

**DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN CRITICAL LINGUISTICS AND
CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR
FIRST LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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If, as a linguist or a language teacher, one is interested in how language is used in obtaining power, in exercising such power and in maintaining it, one sooner or later wants to know the secret of such manipulative use of language. What is it in a person's use of language which gives him/her the ability to control, manipulate, intimidate, infuriate, humiliate or ridicule others? Simply by what they utter people can bring masses to admiration and adoration, to submission and obedience. It can hardly be the speaker's convincing ideas only which achieve this, for in the past many people were carried away by oppressive and inhumane ideas such as those embodied in fascism, nazism, anti-semitism, religious fanaticism of various kinds, or - closer to home - apartheid ideology. What were the words or phrases, the tone's of voice or twists in tales by which large, unsuspecting audiences were so easily taken in?

If one could somehow crack the code that skilled manipulators use one stands to gain at least two things:

- * One could perhaps liberate oneself. A transparent code may assist one in dissolving the control that others exercise through language. The domineering use of power by seasoned manipulators of words may be effectively opposed.
- * One could also become considerably wiser. Those manipulative skills can be imitated or subtly adapted to gain control oneself, to change the course of events to suit one's own objectives. This could be done quite nobly for the good of society ... or of course simply in reversing the roles - to become the controller rather than the controlled!

Lets assume that I am a noble and conscientious individual. I am a teacher, an educator. I have started out on this troublesome project of cracking the manipulator's code, and I have discovered a few language tricks, I have learnt a few communicative skills. Now I want to teach them to children because I believe that in doing so I shall be developing them towards "enlightenment" and "emancipation"¹, i.e. towards new insights and improved patterns of behaviour. A new generation can be guided to appreciate high values. We may cultivate states of mind or forms of consciousness such as those implied in "democracy", "an open society", "civil society", etc.². These would be admirable goals for any education program, I would say. The question is: what scope do language curricula presently give teachers to pursue such goals?

Language teaching programs have for many years very tentatively accomodated teachers who were aware of manipulative uses, the so-called ideological uses, of language. The language teacher had her opportunities of alerting students in language classrooms to these possibilities in language use, no doubt. However, these opportunities did not arise from any provision in the curriculum of an area separately identified for raising awareness of the use and misuse of language in creating and maintaining power relations. Innovative teachers could introduce themes of language and power in various ways. This could be done, for example,

- in written or oral exercises, by selective choice of topics, such as
"The power of television in forming public opinion"
or
"Why English should/should not be the only official language in South Africa";
- in literary studies, in analyzing sensitive prescribed texts, such as
"To Kill a Mockingbird",
"Fiela se Kind", or if one wanted to be more ambitious, Ben Okri's "The Famished Road";

- and even in formal grammar teaching, for example in explaining what the grammatical category "mood/modality" entails, by using provocative sentences such as
 - (a) Mr. Buthelezi is the most influential person in regional politics in KwaZulu-Natal.
as opposed to
 - (b) Mr. Buthelezi is *probably* the most influential person in regional politics in KwaZulu-Natal.

So, up to now it has mostly been up to the individual teacher to make creative use of the space which the curriculum does leave. Recently, however, new possibilities have been opened for systematically bringing this aspect of language into the school curriculum. The area concerned is referred to as "critical language awareness". Formerly teaching such awareness was left to either the slightly subversive, gently undermining, socially concerned teacher or, quite tellingly, to the ideological, fundamentalistic rabblrouser who sought to indoctrinate through language teaching. Now we are experiencing the advent of an era in which all teachers may be obliged to sharpen their own awareness in order eventually to teach it.

Before one gets down to the nitty gritty of deciding WHAT should be included in a critical language awareness (CLA) component in the language curriculum, and HOW it should be taught, I think it would be useful - in fact advisable - to clarify some of the basic concepts embodied in CLA. If we are informed about where the whole notion of critical language awareness comes from, which tradition produced it and what theories underpin it, we may be more certain of achieving our ultimate goal than otherwise. There is no guarantee that we will end up where we want to be if we simply plunge in. Enthusiasm will not compensate for limited reflection prior to presenting CLA in classrooms.

