive construction and deleted the agent. After all it is the tobacco companies that require. So why are they not mentioned explicitly? And when they are mentioned, they are distanced from a negative depiction as in the following example: *some expressed concern about the conditions imposed on them by the industry*. Here the semantic structure stays intact since the agent is present, but the syntax is reshuffled. This means that the ideational meaning has not been changed, but the syntactic rearrangement leads to a modification of the interpersonal meaning by distancing.

### **Distancing from retailers and consumers**

The text on the whole seems very distant, which can be explained by the high density of passivizations and nominalizations, but particularly illustrative of this is the quote by Martin Dockrell, which makes excessive use of the latter transformation device. Within one sentence we encounter six nominalizations, four of which are connected to the actions of the tobacco industry, but there is no agent mystification here. It is clear that the tobacco industry is the one who provides, monitors, and so forth. Yet there are two disadvantageous effects that result for ASH. First, the text gets more difficult to process, and secondly, the events are distanced from the reader. Whereas the former alienates the press release from the ideal of preformulation, the latter has direct negative consequences on the effect the text has on the reader. But distance is also suggested between ASH and the retailers. The statement by Martin Dockrell is in striking contrast to the preceding



passage. Whereas the retailer's speech includes markers of informal language, ASH's research director seems extraordinarily formal due to the huge amount of nominalizations. This extreme divergence leaves the reader with doubt about whether ASH and the retailers are really on the same side of the controversy as ASH is claiming on the level of content.

Moreover, the retailers are sometimes dissolved in nominalizations as in *the cost of implementing the display ban is extremely low*. The difference in the naming conventions in this press release is also very telling about the relationship between these two groups. As far as the retailer is concerned, the details to his name are given before it. The sentence starts: *Retailer John McClurey commented*. The subsequent two statements (by ASH's research director and a researcher from the University of Bath) are introduced with the name, while the descriptive elements are included in an apposition after it. This conveys the impression that John McClurey is only relevant because he is a retailer, while the other two are presented as relevant per se. The explanation why they are relevant is moved after their name, which then rather serves as complementary information, whereas in the position before the name it already primes the reader to a certain classification of the upcoming name.

Distance is also created in the very last sentence. Here the authors of the press release write about the *need for greater restrictions on industry marketing practices*. Of all these nominalizations, the most interesting at this point is *need*, since the readers are not told who needs those regulations. If we reason about it, we could assume that it is the retailers and probably even the consumers that are in need of the government regulating the practices of the tobacco industry. But why are they not mentioned explicitly? Instead, it seems as if the regulations were needed just because they do not meet the standards of an EU Council Recommendation, since this is the argument that occurs immediately in the contextual environment.

But the link to the customers is not stressed either. That the press release is not consumer-oriented becomes clear in the passive adjective in *gantries were eye-catching*. The gantries catch the eye of the consumers, but this is not mentioned here. On the level of content it seems that ASH wants to protect the consumer, but why is he then dissolved in this passive adjective? Neither is the consumer stressed in the other press release by ASH i.e. in example 3. At one point it is argued that tobacco *displays have a direct impact on young*

*people's smoking*. In this example *young people's* only serves as a modifier. Thus, even though it seems to be a central argument that the display ban serves to protect the (potential) customers, they are for the most part absent from ASH's news releases.

### **Suggesting cooperation between retailers and the tobacco industry**

In the news release the control of the tobacco companies over retailers is presented as a natural state. In the very first sentence we find the following formulation: *tobacco companies have almost total control over the way tobacco is displayed and marketed*. The statement would have quite a different effect if it said that companies *almost totally control* the display i.e. if this were presented as an action in which the tobacco companies are the agent, they would have been depicted in a more negative light. But also in the rest of the text the relation between the tobacco companies and the retailers is not depicted as one of domination. In fact, the underlying ideological assumption seems to be that it is one of cooperation, with some exceptions every once and then. This is the central sentence about their relation:

Although the majority of small retailers had gantries provided by the tobacco industry, some expressed concern about the conditions imposed on them by the industry, particularly the need to stock more products than they would otherwise choose to do.

The use of the logical connector *although* is revealing at this point, because it indicates that something unexpected occurred. In this case the writers of ASH's press release assume that the relation between retailers and the tobacco industry is unproblematic. After all, the tobacco reps provide the retailers with gantries. So the assumption is conveyed that in general it can be expected that the element of partnership prevails between the industry and the retailers. Read against this background, it seems insignificant that individual retailers are concerned about the tobacco industry's conditions.

