

Critical Discourse Analysis of an Authentic Text Applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework

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Abstract

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be used as a tool for analyzing text in order to uncover subtle meanings that potentially serve undemocratic purposes. This paper focuses on a piece of media text and analyzes it on both macro and micro levels using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. The macro level analysis revealed techniques often used in this sort of journalism to deliberately capture the reader's attention and imagination (a striking title; buzzwords). This analysis also showed that the ordering of the information is redolent of top-down journalism, a technique used to tell the reader what to think. On the micro level, it was revealed that the author focuses on emotionally charged content, which when delivered through suppositions, generalities, and repetition also has potential to influence the reader's views. A combination of these factors suggests a powerful ideological process is taking place, and one which propagates the agenda held by the creators of the text.

Keywords : Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework, Media Discourse, Textual Analysis, Ideology

1. Introduction

Media discourse contributes to defining our opinions, beliefs, perception of social status, our relationships with other human beings, and our attitude toward other races. A lack of understanding may purely be the product of ignorance, and the seemingly inexplicable imbalance of certain opinions may not be solely due to objective forces, but for the majority of people unaware of the manipulations of media texts, one may conclude that reading between the lines needs to be done if we are to understand the full potential of the ideological forces at work. When analyzing media discourse closely, it becomes clear that the political leanings of the content provider is a key factor motivating what

is circulated, strongly suggesting a considerable influence upon public thinking. As Teo (2000) states, the discourse we encounter every day has an influence on the way people perceive the world and others around them and is indeed a "powerful site for the dominance of minds" (p. 9).

Though journalistic objectivity is supposed to be a core value of the industry, how certain individuals or groups of people are portrayed in the media is often redolent of favoritism, with those biases offered up in discourse subsequently leading to discrimination. The spate of terrorist attacks in the U.K. and abroad encountered in recent years have allowed mass media outlets to induce blind patriotism and nationalism, often resulting in antagonism and violence toward minorities and foreign nationals. In recent years,

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fear generated through tactics adopted by right-wing media outlets in particular appears to have created the perception that evil forces are working in the shadows to erode society. However, in reality, most of the rhetoric, sensationalism, and hyperbole is carefully crafted to benefit those who control and disseminate the information. As Fairclough (1995) succinctly puts it, media texts “constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them” (p. 104). In order to investigate the potential impact of such texts, this paper uses Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework to analyze a selection of right-wing media discourse, investigating the deeper meanings contained in it while scrutinizing some of the possible intentions of its author to understand better how this kind of reporting can act as propaganda, potentially shaping opinions on a wide scale.

2. Review of Literature

In all texts and discourses there are factors which influence the content and its impact. To investigate this, CDA has been used to reveal the subtle manipulative forces in texts, acting as a powerful tool for exposing hidden agendas. In defining CDA, we may consider that “discourse analysis involves examining language from a complex variety of linguistic, textual, psychological, ideological and socio-cultural perspectives” (Holland, 2000, p. 141). Wodak concurs in that CDA focuses on social interactions, which occur partially in linguistic form, and that CDA’s potential contribution to linguistic analysis involves “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as [they] manifest in language” (as cited in Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). It seems fairly apparent, then, that there is an inherent interest in the

association between factors that exist in texts and the complex social connections that accompany them.

There are several authorities on the subject of CDA, though as Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) state “the most elaborate and ambitious attempt toward theorizing the CDA program is undoubtedly Fairclough’s *Discourse and Social Change*” (p. 448). The importance of Fairclough’s contribution to CDA is also echoed by Caldas-Coulthard and Holland (2000), who, in referring to Fairclough’s (1992, 1995) critical discourse studies, state that he “is one of the most active proponents of the critical orientation to language studies” (p. 121). Fairclough’s framework can be described as bringing together three overlapping, analytical traditions. These perspectives are:

- a) Discourse-as-text
- b) Discourse-as-discursive-practice
- c) Discourse-as-social-practice