In what follows I shall briefly say something about critical theories in general, and indicate how critical linguistics is related to these. Then, in relating critical linguistics to

critical language awareness, I shall distinguish between language awareness and critical language awareness. On the basis of these distinctions and relations I shall highlight a number of considerations that could be useful as we go about planning and implementing a CLA component in first language curricula.

CRITICAL THEORY

Critical Linguistics is rooted in a more general **critical theory**³, i.e. a theory concerning the structure of society and the kind of knowledge by which such structure can be disclosed and rearranged. This theory was developed by a group of German philosophers known as the Frankfurt School. They came up with the idea of a critical theory in reaction to a form of positivism or empiricism according to which only statements which are potentially true (or false) can be regarded as knowledge. Such an assumption would exclude normative and metaphysical beliefs, preferences, attitudes, etc. from the realm of rational discussion and evaluation. According to Habermas (1973:263-268) positivism leaves us without guidance about important parts of our form of consciousness, and thereby abandons whole areas of our life to mere contingent taste, arbitrary decision and sheer irrationality.

The Frankfurt School distinguishes sharply between scientific theories and critical theories⁴ by referring to differences along three dimensions:

First, they differ in their aim or goal, and therefore also in the way they can be used. Scientific theories aim at successful manipulation of the external world: they have 'instrumental use'. Critical theories aim at making "agents" aware of hidden coercion, thereby freeing them from that coercion and putting them in a position to determine where their true interests lie.

Second, critical and scientific theories differ in their 'cognitive' structure. Scientific theories are 'objectifying'

in that one can distinguish between the theory and the objects to which the theory refers. The theory isn't part of the object-domain which it describes. A critical theory, on the other hand, is 'reflective' in that it is always itself a part of the object-domain it describes. Such theories are in part about themselves.

Third, critical and scientific theories differ as to the kind of evidence which would determine whether or not they are acceptable. Thus, these theories require different kinds of confirmation.

Critical theories are afforded special standing as guides for human action. They are aimed at producing enlightenment and emancipation. Such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion. They define *ideology* as 'delusion', as 'false consciousness', i.e. as a false constellation of beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, etc. For certain members of the Frankfurt School *ideology* is a world-picture which stabilizes and legitimizes domination. Critical theory intends to create awareness in agents of how they are deceived about their own needs and interests. It aims at bringing them to identify what their true needs and interests are. Such knowledge will guide them in bringing about social transition from an initial state of frustration and bondage to a final state of satisfaction and freedom.

Obviously, such a view on what constitutes knowledge and how such knowledge should be used will be scrutinized and criticized at least from epistemological, methodological and pragmatic perspectives. The subsequent development of postmodernism has offered some such scrutiny and criticism⁵. However for now, without weighing merits, I simply want to give you an idea of the kind of theory from which critical linguistics stems.

CRITICAL LINGUISTICS

Critical linguistics (CL) provides a particular kind of approach to the study of language in society. This approach maintains that all meanings are socially constructed, that all discourse is a social product and a social practice.

In the literature I found a rather bewildering variety of definitions for CL. This lack of coherence is made up for in part by the general agreement on the kinds of phenomena that are of interest in the field. Pioneering work in CL was done in Britain in the early 1980's by Fowler, Kress, Hodge and Trew. The title of their book, "Language and Control" is often taken as a cryptic description of what CL is about. In fact, CL is often quite narrowly defined as a study of the relation between such matters as language and control, language and power or language and politics.

Fowler (1991:5) defines CL fairly widely as "Enquiry into the relations between signs, meanings and the social and historical conditions which govern the semiotic structure of discourse, using a particular kind of linguistic analysis."

The kind of linguistic analysis at issue is one which relates language structure to communicative function. Here there seems to be some amount of overlap with work done by others in the areas of Pragmatics, Stylistics, Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis, etc. Attention is particularly drawn to the choices that are available from the various grammatically correct ways of expressing one and the same thing.