### **Hiding behind the survey**

In this news release ASH is pushed into the background by the survey it commissioned, but why is the shop survey always the actor, when in reality it is ASH that reveals something? In fact, this is only made clear in the apposition of the second paragraph. That ASH is

hiding behind the shop survey it commissioned, is already evident in the headline, where it is the shop survey that reveals tight control. Including the headline, the shop survey occurs five times in the text, of which in four it functions as the subject and it is the theme in all instances. Three times it occurs in the combination with different types of the token *reveal*. Another time the survey is said to have *found* that. The fifth time we encounter it in a passive construction: *The survey, commissioned by ASH, was conducted to gauge the extent [...]*. This use is quite interesting. The passive is avoided in media discourse, since it makes the processing of a text more difficult. Frequently it serves to delete the agent, which is not the case here. Instead, the agent is packed into a weak partial apposition with a verbal constituent, which is the only time it is explicitly mentioned that the survey was initiated by ASH. The major function of appositions is to support the reader, for example by giving him background knowledge, reminding him of things that he might have forgotten or by dissolving ambiguity. Ergo, this is not the location where one would expect to find important information. But it is indeed important to know who commissioned the survey. It also has to be added, that even though a passive structure is used here, the survey is, like in all other occurrences, in the theme position.

Of course it could be argued that the survey is used to background ASH in order to give a more neutral appearance to the press release, but a look at the macro-structure shows that neutral appearance does not seem to be the major concern of this press release's authors. Some elements of the press release are fixed, but many can be moved around. With regard to news texts White (1996, 1997 qtd. in Catenaccio 2008: 18) speaks of a "nucleus" that has a fixed position and "satellites" that serve to modify it, which are not in a fixed order. This means that the authors for a large part can arrange the paragraphs according to their view of what is important and what is not. Bearing in mind the journalistic habit of starting with the shortening of articles and press releases from the end, it is revealing to see how these satellites are arranged and which of them receive the most prominent positioning. Again the authors of the release do not seem to be sure about the road they should be taking. If one argues that they substitute their identity with the survey in order to suggest more neutrality, then it does not make sense that the statement by ASH's director of research and policy is placed before that of the neutral researcher from the University of Bath.

### **6.1.3. The analysis of the sociocultural practice**

The third step in Fairclough's three dimensional model is to look at the underlying social practices, which means to take into account the question of how far situational, institutional and social practices have an impact on the transmission of ideology with regard to the text. In this dimension of discourse CDA draws much on the works of Althusser and Gramsci (e.g. Fairclough 1992: 86), but since I have already discussed the issue of ideology at length, I will now limit my discussion to a brief description of its influence on the discourse practice.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 276) argue that "utterances are only meaningful if we consider their use in a specific situation, if we understand the underlying conventions and rules, if we recognize the embedding in a certain culture and ideology." Hence, the fact that press releases are written in a way that imitates the journalistic style, may also be a result of institutionalized practice. As a matter of fact, this is the most powerful way ideologies can exert influence on people: "[t]he ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and achieve the status of 'common sense'" (Fairclough 1992: 87). So if a press release writer obeys to the preformulation principle because it has become common sense to him, this can be interpreted as him being constrained unconsciously and therefore conveying and reinforcing the dominant ideology. Fairclough (ibid.: 80) says that how people produce and consume texts is determined by so called "available members' resources". These exercise double confinement on the processes of production and consumption. First of all, the members' resources are "internalized social structures, norms and conventions, including orders of discourse, and conventions for the production, distribution and consumption of texts" (ibid.). They are the result of former social practices. The second constraint results from the particular kind of the social practice. The way in which members' resources are included (and also which of them are included) depends upon the very nature of the social practice (ibid.). Therefore people will include different member's resources when reading a press release than reading a newspaper article or an advertisement.

This step is only concerned with "explanation" (Fairclough 2001: 91) i.e. it does solely serve to explain the results of the examinations of the former two discourse levels. In this analysis I will omit the linking of the sociocultural practices to ideology, since I have read

press releases from both sides of the controversy against their grain. So it is impossible to claim that both sides have a hegemonic position and convey ideology through the sociocultural practices.

## **6.2. Possible ways of improving the method and the evaluation thereof**

Here I want to present briefly some possible ways of how CDA's reliability and validity could be enhanced. In particular I want to look at the inclusion of corpus linguistics and also the so called idealized reader framework as developed by O'Halloran (2003).