The first dimension, discourse-as-text, deals with textual components at macro and micro levels according to Fairclough’s model. Fairclough (1992) states “It is a sensible working hypothesis to assume that any sort of textual feature is potentially significant in discourse analysis” (p. 74). Fairclough’s model includes the examination of texts and specifically their formal characteristics. The analyzed text is looked at as a complete text as well as in its smaller individual linguistic components and the meanings derived from such investigation are revealed and understood through the grammatical system (Caldas-Coulthard & Holland, 2000, p. 121). Imperative to CDA textual analysis is the close examination of lexical and grammatical choice and orderings. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) state that “choices and patterns in vocabulary (e.g. wording, metaphor), grammar (e.g. transitivity, modality), cohesion (e.g. conjunction, schemata), and text structure

(e.g. episoding, turn-taking system) should be systematically analysed” (p. 448). Therefore, the purpose of investigation into textual manipulation is to decipher subtle meanings embedded in discourse.

Concerning the second analytical tradition, discourse-as-discursive-practice, Fairclough (1992) states that it “involves processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, and the nature of these processes varies between different types of discourse according to social factors” (p. 78). This is echoed in Blommaert and Bulcaen’s (2000) definition that “discourse [is] something that is produced, circulated, distributed, and consumed in society” (p. 448). Blommaert and Bulcaen also state that when looking at discourse-as-discursive-practice certain factors should be analyzed concomitantly. When analyzing discourse, the features that exist at the micro level of analysis i.e. vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, should be considered simultaneously with connections to aspects that link the text to its context i.e. speech acts, coherence, and intertextuality (pp. 448-449).

Drawing on Althusser’s theory of ideology and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Fairclough’s third dimension, discourse-as-social-practice, places emphasis on the distribution of dominant ideologies through consent and the struggle against those ideologies. Althusser believed that ideology is a construction of reality that permeates the institutions of society and these institutions, for example in education or the media, are points where class struggle is taking place (Freeden, 2003, p. 25). This struggle can be uncovered through an analysis of the discourses inherent within the institutions. In other words, language and other symbolic forms are ideological and work toward establishing relations of dominance. However, these

conditions are not static; the hegemony of state institutions is, as Fairclough (2013) puts it, an “unstable equilibrium” (p. 61). This aligns with Gramsci’s theory that, while economically defined classes may hold power over society, this power is only ever held partially (p. 62). As the ideology has to operate in democratic societies on a level so as to not appear too overtly dictatorial, it is important that people be interpolated into commonly held assumptions by their own volition.

3. CDA Analysis

3.1 Method

An article was chosen from a now defunct British tabloid newspaper, whose political position and reputation for breaking big stories in a sensationalistic way were universally recognized during its long history. The article was considered at macro and micro levels and was then scrutinized to see whether it was serving non-democratic purposes. In agreement with Huckin’s (1992) approach to CDA, the article was chosen because it incorporated features one might associate with overtly patriotic ideologies, and therefore may contain bias, manipulation, and disparity.

3.2 Article / Source of Report / Author:

Article: A report on the 7/7 bombings in London

Source: The News of the World website

Author: Neville Thurlbeck (Chief Reporter)

4. Analysis at Macro Level

The report, written by Thurlbeck (2005), was in the genre of a newspaper article that was viewed through the newspaper company’s website. It was presented in simple to read, small blocks of text – short paragraphs and relatively short sentences

(Appendix 1). This short, sharp, punchy approach is indicative of the kind of discourse that you would usually find in tabloids. In addition, there is a distinct use of top-down journalism occurring in the text i.e. the most significant and important information serving the agenda of the producers of the content is presented first, and lesser, insignificant details are backgrounded by being placed later within the text.

