Merja de Mattos-Parreira
Universidade do Algarve

Some of the snags of interdisciplinarity:
from *life forms* into *form of life* studies

> For students of language it seems to me that the most important theme to emerge in this half century has been semiotics: any phenomenon investigated from the standpoint of what it means – anything considered as information, if you prefer. Not everyone likes the associations of this term – I myself do not accept the implication that the study of meaning must be grounded in some theory of the sign. But it serves to make explicit the perspective that some of us try to adopt, not only towards language but many other human activities as well.
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> M.A.K. Halliday, "New ways of analysing meaning", 1992: 61-62

In this paper I look at some central problems, which have been puzzling me in my PhD research, when applying an interdisciplinary approach to *data*. My thesis is about the reader's identity construction in the English-language newspapers in Portugal, about the expatriates' textual positions in these newspapers.

The theoretical framework I refer to is part of the wider and heterogeneous field of critical language analysis – a combination of linguistic and social analysis. This differs from many other forms of linguistic analysis because it studies language as a social practice that mediates reality.

In critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is more linguistically oriented, language use is considered along the dimensions of text, discursive practice and social practice. Text analysis focuses on formal properties of texts (lexico-grammar, cohesion, text structure), whereas the analysis of discursive practice focuses on the production, consumption and distribution of the discourse under study, that is, the interactional relationship between the text and the reader through genre expectations. The analysis of social practice moves onto an even more general sphere: it is concerned with the study of the political contexts of discursive events along with their ideological effects and contributions to social change in the reading community. Social practice is intermediated by intertextual analysis. Every text is itself the intertext of another text, and cannot be identified with an origin or source[1].

A text establishes a dialogue with other texts in other historical moments. An essential link in this dialogue is the reader, "who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the

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[1] "We know that a text is not a line releasing a single "theological" meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture". (Barthes, 1977: 146)

written text is constituted" (Barthes, 1977: 148). The concept of discourse itself is thoroughly intertextual: whether it is defined as a way of conceptualising some particular area of social reality from a particular perspective or as consisting of typical patterns of language use related to some specific social situation, it conveys the idea that instances of language use are always part of some larger picture and their interpretation matters crucially the way they fit in it. In short, this linguistic framework studies not only textual form, but also how texts are part of different social contexts.

On the other hand, in socially-oriented analysis, the representatives of critical social theory, (CST) – I am mainly concentrating on Anthony Giddens and Jurgen Habermas – build ways of viewing structures, rules, mechanisms and powers, which, through language, construe social and personal identities.

I am puzzled by the following:

i.   How should the parameters, which constitute the adequate social and political analysis, be defined (i.e. social analysis as primary)?

ii.   How can the actual instances of language use be most appropriately related to their social and political contexts (i.e. linguistic analysis as primary)?

The first problem seems more common in analyses coming from the field of social sciences. That is, the social scientist may be wanting to do CDA, and actually lacking any systematic linguistic analysis; there is plenty of evidence that this is a frequent problem in CDA applications[2]. After all, CDA is supposed to be linguistically oriented, as opposed to the discourse analysis done within social sciences. Norman Fairclough (1992) uses the term TODA, i.e. 'text-oriented discourse analysis', arguing for analyses that are firmly and concretely anchored in actual texts.

But since I have a linguistic (mainly systemic functional) viewpoint, my central concern is the second question: how to avoid the snag of linguistic description becoming an end in itself rather than serving a purpose? How to avoid the role of detailed linguistic analysis of gaining prominence to the point where the analyst loses sight of what she is trying to show with the analysis about the real social context?

In short, the fundamental challenge in applying both linguistic and social analysis is how to reach a balance between the two, the social and the linguistic. From this point of view, I cannot start from a problem setting that is purely linguistic in nature, without any recourse to social reasons why a given linguistic phenomenon might be interesting to look at. That is, I cannot simply pick a feature and some data and only then think of what kinds of social considerations the study might resonate with. The research needs to start with some idea relating to the social uses of that feature. For instance, deciding which linguistic phenomenon to look at and the kind of data to be used does not yet constitute a proper social-linguistic research

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[2] My central concern here is to define my own present working model rather than to criticise the work done by others.

frame. What are needed are assumptions around why these features are interesting or relevant in a particular social context, in the way they construct particular social relations.

