Pablo Lafarga Ostáriz

University of Zaragoza

Dr Rebeca Soler Costa

University of Zaragoza

An interpretative research in the didactic process: critical discourse analysis

Badanie interpretacyjne w procesie dydaktycznym: krytyczna analiza dyskursu

Abstract

Roughly speaking, the didactic interaction assumed in any teaching-learning process necessarily needs an internal comprehension and decoding process by the students. Particularly, whenever a teacher develops any teaching process he/she establishes a channel, a code, a system that makes possible communication. In this sense, the language used in the didactic processes is relevant to be analysed as far as it highly contributes to the students' learning process and enhance to achieve quality and effectiveness. More precisely, the study of language and variety of speech used in education is an area that has aroused great interest and has continued to be studied since the mid twentieth century. In this research we will examine the current theoretical framework and the findings of relevant authors to keep on with the analysis of the language of didactic interaction. Thus, we will restrict our attention to general uses rather than on the analysis of the different linguistic levels. In this paper we will analyse how we use language when teaching, what meanings we convey and how communication is reached in the didactic interaction process.

Keywords: teaching process, critical discourse analysis, syllabus design, classroom language, didactic interaction, school organization.

Streszczenie

Interakcje dydaktyczne podejmowane w każdym procesie nauczania-uczenia się wymagają od ucznia wewnętrznego rozumienia i umiejętności dekodowania. Gdy nauczyciel rozpoczyna proces nauczania, tworzy swego rodzaju kanał, kod, system, który sprawia, że komunikacja jest możliwa. Język używany w procesie dydaktycznym należy analizować, ponieważ wpływa on na ten proces, wzmacnia osiąganą jakość i efektywność. Język oraz różnorodność mowy używanej w edukacji są zagadnieniami, które wzbudzają duże zainteresowanie, a prace nad ich poznaniem trwają od połowy XX w. W pracy zaprezentowano obecne ramy teoretyczne i istotne odkrycia badaczy, aby następnie przeprowadzić analizę języka w interakcjach dydaktycznych. Większą uwagę skupiono na ogólnym użyciu języka niż na analizie różnych poziomów językowych. Autorzy pokazali, w jaki sposób używany jest język podczas nauczania, jaka jest jego rola i jak realizować komunikację w procesie dydaktycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: proces nauczania, krytyczna analiza dyskursu, projektowanie sylabusa, język klasy szkolnej, interakcje dydaktyczne, organizacja szkoły.

Growth and decay of communication: the didactic interaction

The recent implementation in the university of professionalizing Masters has meant a considerable increase in the interest of students towards the study of the different subjects in order to improve their expertise. Obviously, this has led to the expansion of new vocabulary to represent new meanings and needs derived from the socio educative context. In fact, due to the emergence of the new theory of governance of the education systems, there is a need to analyse the changes between the State, the economy and the society. In this globalized world, language is the instrumental means to approach and expand knowledge and it requires a deep analysis to understand it. Moreover, the coaching theory aims to promote the internationalization by fostering the participation of the different stakeholders. No doubt, in order to understand and be able to introduce the new changes proposed by Brussels it is indispensable to analyse how stakeholders use language and how consequently teachers introduce the new terms along the different didactic processes.

More precisely, restricting our attention to Ryle we observe the need to create rules of Pedagogy in order to clarify the semantic meaning of words, which, although most of them belong to the vocabulary of the common language, when they are used in the discipline of Education Sciences they have a specific meaning[1]. Broudy[2] indicates the need for linguistic analysis that can account for the educational purposes that are specified in the text field. Pedagogical discourse has been discussed in Anglo-Saxon countries since the sixties with the contributions of Scheffler[3], Peters[4], Kneller[5], Smith and Ennis[6] and Edel[7].

Scholars have not been interested in observing how a term is trivialised or specialized in the semantic level, but rather in analysing language as a vehicle of transmitting information when teaching situations. However, the motivations in this field of study today go much further. The discipline of Education has spread and, consequently, its language has become universal: new terms are created, meanings in common language are diverted in the educational context with restrictive features, specialized databases multiply, etc.

This is due to the constant processes of change taking place in both the workplace and in the university, due to various causes such as; globalization, the introduction

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[1] G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind,* London, Hutchinson 1949.

[2] H.S. Broudy, *The role of analysis in educational philosophy*, "Educational Theory', XII: 261–269, 1964.

[3] I. Scheffler, *The Language of Education*, Illinois, Springfield 1960.

[4] R.S. Peters, *Etics and Education*, Londres, Allen and Unwin 1966.

[5] G.F. Kneller, *La lógica y el lenguaje de la educación,* Buenos Aires, El Ateneo 1969.