Combining different methods is seen as ameliorating the reliability of one's results. The combination of CDA with corpus linguistic methods is particularly popular (e.g. Baker 2006, Partington/ Morley/ Haarman 2004, Morley/ Bayley 2009). The first and probably most significant contributions to this fusion of CDA and corpus linguistics came from Michael Stubbs (e.g. 1994, 1996), who tried to remedy CDA's weaknesses by supplying corpus based quantitative data. It is undeniable that corpus linguistics puts each analysis on a more secure footing not least due to the size of its sample. As Baker (2006: 12) notes, in corpus linguistics also the data selection is more objective than if only a few texts are analyzed. So this helps CDA to move away from impressionistic and unsystematic description of textual features.

It is also important to note that consonant results from different methods do not mean an increase in validity, only reliability (Marchi/ Taylor 2009: 6). Thus, it may be that a method can be used by different researchers to arrive at the same results, but the instrument might not be measuring what it is supposed to measure (on this problem see below). But the reliability may also be lower than assumed. Marchi and Taylor (2009) conducted a revealing quasi-experiment in which they tested whether two researchers will arrive at the same results by working with a combination of CDA and corpus linguistics. They started out with the same corpus, the same software and the same research question, namely: how do journalists talk about themselves in the media? Both had a similar academic background and during the research phase they even shared their literature on the subject, but they did not discuss the literature, nor their progress (2009: 7). Particularly striking was that they came to diametrically opposed results about the most basic question as to whether journalist tend to talk about themselves or whether not. "By looking at slightly different

things we started with different initial findings which partially implemented different paths and different interpretations” (ibid.: 9). There were convergent findings as well (ibid.:12), but the dissonant findings were not insignificant. Echoing Farmer et al. (2006), Marchi and Taylor (2009: 18) conclude that methodological triangulation can help, but it cannot remedy the underlying weaknesses, such as those of the theoretical underpinning. As I have shown in the course of this paper, there is no unified theoretical framework. So while it is beyond doubt that corpus linguistics can help to improve CDA, it cannot remedy the weaknesses of the theoretical underpinning.

There are also some problematic aspects that are directly taken over from corpus linguistics. I already addressed some of them, such as the detachment from co-text and context. There are yet other limitations that have to be kept in mind, for example that not everything can be investigated via a corpus, but only isolated features, which after all are selected by the analyst. Moreover, as Widdowson (2000b: 14) points out, in such an analysis priority is given to those forms that can be easily measured via the computer and also there are distinctions that the computer cannot make, thus flawing the analysis. What do we make, for example, of the past participle?

Although by now such a methodological triangulation was proposed by a number of CD analysts, there still seems to be a reluctance to make use of these new possibilities, perhaps because it would complicate fighting for the good cause. Here is one of Fairclough’s (2003: 6) arguments against it:

The sort of detailed text analysis I introduce is a form of ‘qualitative’ social analysis. It is rather ‘labour-intensive’ and can be productively applied to samples of research material rather than large bodies of text.

I am by no means arguing that corpus linguistics is a solution to all linguistic problems or that it can deliver objective data<sup>16</sup>, but as we have seen with the *flock* example (see section 4.3.3.3.), in some cases it would be better to back up the claims that are made by quantitative evidence. As a matter of fact, Fairclough himself makes use of corpora every once in a while (e.g. Fairclough 2000), but only, it seems, when it fits into his argumentation. There is no way around the inclusion of corpus linguistics in some kind, and there is nothing wrong with it, as long as the limitations are kept in mind. Referring

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<sup>16</sup> For a closer analysis of the shortcomings of corpus linguistics see Widdowson (2000a) and Hunston (2002).

again to Fairclough's three dimensional model of discourse, it can be asserted that corpus linguistics deals with the textual dimension, but cannot alone provide sufficient information on the discourse practice and social practice

The belief that corpus linguistics is the answer to all shortcomings of critical linguistics is still the legacy of the functional fallacy i.e. the belief that pragmatic significance can be read off from textual features, a weakness that critical linguistics has to struggle with since its very beginning. Consequently, computationally received data cannot be the only tool in discourse analysis. Consulting a corpus can increase the sample and also bring in more systematicity, but the problem is still that a textual analysis cannot tell us what effect a certain feature has. Jones (2007: 364) draws up an interesting analogy to CDA:

It would be a similar situation if I decided to judge the ideological worthiness of politicians by the clothes they wear. If I establish ideological correlations between clothing and ideological orientation (and draw up corresponding 'checklist' for the uninitiated to use) this does not mean that I have invented a new social science method – 'critical fashion analysis' – but that I have made a deliberate decision to give automatic priority and significance to certain, very particular, phenomena in my political assessments, in effect thereby tying my interpretative hands behind my back.