Connected to the lack of social justification and the primacy of linguistic considerations is also the assumption that the research process is a linear and ordered process in which one can proceed neatly from systematic linguistic analysis (which is itself an ordered process) to interpretation. This assumption obscures the fact that any discourse analysis should involve a constant interplay between different levels of analysis; linguistic analysis should be guided by the analyst's insights into the social context in the same way as the insights gained into the data through linguistic analysis influence one's perception of the social context. All analysis necessarily involves a degree of interpretation. This of course transforms research into a rather confusing, reflexive and recursive process in which hypotheses are continually developed and tested and rejected, based on information gathered when moving from one level to another.

My attempt to reach a balance between different disciplinary orientations is based on *thematic approach*. That is, instead of interdisciplinarity I propose to view my material from the perspective of *reader's identity construction*. The solution I came up with is no invention of mine; it has a genealogy that I will discuss briefly here.

A discipline is traditionally defined according to its content, according to the subject matter under investigation. The study of *life forms*, for example, is the scope of the discipline of biology, which, on its turn, divides into sub disciplines like botany, zoology, marine biology, and which each split into more and more specific taxonomies.

In language studies we have accepted for some time that studying a language involves more than the content of just one discipline. For instance, our present academic language courses contain disciplines from the fields of culture, history, and literature as well as of linguistics. Our purpose has been to construct links between the various "sister" disciplines in order to achieve an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary practice of language study.

The terms interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary seem to suggest, however, that the centre of intellectual activity continues to be the disciplines themselves. The possible alternative seems to be to replace the disciplines as the intellectual locus and focus, and this way, provide new forms of practice which are in the first place thematic rather than disciplinary in their orientation. Michael Halliday writes about the importance of the complementarity of different, conflicting themes, that of learning and that of meaning, in the domain of language teaching:

> Our practice as language teachers depends more on our being able to adopt the complementary perspectives of two conflicting themes, that of 'learning' and that of 'meaning', than on putting together pieces from linguistics with pieces from psychology and sociology. The reason learning a foreign language can be so extraordinarily difficult for an adolescent or adult who has not grown up multilingual is that there is a real-life contradiction between these two modes of processing a language: that of learning it for future use, and that of using it. They can no longer both learn language and 'mean it' at the same time. The teacher cannot resolve this contradiction, but has somehow to transform it from a constraint into a condition which enables, and even enforces, the learning process.
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> Halliday, 1992:61

Thematic analysis, then, does not focus upon disciplinary contents, it is rather defined by aspect, point of view or perspective. Mathematics, as Halliday (1992) has pointed out, is the earliest and most flagrant representative of thematic orientation in European scholarship; the act of doing mathematics (for instance measuring an item) creates the disciplinary content of mathematics, since numbers or triangles are 'mere' ideal objects. In this same sense, theme can also be taken as the underlying concern of the twentieth century structuralism. To study an event from the structural perspective is to juxtapose the opposing and complementary elements of a phenomenon, to see how these elements organise themselves in relation to each other and simultaneously hold together as a whole, in order to construct the structural 'macrotheme' of a particular item under study.

This motivation to consider disciplines as separate, autonomous and self-contained fields of knowledge can be traced back to the early modernity. Richard Lanham in *The electronic world* (1993) offers us a comprehensive conversation on the historical changes in the field of rhetoric since the classical period. His underlying concern is to show the way modernity's humanistic research, founded on neo-Platonism and Cartesian reason, gradually subjugated to the modern scientific model of inquiry.

Formal rhetoric, in Lanham's theory[3], is an information system based on the equality of style (or "form") and argument ("content"). Modernity's notion of systems is Platonic philosophy on the one hand and physics[4] on the other. What Plato wanted to exile from his Republic was style, the "know-how to play things with words". Rhetoric, however, functions as a counter-system to the Platonic political order by accepting stylistic and ornamental features as foundational characteristics of human discursive world. Hence politics – and ultimately the complex human reason – is both about ideas and the way they are transmitted, independently whether you decide to call the decorous aspect persuasion or even manipulation.

