



## **ASSESSING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA) SKILLS OF ESL UNDERGRADUATES IN AN ENGLISH WRITING CLASSROOM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The field of ELT is constantly witnessing the introduction of new instructional approaches, one such perhaps recent initiative is critical discourse analysis (CDA). Accordingly, the present study was an attempt to investigate the implementation of CDA instructions in an English writing classroom and its role in developing self-regulation and self-reflection skills among ESL learners of undergraduate level. This study was designed to investigate the significance of developing students' critical language awareness through explicit teaching methodology of some procedures of critical discourse analysis that might play a significant role in producing efficient learners who are efficient interpreters and assessors of written discourse. The study was planned to discover the procedure of encoding and decoding of the writer's message and to teach students the skill of inferring, evaluating and explaining through higher-order thinking processes where they supposedly monitor, regulate and reflect upon their own writing and that of the writer's. The learners were their own evaluators, the researcher observed through their writings the capability to activate and apply their critical knowledge while interpreting and assessing the text, as well as the extent to which the learners self-regulate and self-reflect over their written assignments. It was witnessed that the motivation level of learners enhanced and they were able to decode the message of the text. The learners were observed to self-monitor their writing. They were able to deal with challenging tasks rather than mere passive tasks. It was concluded that critical language awareness, self-regulation, self-reflection can be developed through familiarising with CDA techniques in the form of continuous writing practices in classroom.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The most difficult of skills for L2 learners is writing. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), the difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas but also in translating these ideas into readable texts. They argue that the skills involved in writing are highly complex, and L2 writers have to pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, etc. Chakraverty and Gautum (2008) state that writing, "is essentially a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic and to analyze and classify any background knowledge. Then, writers need suitable language to structure these ideas in the form of a coherent discourse". EFL learners conventionally care meticulously for the spelling, punctuation, and grammar and the focus is uni-dimensionally linguistic (Hedge, 2000). More recently, however, there is growing emphasis by a number of scholars on students sliding into critical language awareness.

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Critical language awareness being the pedagogic arm of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as Wallace (Svalberg, 2000) called it, supports writers to make well-informed choices as the traces and clues of certain ideology reflected. CDA instruction helps students to move from non-critical to critical approaches to language learning. CDA instruction in effect extends this kind of analysis thereby allowing learners to also see how these devices are used to realize and construct "social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief" (Fairclough, 1992). During the past decade, CDA has found its way to L2 studies. Wallace (1992) has been among the first who paid the most significant attention to a serious gap inherently present in most EFL classes. Wallace claims that EFL students are often marginalized as readers; their aims in interacting with written texts are believed to be the first and foremost those of language learners. The analysis of discourse for Foucault (1984) is the analysis of the domain of 'statements'- that is, of texts, and of utterances as constituent elements of texts. But that does not mean a concern with a detailed analysis of texts -the concern is more a matter of discerning the rules which 'govern' bodies of texts and utterances. It is common practice in composition classrooms

across the country to have students engage in critical thinking and writing about current issues. In this light, the need for context-sensitive forms of discourse analysis has become increasingly acute. Teachers, students, scholars, and others engaged in composition studies all stand to benefit from being able to analyze written texts and discursive practices in ways that encourage students to address and, ideally, act on important social problems.

In recent years, several closely-related forms of discourse analysis have emerged which promise to satisfy this need: critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993; Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard, 1996; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Many theorists share strong political starting points for doing CDA, with their major focus on revealing hidden values, beliefs and bias of texts, and studying power relationship behind texts. Many of them, however, establish operationalised research frameworks for exploring relationships between language use and social context. The work of Fairclough, Wodak and van Leeuwen especially have helped to operationalise the principles of CDA.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Fairclough's (1995) analysis is based on three components- description, interpretation, and explanation. Linguistic properties of texts are described (text analysis), the relationship between the productive and interpretative processes of discursive practice and the texts is interpreted, and the relationship between discursive practice and social practice is explained (Fairclough, 1995). In doing this, Fairclough attempts to establish a systematic method for exploring the relationship between text and its social context. According to Fairclough, a discursive event is simultaneously text, discursive practice (including the production and interpretation of texts) and social practice. Fairclough develops an analytical framework (Fairclough, 1992, 1995), drawing on the concepts of intertextuality (that is the relationship between texts 'before' and 'after'), interdiscursivity (that is the combination of genres and discourses in a text) and hegemony (the predominance in and the dominance of political, ideological and cultural domains of a society) (Fairclough, 1995). CDA is what Fairclough (1992) has referred to as a textually oriented form of discourse analysis (TODA). To develop this textual analysis, Fairclough (1992) brought together the linguistic theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics proposed by Halliday (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). CDA was first introduced by linguists Norman Fairclough (2003) who made a remarkable contribution in this field. Fairclough introduced the three-dimensional framework for examining discourse, which comprised of an analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution, and consumption) and discursive events as instances of socio-cultural practice.