Fairclough (1989:1) indicates that CL is the study of the connections between language use and unequal relations of power. The aim is to help correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance and change of social relations of power. A further aim is to help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because "consciousness is the first step towards emancipation". Notably he uses terms which we came across before in considering the goals of

critical theory⁶. Interestingly, Fairclough (1989:4) expresses the hope that educators will take forward the work which is being done in CL - an enterprise in which he eventually participates⁷.

Wodak (1989:xiii) explains the interest of critical linguists by referring to their interest in the social and political practices which are "involved in and triggered by" discourse. She aligns herself to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, saying that critical analysis should not remain descriptive and neutral; it should be aimed at uncovering injustice, inequality and at taking sides with the powerless and suppressed. To her CL has to uncover and demystify certain social processes, and it has to make explicit and transparent the mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, demagoguery and propaganda. Language changes do not only make manifest social change; such changes can actually also trigger social change. Therefore Wodak urges that practical and political steps should be taken by teams of practitioners along with "the people most involved", i.e. the people whose interests are misrepresented and neglected.

It is noted that, obviously, language is not powerful on its own - it gains power in the hands of the powerful. This explains why CL often chooses the perspective of those who suffer, and critically analyzes the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and opportunity to improve conditions.

LANGUAGE AWARENESS and CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS

These terms refer to areas of study recently proposed as additions⁸ to language curricula in schools. The distinction between language awareness (LA) and critical language awareness (CLA) is important because the terms refer to non-critical as opposed to critical forms of consciousness.

Donmall (1987:7) defines LANGUAGE AWARENESS as a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life. In such a framework the aim of teaching LA is "to bring pupils to increase the language resources available to them, to foster the mastery of them, to develop the sensitivity and level of consciousness they bring to their experience of language in everyday school and social contexts, and eventually to improve their effectiveness for example as citizens, or as consumers, and in their working life." Critical theory would most probably regard such aims as ideological in that they support and maintain a particular hierarchical kind of hegemony.

Another suggestion as to what LA aims to teach, comes from Trim (1993:9) who refers to the "knowledge and understanding of language and its many aspects". These "many aspects" include diverse and rather randomly selected matters such as

- * sensitivity to different registers and varieties of the mother tongue and of national languages,
- * sensitivity even to the existence of foreign languages,
- * consideration of cultural and pragmatic aspects of language,
- * basic concepts of language acquisition,
- * the relation of language to situations and speakers,
- * the relation of language to the organisation of thought,
- * variety of text types,
- * writing in different registers for different purposes and readerships ...

This appears to me to be an open list!

In contrast, CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS presupposes and explicitly builds on critical linguistics. It also presupposes a critical attitude towards education and schooling⁹. It assumes that we are living in a time of immense social change¹⁰ in which there appears to be a shift from explicit to more implicit ways of exercising power. Much of the change is change in language practices, such as

- * conducting conversation in professional settings,
- * more informal ways of addressing superiors,
- * negotiating and settling agreements, and so on.

Language itself is also the target of change. As a vehicle of social perspectives language may express prejudices of one part of a community. In order to challenge such prejudice language practices which legitimate them are questioned explicitly. In recent times this has resulted in

- * changes in sexist forms of language, e.g. reduced generic use of male pronouns,
- * the removal of old taboos, e.g. addressing a colleague as "comrade"
- * the development of new taboos, e.g. a ban on the use of racist epithets such as "wog", "coolie" or "kaffir".

Critical language awareness is seen as a pre-requisite for effective democratic citizenship, in fact some even view the development of such awareness as a human right. This would make a CLA component in language education something to which people are entitled, and which therefore cannot be optional.

