

N. Fairclough's Concept of Discourse in Terms of Articulation Theory

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the concept of DISCOURSE in N. Fairclough's analytical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) from a viewpoint of Articulation Theory. The theory originated from the tradition of Cultural Studies, offering CDA scholars rich resources of thought through which we could enlarge the scope of the object we deal with when engaged in a study of CDA. This study leads to the conclusion that if we quote useful ideas of sociology in which many scholars have devoted to the consideration of social events in terms of power relations, more attention should be drawn to discussions in the disciplines of sociology and philosophy as well as in the disciplines categorized as linguistics, sociolinguistics, text linguistics.

Keywords : text, discourse, articulation, materiality

1. The Scope of Critical Discourse Analysis

In the field of media studies, much attention is being given to the study of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), which discusses the relationship between language and society, focusing on social realities such as inequalities and discrimination which are supposed to be embedded in language or language use. But this study presents potential difficulties which prevent us from grasping the definite outline of DISCOURSE. In fact, the concept of discourse seems to be different not only in each discipline of linguistics and sociology but also among CDA scholars. The question as to "what is discourse" inevitably presents a metaphysical problem, which might be a difficult question beyond the scope of CDA when we set up such a question. We cannot deny, however, that the object of CDA is surely DISCOURSE itself, and therefore, I think it is necessary to attempt to grasp the definite whole picture of DISCOURSE, inquiring into what characteristics it includes. Otherwise, each CDA scholar would fall into the practice of analyzing and discussing various discourses with different concepts of their own, which can undesirably result in the fragile foundations of CDA as a discipline. Nevertheless, the study of DISCOURSE has been strangely neglected by CDA scholars, though numerous attempts have been made by scholars to show how the methodology is useful in analyzing various news discourses.

The purpose of this paper is to give consideration,

based upon Articulation Theory to which scholars in Cultural Studies would turn, to the concept of DISCOURSE in the field of CDA, especially in Norman Fairclough's work, whose concept of discourse is frequently quoted among CDA scholars¹. We do not sweep away sociology such as Cultural Studies, which deal with some aspects of social realities of inequalities, prejudice, discrimination, and so on, regarding culture as everyday lives of people. We are concerned with the relationships between language (use) and society. Therefore, it seems reasonable, in this paper, to draw much attention to sociological ideas.

The scope of a study of the concept of DISCOURSE is too deep to discuss the whole idea in a single paper. For this reason, here I limit the discussion to the concept of DISCOURSE from a viewpoint of Articulation Theory, which could possibly propound some points to be worth considering.

Broadly speaking, two leading scholars can be mentioned in CDA: T. A. van Dijk² and N. Fairclough. We will begin with a simple observation of N. Fairclough's concept of DISCOURSE. In general, CDA scholars often work through a linguistic approach, but Fairclough's way of thinking in CDA can be marked by a sociological approach as well as a linguistic one, which should be noted in this paper. To put it briefly, Fairclough's concept of DISCOURSE is referred to as "social practice."³ N. Fairclough (1995, pp.55-6) presents a position of CDA, proposing a perspective of networks called "orders of

discourse" which should be found in discourse practices in social activities. And furthermore, he shows an analytical framework of "communicative events" when analyzing discourses on specified occasions, attempting to combine the framework with "orders of discourse." One important phase of DISCOURSE, "orders of discourse" should be fully discussed in a theoretical study of CDA, but it is too complex a subject to be discussed here in detail. At the same time, in our short study, an analytical framework of communicative events can be mentioned only summarily. To fully examine Fairclough's concept of DISCOURSE would require another paper. For the present, we shall confine our attention to the possible discussion of the relationship between Fairclough's concept of DISCOURSE and Articulation Theory.

It is desirable to describe the outline of an analytical framework of "communicative events" Fairclough proposes before moving on to the main subject. A framework of "communicative events" can be classified into three dimensions: TEXT, DISCOURSE PRACTICE, and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE (See Fairclough, 1995, 57). Figure 1 below reveals the outline of how those dimensions are related with each other⁴.