[6] O. Smith & R.H. Ennis, *Lenguaje y conceptos en educación*, Buenos Aires, El Ateneo 1971.

[7] A. Edel, *Analytic philosophy of education at the crossroad*, "Educational Theory", XXII: 131–153, 1972.

of new information and communication technologies, mobility of students, diversi-fication, etc. A comprehensive education, inclusive and conducive to the student's standardized integration at work according to their interests and abilities should be provided.

An overview of critical discourse analysis in Pedagogy

Undoubtedly, a distinction may be made in the process of globalization that characterizes the XXI century between two aspects that drive the development and specialization of language in the field of Educational Sciences. First, it is modified and updated in the school with the implementation of educational reforms by the government. Not only do they standardize the educational discourse, but they also introduce specific terminology: educational innovations require terms to express these reference values.

Considering this issues, we may state this causes the creation of new terms or results in the meaning of existing words in the language being deviated and applied in the educational context: "Since education is considered a good for investment, consistent with economic theories of "human capital": "Governments and inter-national agencies have planned reforms involving increased standardization of didactic terminology[8]". It causes changes in the educational system and introduces terminology that is more in line with the professional career.

The emphasis is on balancing higher education alongside the training needs. This means designing a new educational system that adapts to new labour demands. We are therefore faced with a new reality that requires tools that can promote a profound process of change with regard to planning, strategies and curricula in education. These educational changes will have consequences upon terminology; institutions, schools and universities, are forced to implement an educational system that is in tune with student-centred learning and the achievement of professional competences. At the same time they should endow with a system of accreditation and harmonization in line with these principles.

As it is well-known, school and university have undergone changes to adapt to new social and political demands. Their language has been adapted to describe new realities. For some authors, the terminology changes in education cannot be understood as belonging to a specific branch of knowledge, but rather as a "derived language" or "lost language", established by reference needs but unable to act as the backbone skeleton of knowledge "[...] to its unique interdisciplinary status and influence in the education of ideological and political factors".

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[8] A. Bernat, *La reforma educativa como lenguaje vacío. Actas del VIII Congreso de Lenguajes Naturales y Lenguajes Artificiales*, 197–204, 1992.

Another factor which, according to Bernat, contributes to undermining the status of language pedagogy as scientific is its strong semantic vagueness: "the vagueness of many expressions, the use and abuse of certain terms, -for example, assessment and counselling-, the existence of phenomena of characterization, the kidnapping of words by academic and political groups as well as the creation of inchratyc languages". Roughly speaking, the language of the field of Education Sciences (Pedagogy) consists of words taken from the vocabulary of general language and specific terms of the scientific discipline. This mixture at the lexical level is a "threshold level" which refers to general referential realities and other specific fields of expertise of Pedagogy. It draws on the lexical and semantic variety offered by the general language system and is complemented by other terminology units consisting of procedures of word formation (morphology), expressions (syntax) and changes in meaning (semantics).

Particularly, the words of general language are usually specific and are then used in the language of education in a narrow sense. The opposite effect also happens: terms which, even though they are ascribed within the lexicon of Pedagogy paradigm, they become used in general language. The "popularisations" or specialisations[9] which the voices in this ESP acquire show degrees of semantic indeterminacy that makes communication between specialists or between specialists and non-specialists more complex. Bernat considers the language of education reform is an empty, void language. He claims that reform, as it happened with the implementation of educational laws, introduces terminology borrowed from other fields (in this case, constructivist psychology) and theories of curriculum and pedagogics associated with the history of the Spanish active school, as well as old terms in the language of Pedagogy.

However, despite a mix of general language words that enable communication, on the one hand, and on the other hand, terminology of educational sciences and related fields that convey concepts characteristic of the discipline, this language is still a form of linguistic activity, a means of communication, with official documentation of the psychological and educational spheres, with legislation, which will be distributed in magazines, but without clear borders between science and popularised versions and even with semantic contradictions in educational practice.

No doubt, due to this lack of specific terminology and univocal relations in linguistic signs, the pedagogical discourse legitimizes the educational system through the use of certain terms (implemented by educational legislation): metaphors, concepts, omission of specific words, development of positiviser or pejorative meanings, etc. This does not mean that teachers do not yearn to have a specialized

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[9] R. Soler, P. Lafarga & M. Ramos, *La Competencia Digital de docentes en formación en un contexto educativo de innovación tecnológica*. In Hinojo F.J., Aznar I. & Cáceres Mª.P. (eds), *Avances en recursos TIC e innovación educativa*, 152–161, Madrid, Dykinson, 2019.

language with idiosyncratic meaning, specialized and neither restricted nor expanded from the vocabulary of the common language. It often happens that when a specialist says, *A teacher is educating in class*, this can be interpreted in very different ways. The verb can mean *teaching*, *conditioning*, *indoctrinating*, *training*, *instructing*, etc.[10] Authors such as Bernat analyse this language not only in the context of education, but education legislation that was then in force (Act on the General Education System, 1990), and relate trends in the use of terms with pedagogical lines reference.