Here Jones puts his finger on a very weak spot of CDA, namely the deliberate assigning of significance to particular features and consulting a corpus cannot remedy this weakness. To speak with Widdowson (2000b: 16): "It is one thing to say that syntactic patterns semantically encode reality, but quite a different thing to say, as Stubbs does, that their pragmatic use does the same" (ibid.: 16). There are two possible options of solving this problem: either CD analysts account for multiple possible interpretations, or they put more emphasis on the processes of consumption and production. The latter could, for instance, be done by supplementing the textual analysis with ethnographic research. With regard to the study of press releases the work by Sleurs and Jacobs (2005) is an example of how this could be done. Of course such a procedure is probably unworkable for each analysis, but regarding consumption there is also another way to solve this problem, namely the ideal reader framework that was developed by O'Halloran (2003)<sup>17</sup>. He approaches the interpretation process (and thereby he focuses primarily on inference generation) of hard news texts from a cognitive perspective, whereby he takes into account the work in the area of cognition since the 1980-ies. By fusing evidence from psycholinguistics, cognitive

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<sup>17</sup> See pages 189-191 for a list of the basic processing principles that O'Halloran works with.

linguistics and connectionism, he creates his idealized reader framework which enables the analysts to make assumptions about the interpretation process based on empirical evidence. Working with this framework reduces the probability of over-interpretation and offers a more systematic procedure (ibid.: 3-4). This is not to say that this framework is to be seen as a replacement for SFL, but it can be used complementary, for SFL is focused on the level of text description and O'Halloran's model on the interpretation stage i.e. the two are concerned with two different dimensions of discourse.



## **7. Conclusion**

In this thesis I set out to answer the question whether CDA, which has probably become the most influential approach in the study of discourse, fulfills the basic standards of academic inquiry. Its proponents see it as a scientific theory and method, but as the discussion showed, it is neither of them. In the light of critical rationalism CDA is not a proper theory, for it can hardly deliver predictions that are in accordance to the principle of falsification. With this respect the most troubling issue is that CDA has set up effective strategies with which criticism is being obstructed. This works on the one hand by charging the discussion emotionally and on the other by eclecticism. The latter is present in the analysis itself, but also in the fusion of different theoretical resources. After tearing individual elements out of their genuine theoretical context, they are combined via a patchwork principle into a theory that is not prone to critique. Additionally, CDA primarily adapted those elements that are hardly accessible to testing and refutation, while disregarding those that were seen as too positivistic.

As far as the claim to be a scientific method is concerned, we need to return to two issues that I have addressed at the beginning of this paper, namely validity and reliability. In the argumentative part of the thesis it was claimed that CDA fails to meet the standards of validity, which can primarily be explained by the functional fallacy. The name CDA implies the examination of discourse, but in most of the cases it is in fact textual analysis that is being conducted. As a matter of fact, the only discourse that is investigated is the discourse of the researcher himself, not that of the average reader. In my analysis of press releases I went at great lengths to demonstrate that the method is weak on both, validity and reliability. Only because the method has huge deficits in these two areas, it was possible for me to adopt a completely unusual pretext and thereby to prove that even texts with a clear agenda such as press releases transmit ideology against their issuer. Another thing my analysis showed is that it is problematic to dissect the text from its context. By doing so, the researcher will never be able to reconstruct the discourse of the average reader, because this way of meaning generation does not correspond to that of an everyday consumer of the text. Usually readers do not first examine the textual features and afterwards connect it to the contextual factors. The reception process is much more complex und unsystematic. Context, for example, already channels our perception of the text into a certain direction. In the case of my analysis this means that the reader has