4.1 Headlines / Leads

Headlines are significant as they tend to have a strong influence on the way the reader perceives the event and participants involved, and often a lot more than the subsequent, less-dominant content. Headlines and/or leads are used to present news reports in a concise form. A reader may only need to read this part to get an adequate account of what the story is about. It is at this stage that the author engages the reader, and this may occur by activating the reader's recognition with certain words, phrases or expressions that they may be familiar with and will in turn respond to. The keyword in the headline of the article is "TERROR". The headline, written in block capitals: "TERROR BLAST ROCKS LONDON" leaves little up to the imagination. How people perceive the word "terror" varies, but importantly there are a number of images that people connect with when the word or its various manifestations occur. Connotations with the terrorist attacks in the United States, Spain, and France, and by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) are all obvious examples. The headline need not explain anything in detail, it can simply contain buzzwords like the one in question to manipulate the reader and help them form presumptions about those responsible. Therefore, we can establish that there is an immediate presupposed connection between the reader and the writer in

the understanding of certain lexical items. Secondly, use of the onomatopoeic word "BLAST" rather than a simple noun describing an explosion adds to the effect at sentence level. The use of "ROCKS LONDON" in the headline sentence is significant as it suggests that the whole of London is affected, a mass rocking on a wide scale in the heart of the country.

5. Analysis at Micro Level

In section (A) there is a distinct omission of the exact area of attack. As articles in newspapers are traditionally designed in an inverted pyramid style with the most important information appearing first, it is significant that this key information does not appear here. It is left to the imagination of the reader as to where exactly was attacked. More significant, however, is the point that it was the capital and the center (heart) of London that was attacked, and this contributes to stimulating patriotic support from the start. There is also little subtlety in the phrases "huge terrorist attack" and that the attack "ripped through" the center of London; the latter phrase suggests a severing that does more than simply explode at one defined point, but in fact rips the very fabric of the country and society.

Importantly, the identity of the attackers at this stage is also left up to the reader's imagination. With the terms "terrorism" and "terrorist" being such buzzwords in today's parlance, presupposition becomes evident and the limited interpretation of who performed the attacks has been subjected to cleverly persuasive rhetoric. The implicit lack of identification of the agents at this stage gives a sense, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, that evil forces are at loose in the world. There is, from the start, a distinct "us against them" feel to the article, further pronounced by the author using the

number “50” for the estimated amount of deaths, even though the number of confirmed deaths up to that stage was thirty-eight. The rounding up of the number only reinforces that “they” are not only after thirty-eight of “us” but could well be after fifty or more.

The terminology in section (B) begins with the key topic of the article: the explosion on the London bus. The report focuses quite deliberately on the visually shocking bus explosion, automatically backgrounding the attacks on the London underground. The sensationalized imagery of a bus “ripped apart” is important here as one can immediately visualize the robust vehicle literally being torn to pieces, which would have taken a considerably large bomb (the size of which, importantly, is left up to the imagination).

The next section (C) contains several buzzwords to create drama, as well as the introduction of the first protagonist – the eyewitness. Placing us closer to the action, seeing through their eyes, as it were, the reader is now at street level. Putting the reader as close to the actual event as possible, the author uses “chaos”, “severely”, “blast”, “rip”, and “explosion”, which all manipulate her mental imagery, generating fear and anxiety. There is also the specific use of a “packed double decker bus” – rush hour imagery is unmistakable and universally understood. The word “packed” is particularly emphatic, creating a sense that people were crammed into a tight space and unable to move or escape. The “double decker” reference is clever use of iconic London imagery, which is deep in the psyche of the British people and can also be understood generally by the website’s non-British readership. It can be assumed the writer has chosen this particular event from the ones that happened because, out of all the events that day, this one potentially has the most impact (though not the most casualties,

as is often the case), is most likely to provoke a reaction, and contains memorable and iconic London imagery.