### *Purpose of the study*

In the researcher's own experience in their writing classes (with the narrative text for interpretation, bearing no exception) ESL students do have the tendency to run into the challenges. Having been both encouraged by the somewhat successful application of CDA in ELT and being personally interested in the trend, the researcher set out this study to investigate whether CDA would have any significantly positive impact on ESL learners' comprehension and written

interpretation of the narrative text. To fulfill the aforementioned purpose, the following two research questions were raised:

1. Does critical discourse analysis instructions have any significant effect on ESL learners' writing and their interpretation and analysis of a narrative text?
2. To analyze the level of CDA skills among the ESL learners of under-graduation, by making them write an analysis of a narrative text.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The participants of this study were 30 under-graduation ESL learners selected from among an existing intact group of 73 students at Aligarh Muslim University (A.M.U) based on their scores on their mid-term English exam. The exam is a partial fulfillment of the course which is taken on a quarterly basis to grade the performances of the learners at the university. The exam is taken in the compilation of the assigned syllabus. All the 73 students had the English language background which was similar to that of the target group. The 30 female participants- aged between 20 and 22 who took part in this study were assigned randomly.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

*Students were asked to analyze the text to uncover their initial level of critical language awareness. An assignment was given to them and they were asked to consider it as a graded assignment. As a consequence, the students worked diligently and so the results became quite authentic. They were also asked to provide linguistic evidence from the text as well as semantic representation. No time limit was set for analysis because the subject was new as well as very demanding for them. The researcher intended for the students to analyze the assignment with great zeal and patience and at the same time, the critical elements of the texts were not pointed out to them so as to check their level of critical language awareness prior to the teaching of the techniques of CDA.*

Following the selection of the participants, the treatment commenced. The classes were held four days a week for a total period of two weeks (8 sessions) of the entire term of 13 weeks, focusing on all the four language skills including writing. In these two weeks, the classes were entirely focused on teaching writing skill and the CDA techniques to the ESL learners to interpret and analyze a text/discourse. The classes were taught by the same instructor. All the 30 learners underwent the same procedure of teaching in terms of the three other skills and were assigned the same kind of homework even in their writing instruction; in addition to writing in class, they were assigned to write an essay as their homework. This phase started in class and continued as homework with the teacher-researcher asking students to read their homework in the next session while she and the other students gave them feedback. She would then collect all the other students' writings, score and comment on them after class, and hand them back to the students the next session. Regarding the writing skill, the group underwent CDA instruction of how to write the interpretation of a text after comprehending it carefully. For both classes, each session started with a warm-up, followed by the main activity, and ended with a follow-up. It is worth mentioning that the

writing instruction for all classes took around half of the time of the class since the teacher had to work on other aspects of English as well. What follows is a description of the procedure of the writing instruction.

### **Analysis of Results**

To reiterate, the purpose was to make them aware of the linguistic feature by utilizing those linguistic features for transforming knowledge or presenting ideologies. Secondly, to unveil the power of language which could be used by powerful communicators as their tool for maintaining and sustaining power.

It was uncovered that the students did not have a proper idea and clear framework in their mind to pave the way for them to analyze the text in an organized manner. In their first session- when they were not given the explicit instructions- some of them were not able to find out the writer's stance. They were unable to carry out the connotations and they did not understand the writer's ideology. Moreover, they did not have an idea of the usage of rhetorical elements like figures of speech or similes and metaphors, to present the writer's ideology and opinion. In fact, before becoming introduced with CDA, students accepted these linguistic elements just as simple vehicles of communication. In their first analysis, some students merely paraphrased the whole text. So, before giving them explicit instructions on CDA, they were unable to refer to those specific critical elements that represented the writer's ideological stance. After comparing the first and the second versions of analyses, it was revealed that majority of students' critical language awareness was raised. Students' attentions were drawn to linguistic elements and the roles they played in presenting writers' thoughts and beliefs. By analyzing the text, they were able to find out the writers' mental directions. The study also revealed the significant results of teaching CDA to students. It is acknowledged to have a great impact on their way of thinking and judgment. Another considerable revelation is that in the second session, some students still could not analyze the text based on the CDA techniques. Some of the students did not analyze the text based on the linguistic elements. They analyzed the text by paraphrasing the articles in the second version. Almost all of them, however, believed that their 'abilities to analyze' the texts 'increased'. They could understand the negative or positive loads of special clues in the text; although, most of them did not reach the mastery to name the technical terms in their analyses. This can be attributed to the limited time they had to 'practice' the taught CDA techniques. CDA techniques were instructed to them in two classes only. It seemed that their understanding of the texts increased but their capabilities of critical analyses did not increase. The students did not analyze the text based on the functions of linguistic elements. In fact, not only the participants of the study but all students of considerable practice in CDA techniques to conduct a more detailed analysis. Based on the examination of students' analyses and their answers in class discussions, it can be concluded that about majority of students' critical language awareness rose after becoming familiar with CDA techniques. Although they could not analyze the text based on the linguistic elements in detail and their analyses were weak, their beliefs about discourse and language elements changed. Students were not ignorant readers of the text anymore. As they pointed out, their opinions changed about the phenomenon of language and particularly learning the English