certain expectations to the genre of press releases. One of these expectations is that press releases are written in a way that positively depicts its issuers. This dissection from context enabled me to subject the texts to a pervert way of reading by taking the stance of a non-cooperative reader. This position is taken in each CD analysis. When Fairclough (1992), for example, reads pre-natal medical texts in order to investigate domination rather than to obtain information about pregnancy, he is also slipping into the role of a non-cooperative reader. But this is not the way these texts are read by non CD-analysts. A pregnant woman will not read the text the same way as the analyst and neither will the readers of the press releases I analyzed. The sole fact that with CDA's methodology I was able to subject the press releases to a way of reading that fitted the pretext I adopted shows that the discourse that is suggested in a CD analysis is only one among many and does not have to correspond to that of the lay-reader. Ergo, meaning cannot be read off from textual features. Therefore the most problematic step in a CD analysis is the drawing of conclusions about the actual effect of a language feature by means of interpretation. This stage will always be problematic and that is why the criticism uttered in this thesis applies to all branches of CDA, despite the fact that I focused on Fairclough's works. No matter how much resources are invested into a detailed contextualization of the material, the element of interpretation does not vanish. But the element of interpretation is not something that automatically invalidates an academic enterprise. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that there are multiple possible discourses. I cannot assert that my suggested reading of the press releases is enshrined in the text itself. For me the use of a nominalization or passivization may be troubling, for the agent is not named. For somebody else this may not be the case, because the agent might be present in his discourse without the explicit mentioning in the text. So if generalizations are made with this regard, they should be supported by empirical evidence from language cognition studies and not solely by the interpretation of one analyst.

These deficits about validity are also negatively affecting CDA's reliability. If the results are determined by the researcher's pretext and not by the text itself, then the text is not used to obtain new information, but only as a means of illustration i.e. analyses of different researchers will lead to different results since they are not investigating the same things. This divergence in results is enhanced by the lack of systematic and rigorous guidelines. Take, for instance, my investigation of the four press releases. Given the same texts and the

same toolkit for analysis, another researcher could obtain results that are diametrically opposed to mine. In the course of my analysis I pointed to a number of textual features and I suggested that these have negative effects on the depiction of the press releases' issuers. It is out of question that these grammatical and lexical features are in the text, but the problem is that in the course of selecting these features I was not bound to any ex ante defined procedures, which means that it was possible for me to describe those features that supported my preconceived interpretation and it was also possible to set those into relation to any other feature I believed to be significant. Consequently, the other researcher could focus on different aspects, which then would lead to a different outcome. Hence, if CDA is a method as some claim (e.g. Fairclough 1995b: 1), then it is an extremely unreliable method.

But despite the failure to deliver valid and reliable results, the most dangerous element of CDA is the disguise of interpretation as analysis in combination with the immunization against critique. It is not sufficient to legitimize scientific inquiry as such only by referring to the researcher's expertise in a certain area, because CDA representatives are right in one thing: no scientist can approach a subject without any background knowledge and opinion, especially when the areas of inquiry are as emotionally loaded as those investigated by CDA (e.g. language, politics). There are divergent points of view and in order to have reasonable discussions that can lead to scientific progress, it is important to open one's arguments up for criticism.

Of course CDA's proponents might argue that there is no need to engage in this kind of scientific discussion, since the goal justifies the means, but history has taught us that science can easily be misused if the ideal of objectivity is disregarded. Prominent examples include things such as race theory in the pre WWII era, which paved the way for terrible events. At this point Silverman (2001: 221) sees a major flaw of critical science:

To assume that emancipation is the goal of research conflates yet again 'fact' and 'value'. How research is used is a value-laden, political question. To my mind, the first goal of scientific research is valid knowledge. To claim otherwise is to make an alliance with an awful dynasty that includes 'Aryan science' under the Nazis, and 'socialist science' under Stalin.

At the same time it is naïve to believe that researchers will be critical towards their own work (not even Popper, the godfather of falsificationism, was willing to question his own theories). Each scientist has his own pretext and motives, which are hard to reconcile with

balanced research. Doubt and mistrust are major constituents of the academic world, but CDA is rendering them impossible. Skepticism and criticism are often only fostered in those directions that suit the critical enterprise. This is achieved by blurring the borders between different systems such as politics, morality and science. But science is science because it has rules that other systems do not have. Giving up these rules means giving up the privileged position of scientific research. It is not per se wrong to include political or moral considerations into the academic work, but when these aspects gain the upper hand and research is degraded to a tool for political activism it is indeed troubling. In the end I briefly presented two ways that I find the most promising of improving CDA as a method. However, they can only be effective if changes are made within the theoretical basis. It is only then that other methods such as corpus linguistics can realize their whole potential within CDA.