The renaissance rhetorician Peter Ramus (original 1549, translated 1986) reduced the classical five equal parts of the previously all-encompassing activity of rhetoric into two distinct divisions, those of philosophy (consisting of invention, argument, arrangement) and rhetoric (style and delivery together):

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[3] Theory is actually rhetorical practice, and the most obvious areas of rhetoric's reemergence "banished during the Newtonian interlude in Western thinking" (Lanham, 1993: 56) are, according to Lanham, the contemporary literary theory and the movement from physics-based system to a biological one as an instrument for reflecting upon dynamic processes, i.e. a movement from "closed" to "open" systems. In broad terms, I would add to the above two systemic functional linguistics as a contemporary representative of classical rhetoric analysis.

[4] "A mature physicist, acquainting himself for the first time with the problems of biology, is puzzled by the circumstance that there are no "absolute phenomena" in biology. Everything is time-bound and space-bound. The animal or plant or micro-organism he is working with is but a link in an evolutionary chain of changing forms, none of which has any permanent validity." (Max Delbruck, quoted by Lanham, 1993: 56)

There are two universal, general gifts bestowed by nature upon man, Reason and Speech; dialectic is the theory of the former, grammar and rhetoric of the latter.

<div align="right">Ramus, 1986: 86</div>

Ramus initiated the process, through which rhetoric and grammar gradually became mere cosmetic arts, reduced to style and delivery. Reason (thought or facts) broke free of speech and style, and the spheres of "content" and "form" became separate. From then on, philosophy and rhetoric were to be taken as the two great opposites of the Western modernity. In addition, by dividing rhetoric and philosophy into separate self-sufficient disciplines, *value-making* became limited only to the specific philosophical sub-department of ethics (obviously subordinated to religion), and the boundaries of disciplinary questioning were established into divisions, divisions that later transformed into modern academic disciplines. This separation into "essence" and "ornament" also marks the rise of the "belief" in the neutral, objective language of the Western modern science. By splitting rhetoric into two opposing domains, Ramus operated a paradigm shift to the conception of language as value-free and transparent, and which ultimately justified the scientific worldview of modernity. Richard Lanham puts it into the following words:

Value-free language and the possibility of a self-contained discipline make possible both modern science and that mapping of humanistic inquiry onto a scientific model which has created modern social science as well. And they create a concomitant problem (…) characteristic of our time: they render problematic the relation of thought to action. Thought now had its own disciplinary arena. Knowing could now be a self-enclosed activity all by itself, pursued "for its own sake", a claim that simply makes no sense in the rhetorical paideia, tied as it was to public action.

<div align="right">Lanham, 1993: 158</div>

Lanham is obviously arguing from a post-Wittgensteinian perspective, at least in two aspects. First of all, that the notion of thinking is linked to potential behaviour rather than to any inner goings-on. Thinking, accordingly, is not an activity I simply perform with the brain, since my brain is not an organ over which I have control; it is rather a voluntary exercise of an acquired mental capacity, just as swimming is an exercise of an acquired physical capacity. The different stages of thought-process are better shown by pointing out the differences between thinking and physical activities:

Thinking is not an incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking, and which it would be possible to detach from speaking, rather as the Devil took the shadow of Schlemiehl from the ground. – But how "not an incorporeal process"? Am I acquainted with incorporeal processes, then, only thinking is not one of them? No; I called the expression "an incorporeal process" to my aid in my embarrassment when I was trying to explain the meaning of the word "thinking" in a primitive way.

<div align="right">Wittgenstein, 1997: 109e</div>

Secondly, Wittgenstein's expression of the *impossibility of private language*, the relationship between the inner mental and external behaviour is at stake in Lanham's argument. The notion of private language presupposes a general conception of language, and Wittgenstein considers language an activity guided by grammatical rules. Grammatical rules stand for communicable rules of public language. Rules are standards of correctness, and in order a word like "pain" to represent a specific kind of sensation, we need to see how it is to be used in a specific context. In private language no such standard of correctness could be applied, and words would be meaningless. Thus the possibility of private language, tacitly presupposed in the line of modern philosophy from Descartes through classical British empiricism and Kantianism to contemporary cognitive representationalism, is rejected in Wittgenstein's writing:

> And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.