Focusing our attention back in the 90s there were two pedagogical discourses: the "active pedagogy movement" and the "official-reformist discourse"[11]. This analysis allows us to locate the terms in the theoretical framework of the time and proceed with a semantic analysis that shows the deviations in the direction of the voices in terms of membership of a theoretical school and it is interdisciplinary. The educational elements characteristic of each movement builds educational discourse reminding the reader of the starting theoretical position and encouraging the use of specific terms. Following Bernat, the main themes of his speech are: optimism expressed in his apologetic for change and belief in the idea of unlimited and good progress; a totalizing conception of reform, because outside pedagogical salvation is not conceived of; ideological syncretism euphemism and expressive pedagogies or interest in methods to the detriment of contents; psychologism, etc.

It also implies a critique of previous theoretical models (the humanist) with the corresponding contempt of previous lexical units which are replaced by new terms and reflect the ideas of the two educational movements of the 1990 reform: [...] underestimation of the effort, the disappearance the teacher as a role model to be imitated (he is no longer asked to embody the values that he has to transmit, he is perceived like a reflective technician that makes "decisions" about media, resources, etc.), the devaluation of the contents, replacing the figure of the student by that of the child, the devaluation of quality for quantity and, finally, the disappearance of learning as a process of initiation[12].

Discussion and conclusions

Even more, the construction of educational discourse with the impregnation of terms explicitly reflects the theoretical postulates of the legislation and trends. Bernat believes that a language without a discourse of its own that resorts to tautologies,

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[10] J.Mª. Esteve, *Lenguaje educativo y teorías pedagógicas*, Madrid, Anaya 1979.

[11] A. Bernat, *La reforma educativa como lenguaje vacío. Actas del VIII Congreso de Lenguajes Naturales y Lenguajes Artificiales*, 197–204, 1992.

[12] R. Yin, *Case study research. Design and methods. Applied social research methods series*, Newbury Park CA, Sage 1994.

instead of proceeding to collect the creations of terms meaning to be transmitted and which can be contrasted with the reality of education to observe the true meaning and not the one which is anchored in legislation.

Similarly, a proliferation of slogans and phrases that do not specify educational practice and which are but "beautiful words": "The current educational reform appropriates elements from different discourses without, in my view, composing its own, despite having been attempted in the preamble to the LOGSE, which exceeds three pages of the Official Bulletin of the State".

To these rhetorical strategies which, rather than introducing changes that improve the education system, insist upon educational theoretical conceptions away from the real educational context and its possibilities and justifications are made on the grounds of political and social trends, with attendance consequences involved in teaching, important "semantic abuse" are joined (Ibid.).

Note as an example, Bernat notes the excessive use of the word autonomy: [...] becomes a value repeatedly stated: professional autonomy (GG12 and 59), autonomy of the centre, capable to define its own "identity" (GG49 and PC 8-10) or to develop the curriculum and to choose teaching techniques and resources (GG, 77). The attainment of autonomy is an important educational goal (OD9 and 22). Its recognition as a chance to "make decisions" in many different fields is constant: use of curriculum materials (GG 56), development of educational projects, curricular (GG, 57), and curricular adaptations (AC, 27).

The terms "autonomy" and "decision making" are repeatedly written in all texts relating to the reform. Even mentions are found of the possibility of a "free" reading of the objectives from the educational period (PC, 27). And professional autonomy, centred around the teaching team and of the professor is a value that undoubtedly attracts consensus. However, if we contrast these with other expressions used in the same speech, and also that do not become manifest, we conclude that the appeal to autonomy constitutes an "abuse".

The margin of autonomy is a very narrow range when taking into account three elements. The first is the coercive value of textbooks [...]. The second element is the imposition of a curriculum development model that implies a certain psycho-pedagogic choice, constructivism [...]. The third element is the setting of curriculum development project to a structure type [...]. The abuse of the concept of autonomy is manifested even in the existing paradox between the claim of freedom of the teacher and the catechetical character with which the administration is communicating with teachers[13].