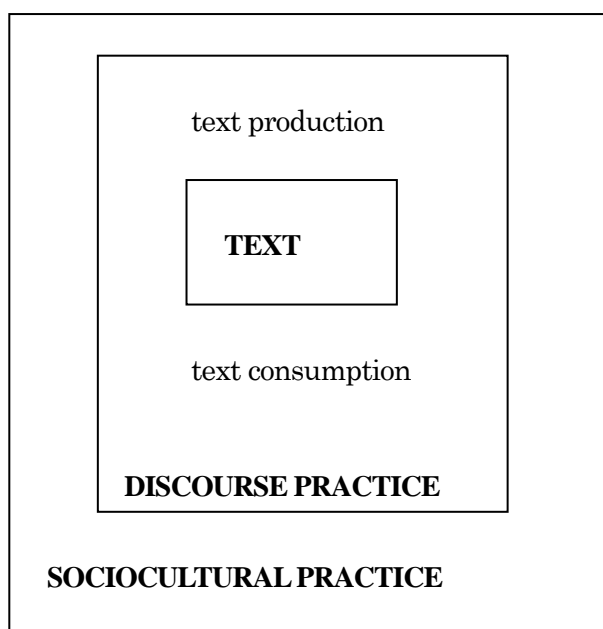


Figure 1 A framework for critical discourse analysis of a communicative event

I would like to look at the terms in Figure 1 briefly, attempting to abstract the point which should be discussed in this paper. First of all, some terms which imply the three

dimensions are described below.

TEXT: 'Texts' may be written or oral, and oral texts may be just spoken (radio) or spoken and visual (television).

DISCOURSE PRACTICE: By 'discourse practice' I mean the processes of text production and text consumption.

SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE: And by 'sociocultural practice' I mean the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is a part of.

(1995, 57)

Taking a close look at Fig.1, in relation to the question of "what is DISCOURSE?", a few questions then arise as to the framework of CDA. We are confronted by three difficulties. The first is the question of the object we should deal with: which area should we concentrate on, while in the discussion of CDA. If we spotlight on the center of the framework, that is, the area of TEXT, we will come nearer to the discipline of Text Analysis⁵. The second is whether or not we must deal with each dimension of the framework (Fig.1) in terms of the interconnectedness of the whole phase of the framework. The third is about the question of the validity of that framework (Fig.1): the question of whether or not the framework of CDA can reasonably be divided and classified into those parts of TEXT, DISCOURSE PRACTICE, and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE. But, the fully study of these points lies outside the scope of this paper. I have space for no more than an introduction of the potential questions.

Before turning to a closer examination of the relationship between Fairclough's concept of DISCOURSE and Articulation Theory, a few remarks should be made concerning DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE in Fig.1. We can say that the area of DISCOURSE PRACTICE points out to what we call DISCOURSE. In other words, DISCOURSE is practice itself, namely, social practice, which belongs to the dynamic process including both text production and text consumption. On the other hand, the dimension of SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE, which embraces the two inner parts of TEXT and DISCOURSE PRACTICE, embodies media economics and media politics⁶. That dimension can be mentioned to be

social conditions which cause the practice of text production or text consumption. Any text does not appear until the moment of text production or text consumption is located in those "conditions." If any text is not placed in those "conditions", that is, the phase of SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE, the text is NOT "text", but no more than ink and paper as physical materials. Just looking over the interconnectedness of three dimensions in Fig.1 gives us some points to discuss, but these considerations themselves are preliminary to a further question. We have seen the term PRACTICE many times. I believe that we can grasp the conception of DISCOURSE through the idea of PRACTICE. Let us now attempt to extend the observation into the idea of PRACTICE. For the present, we shall confine our attention to the conception of PRACTICE.

2. Fairclough's concept of DISCOURSE and Articulation Theory

Let us consider the subject from a viewpoint of Articulation Theory, which discusses DISCOURSE and PRACTICE. This theory can possibly suggest a useful insight to lead us to a definite explanation of DISCOURSE. E. Laclau & C. Mouffe (1985) discuss the relationship between DISCOURSE and PRACTICE with the introduction of the term "articulation," as can be seen in the following quotation:

we will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice we call discourse. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call elements any difference that is not discursively articulated. (1985:105)

The word "articulation" or "articulated" is important in this context, because these words are in an intermediary position which bridges DISCOURSE and PRACTICE. To put it plainly, articulation is practice itself. We might say that each articulatory practice amounts to the structure of DISCOURSE. The structure of DISCOURSE is not solid, but always open to change. Now we come to the point at which it is necessary to deal more carefully with the

framework of CDA Fairclough presented. The consideration in reference to the concept of "articulation" drives us to the question what similarity can we find in the conception of PRACTICE which Fairclough mentioned and articulatory practice. Finally, we have come to the essential point to discuss in this paper.