From such a perspective language education is a resource for tackling problems which centre around language. Clark et al. (1987:27) view CLA as a resource for developing the linguistic consciousness and self-consciousness of dominated people. By placing language study in the context of power relations, CLA intends to encourage critical thinking. Fairclough (1992:6) expresses the goal of CLA as training people to be "effective citizens in a democratic society". This brings us clearly into the domain of critical theory. CLA aims to oppose forms of false consciousness that perpetuate domination. Its object is to emancipate students so that they develop societal structures which serve their true interests. These true interests will become clear once ideologies are critically analysed and the interests which they serve are exposed as false. Language is central in legitimising ideology, in critically analysing such ideology, in expressing the true as opposed to the false interests of a community, and in

restructuring society so that it will reflect the true interests of the community.

Now, one could go back to these theories, fields of study and areas of application discussed above, and analyse each critically in an attempt to determine which forms of consciousness underlie them, which kinds of domination they may be legitimising, etc. I shall not be over-courageous and try to carry out such an analysis. However, the foregoing exposition does provide a basis for a number of suggestions as to the planning and implementing of a CLA component in first language curricula.

I particularly distinguish between first language curricula and second or foreign language curricula because with the latter there are additional considerations which would have to be taken into account. Foreign language learners are primarily focussed on acquiring basic grammatical competence; second language learners are assumed to have progressed considerably further, but the focus is still on expanding their limited ability to produce utterances and texts which are grammatically and pragmatically acceptable. Aspects of mothertongue interference and of social and cultural difference will have an influence on how language awareness can be developed in a non-mothertongue.

PREREQUISITES TO INTRODUCING CLA IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

1. There is a real possibility that CLA can mistakenly be used not in challenging ideologies, but in reproducing the very power structures that it set out to deconstruct. Language educators need responsibly to plan a unified approach, rather than vaguely to leave the task of teaching CLA in the hands of who ever would like to use or misuse the opportunity. The idea is to develop emancipatory discourse skills, to resist disempowerment, without merely reversing the roles and disempowering

others. Rather than perpetuating ideological practices CLA should aim to recognise forms of language which bring about and legitimise domination. Such domination can then be opposed effectively by replacing disempowering forms of language with others which better encode the values of civil society.

2. A LA-program developed for Australian schools¹¹ soon lost its impact, because it had not duly considered everything required to achieve the useful goals that it originally set. Language educators need to bear in mind that Critical Theory and Critical Linguistics have been widely reflected on. Past errors will be repeated unless we are prepared to learn from such reflections. Here, for example, the development of CLA programs may be informed by the following:

- (i) In keeping with post-modernist thinking, critical theory no longer puts its trust in the supremacy of reason. It acknowledges the complexity of societal phenomena, and yet - it assumes a possibility of reaching a final state in which perfect knowledge of true interests, and optimal conditions for satisfying those interests is achieved. Post-modernists argue that different interests are an essential part of reality, and that in negotiating a balance of interests we cannot expect ever to reach a final settlement. Thus, any CLA program which pretends to present a guide for finally overcoming all domination through language, creates expectations which are bound to be frustrated.

- (ii) A number of the analyses done within the framework of critical linguistics have been criticised for posing oppositions which cannot be resolved, rather than viewing different possibilities as dialectic forms which can be related in a more productive way¹². CLA programs which critically analyse ideological language use from a single perspective without recognising the relativity of such a position, will be guilty of a similar fallacy. No analyst starts out with divine insight into the linguistic

mechanisms which dominate or manipulate, nor is such insight easily gained. Not even CLA can guarantee complete objectivity. Even a person with sound insight into linguistics mechanisms which effect unequal power relations, may criticise oppressive forms of language use, but not necessarily him-/herself be innocent of manipulating. CLA should acknowledge the tension between opposing views and seek ways in which effective language use can transform the destructive possibilities of the tension into a productive and dynamic opposition.

3. If a CLA component is to be introduced into language curricula in secondary schools, this will necessarily impact on teacher training. Even the most imaginative of programs will fail if teachers are not properly equipped to implement it. Teachers need to be properly informed about the motivation for including CLA, about the content of such a component, and about appropriate teaching methods. In the true tradition of critical theory teachers' own CLA-skills need to be sharpened. Curricula for language teachers at teacher training institutions should provide for this. Simultaneously a program has to be developed for equipping teachers already in the profession. Teachers need as much to be empowered as scholars do!
4. The goal of a CLA component in first language curricula is often expressed as "educating for democracy". In a society where "democracy" has accumulated a variety of often diverse meanings, I propose that either this concept be clarified, or the term be replaced by one which more aptly captures the essence of our aims.