> Wittgenstein, 1997: 81e

Consequently, my present thematic language analysis of reader's textual identity construction seeks to systemise meaning potential, in the context of specific types of social activities, of the so-called speech genres. This meaning potential derives from the systematic forms of the grammar we all share with each other. What divides us from each other are the choices we make inside this powerhouse of grammar. For example, what are the processes that make one social group, through linguistic options within the grammar, become oppressive in relation to another one. Halliday has illustrated the paradigmatic character of language through the theme of sexism:

> What construes our sex roles is not the inherent sexism in the forms of language (such things are useful for making people conscious of the problem, but in themselves are trivial – some of the most sexist societies have no trace of gender morphology in their languages) but the way the resources of the language are deployed, how the meaning potential is taken up in the construction of the subject, in the family, the media, popular literature and elsewhere.
> Halliday, 1992: 90

Halliday argues that our gender roles are not constructed by the inherent sexism of language structures. These roles are construed through the ways the resources of language are being applied, through the processes meaning potential is being used in the everyday language, in media, and so on. Halliday's sense of meaning potential is similar to, if not the same as, Wittgenstein's notion of rule-governed language games. The greatest challenge, however, arises from the analyst's interpretive task:

> One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to *look at* its use and learn from that. But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice which stands in the way of doing this. It is not a *stupid* prejudice.
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> <div align="right">Wittgenstein, 1997: 109e</div>

Both the linguistically and socially oriented analyses of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and critical social theory (CST) have a common denominator; they both call themselves critical. In CDA analysis, the term *critical* stands for the attempt to become aware of the fact that social practices and, more specifically, the common uses of language are linked to cause-and-effect relations – namely the relations in between the uses of language and power – that we do not notice in everyday life. That is, the concept discursive power does not refer simply to the political power interests but rather to the ways things start to appear common-sensical.

What do the CST theorists mean then by being critical? How critical are they in their own sense of being critical?

The central idea of Critical Social Theory is that social and political criticism requires a foundational theory of individual and social 'ontology'. This new theory is indebted to Wittgenstein's philosophy as a starting point. Anthony Giddens's notions of *social practices* and *practical consciousness* lean on the modern philosophical "linguistic turn" associated with Wittgenstein. According to Giddens, modern philosophy shows that "personal experience is known to the self as a 'self' only via the public categories of language" (Giddens, 1996: 205). This focus on public language leads to the rejection of the dualism of private, subjective experience and an objective culture separated from such experience. Practical consciousness is "all the things that we know as social actors, and must know, to make social life happen, but to which we cannot necessarily give discursive form" (Giddens, 1996: 69). And most importantly,

> The knowledgeability of human agents, however, is not confined to discursive consciousness of the conditions of their action. Many of the elements of being able to 'go on' are carried at the level of practical consciousness, incorporated within the continuity of everyday activities. Practical consciousness is integral to the reflexive monitoring of action, but it is 'non-conscious', rather than unconscious. Most forms of practical consciousness could not be 'held in mind' during the course of social activities, since their tacit or taken-for-granted qualities form the essential condition which allows actors to concentrate on tasks at hand.
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> <div align="right">Giddens, 1991: 35-36</div>

Giddens's theory of human agency, people's capacity to act in the social world, is composed of three levels. Discursive consciousness refers to the conscious reasons that people give to explain their behaviours and motivations. Practical consciousness is the unarticulated, tacit beliefs and knowledges that people use to orient themselves to situations and interpret the actions of others. The third component of agency is the unconscious tied to memory, which is always implicated in our daily actions. Practical consciousness for Giddens is the most important dimension of the three, because people in his theory act and understand tacitly in

social life, rather than discursively. Also, rule-following in social life is based on implicit knowledge in particular situations.

Tacit knowledge, then, provides the connection whereby Giddens links subjective, individual agency and meaningfulness with objective, social structure. Tacit knowledge is ultimately grounded in the individual's cognition, and social structure consists of networks of rules. By making tacit knowledge a possession of individuals, Giddens is able to argue that its manifestation is also simultaneously an expression of human freedom.