language. In order to have better analyses, students need to apply CDA and practice it frequently, for a longer period of time.

By developing Critical language awareness and critical discourse analysis skills, the capability to self-regulate and self-reflect also develops. We can support this statement with the findings of this paper. The researcher noticed that students were found to self-monitor their writing. They were assessing and commenting on their work. The findings show, that most of the students used and followed the points discussed in the class lectures on CDA techniques. Some students very impressively delivered their drafts and very interestingly critiqued over the text. Although they were found to skip the major technicalities of the text, like the use of literary devices by the writer. Their main focus remained on the character analysis of the characters of the text, and on the analysis of the dialogues, they exchanged. The students offered their opinions and judgments to the text and its characters. The use of the vocabulary and sentence formation was found to be very apt and elaborate. The majority of the students were able to deliver a good interpretation of the text, although, excluded various technical features of the text analysis. Therefore, if received a prolonged practice in CDA, one can improve CDA skills of the learners, as well as, would directly complement to their potentials to self-regulate and self-reflect. Such practices when initiated and facilitated by the teacher, can result in improving the writing skills, discourse interpretation skills, and along with that the self-regulation and self-reflection ability. Through CDA practices, learners act upon their own potentials to deliver their best. When they are writing, they are becoming their own critique by monitoring their own writing. This way the learners act upon the feedbacks given to them, therefore, CDA skill development should be initiated by the teachers for their learners' overall development, as well as, to grow them as self-regulated learners and as a critical thinker, which are the qualities of an efficient learner.

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The objective of a curriculum and syllabus should not be limited to linguistic factors alone, but these should be extended to develop the art of critical thinking and power of reasoning. This study was an attempt to make learners familiar with the CDA techniques and the application of that when analyzing a text. The findings of the study showed that the learners were able to analyze the text critically to an extent, where they were assessing the text as well as regulating and monitoring their writing. Although there were students who could not perform up to the mark. After assessing their writing the researcher, attributed this lack of performance to the learners' own motivational level, and the less number of lectures being delivered to them on CDA. Low motivation level is due to the lack of interest and enthusiasm, among the learners for engaging themselves into new kind of activities. The researcher perceived that the learners are stuck to the old dogmas, where the teacher works as the sole director, and students sit as passive learners. Therefore, it is then very important for a teacher to facilitate their learners with such practices. Incorporation of such practices will motivate the learners to participate in all classroom activities, with complete zeal. Activities, where the learner is the center, and the teacher is the facilitator. Incorporating CDA skills, self-regulation, self-reflective practices, would build up the

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motivation level of the learners, they'll become the sole owner and director of their learning.

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Appendix:

Some randomly selected assignments:

### CDA 1

The given extract is taken from the novel 'The Catcher in the Rye' written by J.D. Salinger. From the given extract it is evident that perhaps the story revolves around a student named Holden Caulfield and his teacher Mr. Spencer. It can be said that the scene took place at Mr. Spencer's place as Caulfield decided to say farewell to his teacher, who failed in history and Mr. Spencer is his history teacher. The apparent protagonist, Caulfield not only failed in history but also in those other subjects excluding English. His love for English can clearly be seen on the other hand his teacher Mr. Spencer who seems to be strict, he tells Caulfield about the mistake he committed during the examination in a sarcastic tone, he also read loud his answer sheet - 'The Egyptians - - - twentieth century' - followed by Caulfield's note which said that Caulfield himself knew that he was going to fail in the papers except English. During the session of Mr. Spencer reading aloud Caulfield's failed and note the latter wished that Mr. Spencer should stop there. When Mr. Spencer finally stop talking and asked Caulfield whether he was OK with faking, Caulfield played the 'old bull's trick' - buttering and supporting Mr. Spencer in his each and every statement; but in reality he was totally indulged into his thoughts about the 'frozen bigons of the central park'.

perhaps we can generalised the characters of Holden Caulfield and Mr. Spencer to our day to day life and with the relationship between a student and a teacher, respectively. Thus, it can be said that Caulfield like any other normal student does not take things seriously rather is passionate about only one thing; like Caulfield is passionate about English. Whereas Mr. Spencer to me reflects the elderly an experienced strata of the society who lives not by his passion but by his sense and needs; And wants the same for his student, Holden Caulfield.