In sections (C) and (D), the eyewitness gives the perspective of an average person, who is, we may perceive, the same background as the reader from her manner of speech / colloquialisms (half the bus was in the air); female (potentially vulnerable – to the average reader of the publication, that is); married and therefore respectable (Mrs); most probably English (Seabrook); has some class, according to stereotypical British coding (Mrs. Belinda Seabrook), which gives more credibility to her account; and was extremely close to the event on a packed bus (“20 metres away” from the explosion (F)). At the first time of reading paragraph (D), there is a sense given that the eyewitness was on the bus that exploded: “I was on the bus in front” could be easily confused with “I was on the front of the bus”. This gives the impression that she is a survivor of the event and therefore we should empathize strongly with her. The hyperbolic, and slightly cartoonish, statements that the eyewitness “heard an incredible bang” and that “half the double decker bus was in the air” suggests again that the writer is relying on exaggeration to accentuate the drama to cause a reaction in the reader. That half of the bus was “in the air” suggests, again, that the solidly built vehicle was split into two, with one of the pieces literally suspended in the air. Such overstatement feeds the imagination to the point that the reader would be incredulous that anybody could have survived the event.

Section (E) starts with the route the eyewitness was taking, the writer focusing on familiar stations rather than purely saying she was riding the bus. The mention of these iconic London stations is likely to fuel anger in the reader, who,

engaged on an emotional level, may now experience a disconnection from rational thought. There is a sense of despair and a loss of agency in that people were being forced onto buses, as people were being “turned away” from tube stations. To reinforce the powerful imagery generated from the eyewitness account in (D), the writer now employs a second telling of how the bus was “flying through the air”, again cartoonishly representing the events, allowing those reading to, at the same time, absorb the serious information while delivering it through an entertaining, easy-to-digest narrative. The mention of papers flying through the air, too, creates a scene that has echoes of both mundanity and chaos, as on the one hand, people are going about their daily business, and on the other, evil terrorists are intent on destroying even the most sacred of quotidian routines such as riding the bus to work.

The use of modality in paragraph (F) “must” suggests that the writer knows we trust this source of information and that, as the eyewitness believes, there were many deaths. We need not question the fact. The writer employs the use of repeating information from the eyewitness, telling the reader again that people were being turned away from tube stations, which creates a sense of confusion both on the ground and in the imagination of the reader. This is further compounded by the fact that the eyewitness was “about 20 meters away” from the explosion, a slight contradiction in geographical terms, as at first Mrs. Seabrook was reported as being on the bus in front. This confusion unsettles the reader and she is unlikely to be able to navigate it to a logical conclusion, creating an opportunity for the author to achieve the desired emotional reaction.

From section (G), the focus changes direction suddenly, not dissimilar to a live news report,

with a very short quote from emergency service “sources”, which we may also instinctively not question – we must only assume that the people in charge are in control and in contact with those far up the chain of command. They state that there are “numerous fatalities”, meaning that the number could in fact be at least as high as the number first stated in the piece, “50”. The omission of the number of dead, and indeed the use of the rounded number “50”, are indicative of the sensationalism commonly associated with tabloid journalism. The use of the buzzword “feared” again reinforces what the author wants the reader to feel at this stage, a sense of uneasiness and disorientation.

Section (H) connects the two halves of the report, departing from the (wo)man-on-the-street account and introducing to the reader that the event has affected not only the U.K. but is a major incident that involves world politics and politicians, inflating its importance. The reference to both the G8 summit and world leaders gathering there at once expands the scale of the seriousness of the attacks. The leaders, who are now concerned with and therefore connected to events, are expected to make decisions based on our best interests. The leaders are not defined at this stage, creating a metonymy of authority, control, and stability in the chaos. However, the close proximity of the phrase “blasts plunged the capital into chaos” and “world leaders gathered in Scotland for the G8 summit” creates a sense that both the world and the leaders attending the summit are under threat. Even more so, the fact that the reader relies on the leaders to show calm and resilience in these circumstances creates and even more elaborate threat, as the wording suggests that the world they are charged to protect and control is, in fact, out of control.