Sensitising students to how language is used in determining power relations, may be enlightening and even empowering - but to what end? If the CLA program is to be emancipatory, what measure do we have for assessing whether emancipation has been achieved? A program aimed at enlightenment and emancipation of students is based on

the tacit assumption that there exists a generally accepted standard for reasonable, mature, educated language practices. Even if such a single universal standard could be conceived, "democracy" does not sufficiently express it.

I suggest that we rephrase the goal of CLA teaching to correspond with Degenaar's¹³ challenge to civil society that it take on the responsibility of finding and maintaining space in which the imagination can create freely. He argues that the variety and complexity of cultures in South Africa needs to be appreciated. Striving to develop a single universal "tribe" would impoverish society. He defines "democracy" as the maintenance of a plurality of cultures. Destructive fear of differences, of variety or of plurality can be overcome by developing a critical attitude to the enslavement of the mind. The most creative part of the mind, Degenaar finds, is the imagination. Through the imagination we develop an understanding of how diverse ways of interpreting and experiencing the world can be enriching rather than threatening. Such understanding develops tolerance and productive negotiation of differences. From such a perspective CLA will best achieve its goals if it opposes enslaving forms of language. This can be done by fighting for space in which the imagination will not be limited

- * by ideology,
- * by rigid notions of democracy,
- * by restrictive cultural values,
- * by falsely rating one language, or one dialect superior to another,
- * by promoting the development and use of one language at the expense of another,
- * by reinforcing rote learning rather than creative learner participation, or what ever else.

According to Degenaar we are obliged to "hold off any gods and tyrants" who want to take such space for

creative use of the imagination away from us"! Janks (1992:65,67) endorses this in her work which is geared toward a new education system which will encourage rather than outlaw critical thinking in students.

Critical studies have indeed opened new possibilities for language teaching. There are a number of challenges in the envisaged approach to teaching critical language awareness which I believe can be taken on confidently. Understanding the history of the present movement towards critical language studies is a prerequisite to developing a CLA program for schools. Knowing how complex the ideas are which underpin manipulative uses of language, may contribute to the success of a program aimed at uncovering language strategies which dominate and enslave. Such knowledge and understanding will in themselves be the beginning of a much needed process of enlightening and emancipating society.

NOTES

1. These terms are used by a number of people working with critical theories of some kind, cf. Geuss (1981:2), Clark et al (1987:27) and Janks and Ivanic (1992a:305ff.)
2. cf. Fairclough (1991:6), Janks (1992b:69) who refer to these as goals in such education programmes.
3. Wodak (1989:xiv,xv) endorses this.
4. For my exposition of critical theory I rely mostly on Geuss, R. 1981. **The Idea of a Critical Theory - Habermas and the Frankfurt School.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. For more detailed reactions to critical theories, see i.a. J-F.Lyotard 1984 and Turner 1990.
6. cf. p. 5 above: critical theories focus on ideologies as forms of false consciousness from which agents need to be emancipated.
7. In 1992 Fairclough edited a publication titled **Critical Language Awareness** which brings together a variety of papers concerned with critical language study in language education.
8. cf. Janks (1992b:68-70).
9. Notably this is not a perspective unique to South African society. Fairclough (1992:3-4) refers to the fact that Britons are experiencing "a period of intense social change".
10. cf. Van Lier (1991:533) who refers to early Australian efforts to implement Language Awareness courses.
11. cf. Huspek's (1991:131ff.) review of Fairclough, N. 1989. **Language and Power.** London: Longman.
12. J.Degenaar presented these views in a paper (unpublished) read at a conference on "The Culture of Multilinguality" hosted by the Department of African Languages, UNISA in February 1994.

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