### CDA 2

After reading the text we come to know that situation is very familiar to us when the things turned out opposite to our thoughts. After reading it we get an idea that some sort of emotion is prevailing in the scene where a student went to bid farewell to his teacher at his house. And the whole scene is inside his teacher's room. So only two characters are there, one a capful, fickle minded student and a history teacher named Spencer who according to his student was crazy about history. The idea of the student of bidding farewell would not be so same when teacher started questioning him about his result. He start getting irritated and wanted to get rid out of that situation in which he himself dragged in. The environment also started suffocating him and things turned out to be difficult to tolerate like Handel did he even call in his life. As the conversation proceeds the teacher start asking him in a doubt that, whether he would ever glance his books in the whole academic year. Because he never got passed any exam except English. And due to this negligence he always been eliminated out of the school and same thing is happening again. His teacher just wanted to make him realized that without changing this attitude he can't progress in his life. And for this he asked him to bring his history answer sheet. And the student brought that against his will. And situation becomes more miserable when he started reading his answer loudly. He even read out that message which the student has written for his teacher so that he would not feel guilty while failing him. But bad luck becomes more bad because sometimes. And same thing happened with the poor guy when teacher took that message in another way. He thought that his student is blaming him for his own failure. So he asked him directly. Do you think so, that I have done it willingly. In spite of being honest he said No. And sarcastically the student

in his own conversation said that if he would be a teacher he'll never read anyone's paper loudly against that person's will and also never do such crazy things. We can relate this situation to ourselves when we do something unusual our ideas always do play the same advise part as his teacher is doing. They always want us to learn from our mistakes so that some thing would never happen again. But as usual in our adulthood we always like to student start regretting the things as he was asking him of his idea of bidding farewell to his teacher. And we just want, out from that situation. But as someone said, (stated) it is our attitude not our aptitude will decide our attitude.

### CDA 3

Critical Analysis  
The text beautifully depicts the conversation between a student - Holden Caulfield and a history teacher - Mr. Spencer. The boy after failing in four out of five subjects has come to bid farewell to his teacher. The conversation is taking place in teacher's bedroom and the student's discomfort is evident when he says, "It was the hardest bed I ever sat on." The teacher tries pointing out the mistakes and blunders of student in spite of the boy saying "he won't care to hear" what all he had written. The interest shown by the teacher has slightly been exaggerated by the author as any teacher would rarely bother to read out the answer of student.  
The way boy is projected trying to escape the embarrassing situation of teacher reading his paper loudly shows the realistic behaviour of a teenager. Holden's awkwardness is evident from many phrases like, "You can't imagine how sorry I was getting that I'd stopped by to say good-by to him" and "I was beginning to sort of hate him".  
Readers, specially students can easily connect with the happy-go-lucky

attitude of Holden who was aware that he would flunk in all subjects except English as he had mentioned it in his note to the teacher and in spite of this he was least concerned about his grades and had "glanced through the text book a couple of times." The boy didn't even feel bad after being flunked out, he rather tried convincing his teacher by telling him that "he was a real moron." Contrary to the student, Mr. Spencer an old, sarcastic teacher was feeling extremely sorry for flunking his student.

To sum up, the student might consider the acts of his teacher as embarrassing situation, but the teacher didn't mean to embarrass him rather he was trying to show that Holden was flunked only due to his careless attitude and a slight heedful attitude might improve him academically.

#### CDA 4

This text is about a teenager growing up and he has been through into both physically & mentally & is going through a pivotal time in his life. The boy standing in front of his teacher he is clumped into a very awkward situation. He already gets failed in 4 subject out of 5. The aggression or the anger of teacher burst out in front of the boy but the boy want to delete all that moment as he is not comfortable in talking to his teacher. His teacher repeated every thing which irritate him. Every moment of that conversation become very embarrassing for the boy like, the bed on which he sat become hardest for him. Every moment or a single minute turns into a hours. He was not even disturbing to his teacher.

In this text Author present the humor and the obvious situation as can be happened in real life but the student or the boy not seems to be naughty as he gets failed in 4 subject but it becomes funny for the readers. Every time he gets irritated when the teacher asked him again and again about his paper.

The situation can become more humorous even it is, if the Author point out more gestures & postures in the text. But the character of teacher is ~~the~~ seems to be happen ~~very~~ exactly the same as it can be in front of a student who gets failed. I just want to point out that if the teacher already know him then ~~he~~ why he called him 'Boy' all the time which the boy also feel the same as anyone can. Overall the text is funny and a obvious situation happened in any student life who gets failed in their examination.

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