The word "articulation" can be referred to as a kind of linkage between one thing and another. J.D. Slack (1996, 115) observed that the concept of "articulation" had originally been used centuries ago, implying various kinds of meanings related to some realms of dentistry, medicine, biology, and pronunciation. In earlier Cultural Studies, the concept of "articulation" was not applied to its methodology. In the 1970s, that term did appear in the discipline. S. Hall (1986, 53), the leading scholar in Cultural Studies in those days defined the word "articulation" as follows: "Articulation is the form of connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time." It also implies the image of flexibility which could separate structured relations. From this point of view, how should we consider the framework of CDA? Is it possible to view the concept of "practice" of DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE described in Fig.1 as "articulatory practice?" Let us devote a little more space to examining these questions. Pursuing these questions, we almost reach the core of Fairclough's concept of DISCOURSE and the key to understanding DISCOURSE itself. In Fig.1, it is reasonable to suppose that the phase of DISCOURSE PRACTICE is conditioned by the surrounding field of SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE. We could say that DISCOURSE PRACTICE such as text production and text consumption do not arise independently, but arise dependent on SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE. SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE is not so much linguistic aspects as material ones, as can be seen in the following quotation: "The elements articulated together in a discursive formation are not only linguistic – they include 'institutions, rituals and practices'. Laclau and Mouffe are drawing heavily on Foucault's theory of discourse (the conceptualization of discursive formations), but also pushing it in a direction which leads them to reject Foucault's distinction between discourse and non-discourse – the social is nothing but discourse (L. Chouliaraki & N. Fairclough, 1999, 122)." If we follow Laclau and Mouffe's rejection of distinction

between discourse and non-discourse, the distinction between DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE could result in disappearing to merge into PRACTICE as a single concept. While we have realized the dynamic process embedded in the dimension of DISCOURSE PRACTICE, that is to say, the whole process of both text production and text consumption, we could find the dynamic process between DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE. We noted earlier that the phase of DISCOURSE PRACTICE is conditioned by the surrounding field of SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE. It is not too far from the truth to say that the opposite is logically equivalent. To put it another way, DISCOURSE PRACTICE conditions SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE. In other words, practices such as text production or text consumption can strengthen or weaken the structure of SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE, for example, 'institutions, rituals and practices' quoted in Chouliaraki & Fairclough. It would be better to say that insofar as any element of texts, practices, or social things is activated enough to function as any moment which gains potential energy, it is ready to affect or to be affected by the other moment.

3. Materiality and the Possibility of Modification

The concept of "articulation" offers material aspects. This can be derived from the previous observation that the word "articulation" can be referred to as a kind of linkage between one thing and another. In order to link one thing with another, material existence is supposed to be required. This will lead us further into a consideration of the materiality of DISCOURSE. But, it does not always mean that we should concentrate only on material factors to discuss in CDA. What I mean is that anything includes both aspects of its substance: social events or things can be described in terms of different angles or dialectically. Accordingly, the feature of DISCOURSE consists of two different aspects; therefore, we could say that DISCOURSE comprises, at the same time, both linguistic and materialistic factors. Vološinov (1973) refers to the fact that any things can possibly become symbols and vice versa.: any symbolic and ideological phenomenon exists as a material phase⁷. According to Vološinov's theory, it may safely be assumed that materialistic and symbolic aspects are inherent in DISCOURSE.

Let us now attempt to expand this argument into the concept of DISCOURSE we discuss in this paper. We must return to the point which I mentioned in the quotation of Laclau and Mouffe. They argued that the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice we call discourse. Previous consideration of aspects of DISCOURSE from multiple viewpoints could help us understand the outline of the phrase of "articulatory practice." We are now in a position to say that "articulatory practice" is the practice with the possibility of modification and materiality. Any practice, due to the possibility of modification, could give us reason to transform and restructure social paradigm. In addition, as materiality subsists in any practice, the analysis of practices should also be made in terms of physical factors: habits, customs, ways of thinking and acting in a specified situation derived from common sense and assumptions built in "civilized" people. The first characteristic of "articulatory practice" could encourage us to act against social problems which are apt to be formed from the sense of discrimination and prejudice. This means much to a study of CDA in our times which are inevitably exposed to continual flow of information from the media. The second characteristic of "articulatory practice" could cause us to reconsider the methodology of CDA. This point would lead us to the awareness of material aspects as the object of CDA, which motivates us to inquire into a new approach of CDA, not just depend on Text Analysis.