Not only are overused those terms that legitimize the pretexts of the educational Acts. The voices and expressions have an opaque meaning which is more confusing

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[13] J.R. Soler, *La participación social en la construcción de la democracia, reto consustancial a la formación a lo largo de la vida*, Madrid, Tornapunta 2009.

than helpful. The LOGSE (1990) insisted especially on the development of learning by discovery in students. This expression is a learning guided expression that leads the student to acquire new knowledge from the previous ones which he has acquired with a plan of teaching and learning activities that allow him to reach new goals.

As stated by Bernat (1992), they are newly created tautologies to show that progress has been made scientifically, but they merely represent methodological principles that already existed with a different term or expression: The constructivist learning option leads us to important semantic problems: To what extent is correct the contrast between "significant" and "rote" learning? The condemnation of the latter, together with the preference for the procedures, – the "knowing how"–, to the detriment of content – knowing 'what'– implies a choice with important pedagogical, cultural and social consequences [...] The tendency to reify the concept relationship by using concept maps, graphically bi-dimensionally represented, does it not impoverish the meaning of words by ignoring the natural vagueness of the terms used, especially in the Social Sciences?

The semantic vagueness of the terms of any language of expertise is unquestionable. Although the context and the co-text determine the possible meaning of a voice, semantic vagueness can always be generated. The referential extension of the terms, as a result of a lack of precision in their semantic features, allows different interpretations to surface. Sometimes the elements that are combined in the phrase, in the case of expressions, will help establish semems and specific features of semantic restrictions that distort the imprecision, but, in other cases, the meaning of the voices will be violated by the intervention of the speakers (specialists and non-specialists) and by the specialized context.

The referential vagueness of most of the terms of the language of Pedagogy[14] responds to the symbiosis that is generated by the combination in educational discourses of general language words and scientific terms of the discipline or of intra-linguistic loans. Often some of these terms are associated with icons or images that represent, without explicitly using literary tropes, concepts. For example, Bernat notes the presence of voices associated with architectural concepts, such as "construction, internal consistency, stability, up and down scale or dimension, transversely, the degrees, level of detail, and so on".

The legislative text is based on the tenets of constructivist psychology and the words of its speech so show: [...] learning is built, knowledge is capable of outlining, of rendering into cognitive mapping, degrees and sequences of learning can be established, meanings are built [...] the "well ordered" architectural design emerges from the following levels: organizational and didactic (cycles, levels, curriculum developed at different levels, coping or adaptation mechanisms, eclectic

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[14] R. Soler, *El poder de las palabras: un análisis del lenguaje pedagógico*, Zaragoza, Mira Editores 2015.

evaluation, etc.), psychological (constructivist psychology) and ethical and social (school constructed socially and morally[15]).

As we have seen, the political and social ideology that permeates the text of the educational reform of 1990 determines the presence and extension of terms associated with the current in force in that decade (constructivism), strengthening the control system especially the ideological part, and stratifying the support groups and figures of educational administration: As a nearly semi-perfect image has been set, authors and advocates of reform take as legitimate the expectation of a favourable consensus [...] This justifies also the emergence of a parasitic series of figures of the administrative system. For example, program managers, technical advisors of innovation and of training, the trainee trainers, etc... may be perceived as new holy figures of the terminology reform.

Bernat suggests these are configured as a professional constellation of groups and persons appearing as a political necessity, with the explicit aim to foster innovative processes and to support school teaching, but with the un-confessed purpose of ensuring reform itself, exercising the ideological control of its implementation, primarily through the semantic control. Factors that for this author help to empty out the meaning of the words are: "hipertelia", the abusive tendency to define operationally important concepts "disactivation" and "intransitivity". For example, the term evaluation is defined by means of operations that are used to measure it or by the results obtained.

Undoubtedly, the expansion and new creation of terms in each of the different educational legislations is but an index of an infinite semantic vagueness, lack of attribution of specific objectives that address loopholes in the texts. All this is masked with a terminology that aims to say new things, like overcoming what came before, but the true meaning must be found elsewhere, by association with other current psychological, educational, trends, etc. From a pragmatic point of view, we see that many terms used in documents of the reform say nothing. What they mean has to be looked into elsewhere. That language is empty does not mean that the implementation of the reform will not produce effective organizational change and learning. However, meaning is slightly different and implies a deep comprehension of the whole didactic interaction process. In fact, restricting our attention to the field of Education Sciences, more particularly to Pedagogy, one may argue what are the relations with other disciplines based on pragmatics. What is true is that Pedagogy has its own language as a scientific discipline and its vocabulary emerges from the macro-political level of school organization and from the influence of stakeholders' prescriptions.

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[15] J.R. Soler, *Estado actual y estrategias para futuribles de la formación a lo largo de la vida, Libro de Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de Formación para el Trabajo*, 369–379, Zaragoza, Editorial Tornapunta Ediciones 2013.

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