The next section (I) introduces former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's "statement to the nation." Significantly, the author chooses the verb "brand" when describing how Blair refers to the perpetrators, a subtle reference to searing a mark on an animal's skin, the connection of which automatically dehumanizes those involved; they are animals and unlike us. Blair continues, denouncing the perpetrators as "barbaric", again distancing the "them" from what we understand, and are encouraged to identify, as "us". The individuals responsible for the attack are still yet to be identified, but we now have a clear image that they do not possess the same values as us and are indeed a lower form of life.

Importantly in section (I) there is considerable stress on the concepts of national pride and unity, loyalty and togetherness. The use of "us" and "our" is prevalent, and the reportorial discourse is underpinned with weighty statements made by those in charge. It should be noted that the use of official titles like Prime Minister suggests that at this stage the most important people in power are figures to be respected and are taking this opportunity to reinforce their authority. Statements from the high echelons of power, while reassuring the populous that everything is under control, also reinforces the status quo, subtly reminding us that these people and those like them are in control.

Paragraph (J) contains a very powerful message at this stage where the point of maintaining our values and way of life occurs for the second time. This presupposition omits the specific details of what exactly our values and our way of life are, but, as Huckin (1992) states "presuppositions are notoriously manipulative" as when readers are presented with them, "[they] are reluctant to question statements that the author appears to be taking for granted" (pp. 83-84). In this case,

the British people do not question that they are part of British unity – they are "all in it together". In the case of agent-patient relationships between the protagonists in the report, it is quite clear that there is an innocent, British, vulnerable by-stander, an evil non-British outside force wanting to destroy their way of life, and the protectors of the values and the country's wellbeing (the ruling classes) Her Majesty the Queen and Prime Minister Tony Blair. These clearly defined positions further manipulate the reader to support the views of the author, and simply reinforce the status quo.

In the second part of Blair's quote, phrases such as "determination" (repeated above), "defend", "values", "innocent people", "hold dear", and "civilized" all present a very powerful rhetoric, reflecting the British stoicism that can be identified with wars fought in the 20th century. In contrast, the words and phrases "destroy", "destruction", "impose", "cause death", "extremism", and "terrorism" tell the reader what she is not, the juxtaposition of which sends a powerful message, reinforcing the binary of us and them, with the positive words being directed squarely at the reader – it is her values that are being threatened by the extremism and terror that the Prime Minister is determined to protect her from. The reference to "civilized nations" is also important here as it is telling the reader that it is her nation that is civilized and under attack, and the evil outer forces are doing this throughout the world, which Blair intends to stop.

In section (L), it is stated that the Union Flag will be flown at half mast, which is usually reserved for war dead or the death of a royal. The powerful iconography of the flag and the Queen and their association leaves little up to the imagination, and their use for these circumstances suggests that the Queen is on the side of the country and

is looking out for every individual in it.

Paragraph (M) starts with a released statement from the Queen, striking a somber and compassionate tone. Where the Blair statement focused on affirmative action and fight, the Queen's focus is on grief and sympathy. The statement, like Blair's, is replete with contrasting words and phrases: "dreadful", "deeply shocked", "affected", "killed and injured" versus "sympathy", "admiration", "going about their work". There is a clear presupposition that the Queen speaks for "the whole nation", unifying everyone who is in it – the irony that the perpetrators of the 7/7 bombings were in fact British citizens is not lost here ("The bombers," 2006). The key hegemonic device of the statement is that, although being "one of us" ("the dreadful events...deeply shocked us all"), she also "speaks for us" ("I know I speak for the whole nation"). This reinforces the idea of the hierarchical system that is in place to protect the country from the wicked outside forces referred to by Blair. The statement to the emergency services is meant to show the Queen's compassion and selflessness as she identifies that there are people struggling to deal with the tragedy. Omitted is the mention of the advantages and riches enjoyed by the Queen and the upper classes that benefit from private health care while the working classes make do with a slowly depleting national health service.