Having made this point that the two properties of "articulatory practice", in particular, those of "articulation" could be observed, we may go on to discuss the latter part of the phrase, "practice" in relation with the concept of DISCOURSE in CDA. Laclau and Mouffe's rejection of distinction between discourse and non-discourse, as I have mentioned before, is here to be examined in terms of the concept of DISCOURSE. This point seems to be relevant to the materiality assumed to be embedded in the concept of "articulation." If we accept this argument, we can say that DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE in Fig.1 are not only interconnected and merged into one concept of PRACTICE as I said earlier, but also are characterized by material and non-material aspects. SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE might include material aspects, on the other hand, DISCOURSE PRACTICE might include non-material ones. Even though we apply Laclau and Mouffe's rejection of distinction between discourse and

non-discourse to the analogy of DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE in Fig.1, we cannot deny that the distinction between those two areas of PRACTICE we are discussing now does exist in the sense that while the former is non-material, the latter material. Therefore, the distinction between DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE in Fig.1 should not be rejected, though the relation of the placement between the two areas could be misleading. The reason for this argument is that as mentioned before, the area of SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE does not include the area of DISCOURSE PRACTICE, but the two dimensions do affect each other. In other words, they can be interdependent, interconnected, and dialectical.

Before coming to the conclusion in this paper, whose main subject is to discuss the concept of DISCOURSE, particularly in CDA of N. Fairclough, we come back to the definition of DISCOURSE by Fairclough. He briefly and definitely defines DISCOURSE as social practice, which corresponds to the whole process of social interaction such as text production and text consumption. It is obvious that he has already regarded the property of DISCOURSE as "dialectical." Following this point, we could say that each area positioned in the diagram of Fig.1, assumes a dialectical feature without exception. Viewed in this light, the area of TEXT, which remains untouched in this paper, can also be regarded as a moment which could be dialectical. It could also mean that the area of TEXT in Fig.1 should be connected with the outside area, the one of DISCOURSE PRACTICE, as we have already discussed in terms of the relation between DISCOURSE PRACTICE and SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICE. Accordingly, it seems to be possible to assume that DISCOURSE PRACTICE does not include TEXT, but they are interconnected, interdependent, and dialectical; consequently, any text could be not only produced or consumed under the influence of the area of DISCOURSE PRACTICE, but also supposed to become activated into one "moment," which is equivalent to concept of the same term referred to in the quotation of Laclau & Mouffe. If this point is valid, any text, placed in structured "discursive formation" which M. Foucault would call, could cause DISCOURSE PRACTICE to be functioned.

4. Conclusion

Let me summarize the main points that have been made in this paper. An analytical framework of CDA, namely, the concept of DISCOURSE described in Fig.1, which N. Fairclough proposed, can be discussed from a viewpoint of Articulation Theory, through which we could enlarge the scope of the object we deal with when engaged in a study of CDA. It should be concluded, from what has been discussed above, that if we quote useful ideas of sociology in which many scholars have devoted to the consideration of social events in terms of power relations, we, CDA scholars, should draw more attention to discussions in the disciplines of sociology and philosophy as well as in the disciplines categorized as linguistics, such as sociolinguistics, text linguistics, and so forth. Otherwise, we could surely fall into the trap of "text-centrism" in which we expect too much that each text expressed in discourses reflect social reality. It is true, to some extent, that social events, which must be transformed into communicative events such as talk or text so that we can realize those and "experience" them, can be reduced to the realm of DISCOURSE. But, we should be more careful not to miss the fact that DISCOURSE itself contains something material as we saw in the main discussion of this paper.

Notes

- ¹ J. D. Slack(1996, 112) noted, "The concept of articulation is perhaps one of the most generative concepts in contemporary cultural studies."
- ² We can say that one of the features of Van Dijk's perspective of CDA is that he is intensively concerned with sociopolitical issues such as social inequalities, power, damnation, etc. which don't tend to be referred to in the field of Discourse Analysis in relation with social linguistics. Still, unlike Fairclough, Dijk's concept of DISCOURSE seems to be within the category of Discourse Analysis. Van Dijk (1998) regard DISCOURSE simply as "talk or text" in terms of spoken or written act of communication in verbal dimensions.
- ³ See Fairclough (1989, 22). Fairclough stresses that DISCOURSE should be differentiated from TEXT. This point is argued by Fairclough (1989, 24): A text is a product rather than a process – a product of the process of text production. But I shall use the term *discourse* to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part. This process includes in addition to the text the *process of production*, of which the text is a product, and the *process of interaction*, for which the text is a resource.
- ⁴ Figure 1 is quoted from a book (Fairclough, 1995, 59).
- ⁵ Giving too much attention to TEXT itself could possibly

lead us to a limited way of thinking: we are apt to regard the field of text as universal. We must be careful not to fall into what is called, "textcentrism." Nevertheless, I would like to lay special emphasis on two points which focus on TEXT. One is about the possibility of the discussion of "intertextuality" with which Fairclough is concerned. The other is about the potential discussion of the conception of "L'Écriture" J. Derrida proposed.

⁶ See Fairclough (1995, 57).

⁷ Vološinov (1973, 11) stressed the materiality of signs, arguing, "Every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality."

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