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## 9. Appendix

### **Abstract (English)**

This thesis is an exploration of the scientific value of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA's interdisciplinary popularity is continuously growing and it is symptomatic for the rise of the critical paradigm in linguistics, thus making it necessary to ask whether CDA fulfills the criteria to be regarded as a scientific theory and method. Following critical rationalism the major criterion for the assessment of its value as a theory is the degree of its falsifiability. CDA's value as a method, on the other hand, is determined by the criteria of validity and reliability. The paper is composed of an argumentative and an analytic part. The former primarily depicts the two strategies with which critique is obstructed in CDA. First, the emancipatory goal is used to background rationality. Secondly, multiple theoretical resources are fused, whereby each of them is torn out of its original theoretical environment. It is discussed how - fueled by a critical perspective - isolated elements from sociology, the study of literature and linguistic are combined via a patchwork principle to make CDA immune to criticism. The argumentative part also addresses the weaknesses concerning validity, which are largely a result of the belief that pragmatic meaning can be read off from textual features. In the analytic part, which consists of a case study of different press releases, it is shown that CDA also has to struggle with low reliability. Starting out with Fairclough's three dimensional model for analyzing discourse, press releases in a controversy are read against their grain. It is shown that they convey ideology against the issuer, thereby demonstrating that it is possible to substantiate any preconceived interpretation by using the tools that CDA provides. The results of a CD analysis are not as dependant on the text, as they are on the researcher's pretext. Meanings are read into the text, not off it and this is why in fact it is interpretation and not analysis that is taking place under the label CDA. Eventually, some possibilities of remedying CDA's weaknesses such as the inclusion of corpus linguistics are briefly presented and evaluated.

### **Abstract (German)**

Diese Arbeit ist eine Untersuchung des wissenschaftlichen Wertes der Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Die CDA erfreut sich steigender interdisziplinäre Popularität und ist symptomatisch für den Aufstieg des kritischen Paradigmas in der Linguistik, weshalb es notwendig wird zu fragen ob die CDA die Kriterien einer wissenschaftliche Theorie und Methode erfüllt. In Anlehnung an den kritischen Rationalismus gilt in dieser Arbeit der Grad der Widerlegbarkeit als Hauptkriterium zur Beurteilung der Brauchbarkeit als Theorie. CDAs Wert als Methode wird anhand der Kriterien Validität und Reliabilität gemessen. Die Arbeit besteht aus einem argumentativen und einem analytischen Teil. Ersterer beschreibt zwei Strategien mit denen Kritik verhindert wird. Als erste Strategie gilt der Gebrauch des emanzipatorischen Ziels um die Rationalität dem moralischen Appel unterzuordnen. Zweitens werden verschiedene theoretische Ressourcen fusioniert, wobei diese aus ihrem ursprünglichen Kontext herausgerissen werden. Es wird gezeigt wie - angetrieben durch die kritische Perspektive - isolierte Elemente aus der Soziologie, der Literaturwissenschaft und der Linguistik mittels eines Patchwork Prinzips kombiniert werden um die CDA gegen Kritik zu immunisieren. Im argumentativen Teil werden auch die Schwächen bezüglich der Validität angesprochen, die größtenteils auf der Annahme basieren, dass pragmatische Bedeutung von textlichen Merkmalen abgelesen werden kann. Im analytischen Teil, einem Fallbeispiel bei dem verschiedene Presseaussendungen untersucht werden, wird gezeigt, dass die CDA auch Defizite im Bereich der Reliabilität aufweist. Ausgehend von Faircloughs dreidimensionalem Modell zur Diskursanalyse werden Presseaussendungen zu einer öffentlichen Debatte gegen den Strich gelesen. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Presstexte Ideologie gegen ihren Auftraggeber transportieren, wobei bewiesen wird, dass es mit den Werkzeugen der CDA möglich ist jegliche vorgefasste Interpretation mit textlichen Merkmalen zu untermauern. Daher sind die Resultate einer CD Analyse nicht so sehr abhängig vom Text, sondern vielmehr von der Position und Intention des Forschers. Bedeutung wird in den Text hineingelesen, nicht vom Text abgelesen und daher ist es de facto Interpretation und nicht Analyse die unter der Bezeichnung CDA stattfindet. Zuletzt werden Mittel präsentiert und evaluiert die zur Beseitigung der Schwächen der CDA genutzt werden können, wie etwa die Einbeziehung der Korpuslinguistik.

## Curriculum Vitae

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### Education

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