Finally, attention is turned to who was responsible for the attack. Though section (N) mentions a group linked with al Qaeda, by this stage the assumption has already been made. An earlier reference to "papers...flying through the air" (E), would lead the reader to make a connection with the events of 9/11, leaving little doubt as to who the attackers are and what they represent.

The final paragraph (O) gives more information

on the individual group's involvement. The idea of a "secret group" precludes the reader's access to its inner workings and therefore she is unable to identify with it in any way. The reference to the group being set up in Europe suggests that home soil has been infiltrated from there and that the perpetrators have come in from the outside, through Europe, who, because of open borders, are unable or unwilling to protect us (the U.K.) – again, the fact that the perpetrators were born in the U.K. and operated from there is of little consequence. This final claim, a distorted message about who is responsible, completes the picture. The ideology has been transferred to the reader, whose ideas about the attack from the information provided are now set in stone.

6. Conclusion

Although CDA is a relatively new analytical paradigm, it is already teaching us a lot about how to look deeper into textual manipulations. From an ethical standpoint, analyses like the one in this report show us that there are plenty of non-democratic practices that occur in the manipulation of people's beliefs. Raising people's awareness of these manipulations can only serve to abate the increasingly volatile opinions that tend to segregate society and create disillusionment among millions of ordinary people. As this type of journalism can often seriously impact belief systems on a wide scale, it is imperative that researchers scrutinize texts like these more closely. From this kind of study, we can be better informed about how ideology can permeate society and can manipulate people unknowingly. This kind of research can also help us better understand the potential pitfalls in the highly interconnected, media-saturated world we live in today, offering us opportunities to impart more critically informed knowledge in liberal education environments.

7. Appendix 1

Headline: TERROR BLAST ROCKS LONDON

(A) Explosions have ripped through central London during a huge terrorist attack on the capital, killing at least 50.

(B) A bus was ripped apart and there were three major blasts on tube trains at King's Cross, Aldgate and Egware (sic) Road.

(C) Amid the chaos eyewitnesses reported that a packed double decker bus in the Russell Square area had been severely damaged in a blast. Eyewitness Belinda Seabrook said she saw an explosion rip through the bus as it approached the Square.

(D) "I was on the bus in front and heard an incredible bang, I turned round and half the double decker bus was in the air," she said.

(E) Mrs Seabrook said the bus was travelling from Euston to Russell Square and had been "packed" with people turned away from tube stops. "It was a massive explosion and there were papers and half a bus flying through the air," she said.

(F) "There must have been a lot of people dead as all the buses were packed, they had been turning people away from the tube stops. "we were about 20 meters away, that was all."

(G) Emergency service sources said there are feared to be "numerous fatalities."

(H) The blasts plunged the capital into chaos as world leaders gathered in Scotland for the G8 summit.

(I) Prime Minister Tony Blair made a televised statement to the nation in which he branded the terrorists "barbaric" and said that they will "never succeed" in destroying our values and our way of life.

(J) Mr Blair said: "It's important that those engaged in terrorism realize that our determination to defend our values and our way of life is greater than their determination to cause death and destruction to innocent people in a desire to impose extremism on the world.

(K) "Whatever they do, it is our determination that they will never succeed in destroying what we hold dear in this country and in other civilized nations throughout the world."

(L) The Queen ordered the Union Flag to fly at half mast over Buckingham Palace as a mark of respect for those killed and bereaved.

(M) Her Majesty issued a statement saying: "The dreadful events in London this morning have deeply shocked us all. I know I speak for the whole nation in expressing my sympathy to all those affected and the relatives of the killed and injured. I have nothing but admiration for the emergency services as they go about their work."

(N) A previously unknown group claimed responsibility for the attacks in the name of al Qaeda, although this has not been verified.

(O) The "Secret Group of al Qaeda's Jihad in Europe" claimed responsibility for the attack in a web site posting. The claim did not appear on any of the main sites normally used by al Qaeda.

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