Jurgen Habermas's *theory of communicative action* arises from his Wittgenstein-inspired pragmatic turn in social theory, a shift away from "the philosophy of consciousness" to the intersubjective rules of communicative action, "the generative rules according to which the speaking and acting subjects (…) produce the social context of life" (Habermas, 1984: 107-8). Habermas explains his Wittgensteinian linkage in these terms:

> In the course of analysis it will become evident how much this concept owes to investigations in the philosophy of language stemming from Wittgenstein.

Habermas, 1984: 96

Communicative action is only one of four types of action identified by Habermas, but yet it is "the original mode of language use" (Habermas, 1984: 288). Critique is seen to be embedded implicitly in the everyday process of communicative action itself. It is "presupposed that those acting communicatively are capable of mutual criticism" (Habermas, 1984: 119). The new theoretical perspective can be resumed in the following: that

> the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members; (…) this coordination has to be established through communication; (…) the reproduction of species also requires satisfying the conditions of rationality that is inherent in communicative action.
>
> Habermas, 1984: 397

In order communicative action to be able to take place, a shared, taken-for-granted background of tacit norms, assumptions and expectations is required. Thus, similar to Giddens's concept practical consciousness, individual's tacit knowledge and cognition is at the centre of the theory. The function of critical social theory is to provide reconstructive analyses of practical, intuitive, tacit knowledge of the rule-governed individuals. "Lifeworld" is constituted by this individual knowledge and the rule-governed structure of language. The critical social theorist's task is to translate individual's implicit knowledge and abstract social structures into propositional form. This relationship between the theorist and layperson in Giddens's theory is formulated in his concept double hermeneutic. It refers to a process whereby the different orders of discourse of the social analyst and the person acting in society constantly intertwine with one another, as researchers study the common practices and discourses of laypeople, while social scientific findings become part of everyday language.

The critical position claiming to be constructed upon Wittgenstein's thinking, however, is a myth which these theorists have actually built upon the Kantian conception of tacit cognition based on individual's private language that they themselves consider discredited.

Sharing a language is "not agreement in opinions but in form of life", states Wittgenstein (1997: 88e) in *Philosophical investigations* at the end of the well-known rule-following sections (§ 143-242). The term *form of life* stresses the intertwining of culture, world-view and language. "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (1997: 8e). Accordingly, a form of life is a culture or social formation, the totality of communal activities into which language-games are embedded. *Form of life* does not stand for our inflexible biological human nature rigidly determining the way we act. Instead, Wittgenstein's naturalism is anthropological rather than biological:

> Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.
>
> Wittgenstein, 1997: 12e

This natural history is the history of cultural, language-using entities. We must distinguish forms of life from the common human nature onto which they are designed (called framework in Wittgenstein's writing): Wittgenstein (like Marxism and pragmatism) emphasises not our inflexible biological outfit, but our historical practice.

In short, *agreement in form of life* is what people do with language. It is the same type of agreement Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956: 213) wrote about, *an agreement* "that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language." A language does not simply imitate phenomena of the outside world; it orders them according to linguistic classes, exercising a deep influence on each community's reality construction. Thus, "no individual is free to describe nature with absolute impartiality, but is constrained to certain modes of interpretation even while he thinks himself most free[5]" (1956: 214).

But it does not make sense to think that we must somehow reach an agreement *before* we mean / say anything. Wittgenstein's position, according to which language rests upon the fact of agreement, is non-cognitive. That is, all linguistic action presupposes agreement in form of life – in what is being done – in order to say things that can be judged true or false:

> It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. This is not an agreement in opinions but in form of life.
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> Wittgenstein, 1997: 88e

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[5] In the beginning of last century, Whorf studied the Indian community of the Hopi of the northern Arizona desert. Christian missionaries were not successful in their work because the Hopi were not able to grasp the concepts of the heaven and hell of the Christian doctrine.

Language-game, therefore, is neither reasonable nor unreasonable; it "is not based on grounds. (…) It is simply here – like our life." (Wittgenstein, 1999: §559)[6]

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[6] My own translation from the Finnish edition of Wittgenstein's book *Uber Gewissheit* (*On certainty*, 1969, *Varmuudesta*, 1999)

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