



Semnan University
Faculty of Humanities

Title

**The Effect of Critical Discourse Analytical Tools on the
Improvement of Speaking Abilities of Advanced English
Students**

Thesis

*Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirement for the Degree of MA in Teaching English as
Foreign Language*

Supervisor:

Dr. A.R. Sadeghi

Thesis Advisor:

Dr. A. Moradan

By

Ali Asadi

June, 2011

Dedicated to

My Family

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Sadeghi, my supervisor, for his continued support and guidance throughout the course of my research. Equally, I would like to thank Dr. Moradan, my advisor, for his kind and sincere support.

I also owe a special note of gratitude to Dr. Farjami, whose advice and guidance helped me a lot during my studying and whose lifelong influence will always be with me.

I would also like to thank my family who always motivated and supported me as I was completing this study.

I owe thanks to Zahra Hoseini who helped me a lot in this study and also provided me with lots of books and articles.

Finally, I am extremely thankful to all the participants who provided me with rich and detailed data for the study.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of exercising critical discourse analytical tools (CDA tools) on the speaking performances of advanced English learners. In addition, the researcher was curious to know whether or not teaching CDA tools had any influences on the enhancement of the motivation of the learners. To do so, 46 learners of Valiasr English Institute were chosen by means of administering a proficiency test. After their homogeneity was assured, the learners were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control. Then, the learners were pre-tested to check their current level of performances on a speaking test. The pre-test comprised a semi-structured interview as well as a 10-minute lecture evaluated by three raters. Next, the experimental group started to practice CDA tools in their speaking, while the control group was set to let the effectiveness of the treatment be calculated. After 18 sessions of experiment, the subjects who had been put to the experimental group filled out a questionnaire on motivation, and then both groups were post-tested. The post-test, again, was composed of a semi-structured interview as well as a 10-minute lecture evaluated by three raters. The means score of the pre-test for experimental and control groups were 49.47 and 49.73 and on the post-test the mean score of the experimental significantly improved to 72.43 and the mean score of control group were 53.52. The scores of the learners demonstrated that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of the average gains scores. The analysis of the data was done through t-test. Besides, the result of the questionnaire showed that the learners found the treatment quite motivating. Finally, it was concluded that teaching CDA tools could lead to improvements in oral productions of advanced English learners.

Key words: Critical discourse analysis (CDA), Critical discourse analytical tools (CDA tools), Speaking skills, Motivation, Advanced English learners.

Table of Contents

<u>CHAPTER 1: Introduction</u>	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Critical discourse analysis	2
1.3. Critical discourse analytical tools	4
1.4. Speaking	5
1.5. Statement of the problem	6
1.6. Purpose of the study	7
1.7. This work	8
<u>CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature</u>	10
2.1. Introduction	10
2.2. Speaking skills	11
2.3. Pragmatics	12
2.4. Conversational maxims	13
2.5. Speech act theory	14
2.6. M.A.K. Halliday's systemic/functional grammar	15
2.6.1. Metafunctions	16
2.7. Critical discourse analysis	18
1.7.1. Overview	18

2.7.2. A quick look at the history of CDA	20
2.7.3. Definitions	22
2.7.3.1. Discourse	23
2.7.3.2. Context	23
2.7.3.3. Discourse analysis	24
2.7.3.4. “Critical” in critical discourse analysis	25
2.7.4. CDA in the classroom	27
2.7.5. Critical discourse analytical tools	28
2.7.5.1. Connotation	29
2.7.5.2. Metaphor	30
2.7.5.3. Simile	31
2.7.5.4. Exclusion	32
2.7.5.5. Nomination	34
2.7.5.6. Functionalization	35
2.7.5.7. Physical identification	35
2.7.5.8. Metonymy	36
2.7.5.9. Indetermination and differentiation	38
2.7.5.10. Hedging and modality	38
2.7.5.11. Anaphora	40
2.7.5.12. Epistrophe	42
2.7.5.13. Epanalepsis	42

2. 7.5.14. Hypophora	43
2. 7.5.15. Rhetorical question	44
2. 7.5.16. Procatalepsis	45
2. 7.5.17. Metabasis	46
<u>CHAPTER 3: Methods</u>	48
3.1. Introduction	48
3.2. Participants and setting	48
3.3. Instrumentation	50
3.3.1. TOEFL Test	50
3.3.2. Pre-test and post-test	50
3.3.3. Questionnaire	52
3.4. Procedure	53
3.4.1. Control group	54
3.4.2. Experimental group	55
3.5. Design	57
<u>CHAPTER 4: Results</u>	59
4.1. Introduction	59
4.2. Statistical analysis	60
4.2.1. Correlation coefficient of the pre-test	62

4.2.2. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test	63
4.2.3. Independent sample t-test of the pre-test	64
4.2.4. Descriptive statistics of the post-test	65
4.2.5. Paired-sample t-test results of the control group on pre-/post-tests	67
4.2.6. Paired-sample t-test results of experimental group on pre-/post-tests..	68
4.3. Testing the first null hypothesis via independent-samples t-test	69
4.4. Questionnaire	71
4.5. Testing the second null hypothesis	74
<u>CHAPTER 5: Conclusion</u>	76
5.1. Introduction	76
5.2. Restatement of the problem	77
5.3. Discussion	79
5.4. Pedagogical implications	83
5.5. Suggestions for further research	85
<u>References</u>	86
<u>Appendices</u>	97
Appendix A: Copy of the TOEFL test	97
Appendix B: Copy of the Pre-test and the Post-test	125
Appendix C: Questionnaire	127

List of tables and figures

Table3.1. Participants of the study	49
Table3.2. Criteria for evaluating speaking performances of the participants on pre-test and post-test	52
Table3.3. Experimental and control group classes during the week	54
Table3.4. Critical discourse analytical tools in experimental group	56
Table4.1. Descriptive statistics of participants' scores on TOEFL test	60
Table4.2. Reliability of the TOEFL test	61
Figure4.1. Normal curve of scores of participants on the TOEFL test	61
Table4.3. Skewness of the scores of TOEFL test	62
Table4.4. Correlation coefficient of pre-test	63
Table4.5. Results of the pre-test for the control and experimental group	63
Table4.6. Independent-samples t-test of experimental and control groups on the pre-test	64
Table4.7. Correlation coefficient of post-test	65
Table4.8. Descriptive statistics of the post-test for the experimental and control groups	66
Table4.9. Paired-samples t-test results of the control group	67
Table4.10. Paired-samples t-test results for the experimental group	68
Table4.11. Independent-samples t-test results	69
Table4.12. Reliability of questionnaire	71
Table4.13. Reporting the results of the questionnaire	72

Table4.14. Descriptive statistics of the questionnaire75

Table4.15. One-sample t-test of the questionnaire75

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This chapter consists of six sections. In the first section, there will be a brief introduction to critical discourse analysis (CDA) and some experts' ideas towards this approach will be presented. The second section includes an introduction to critical discourse analytical tools (CDA tools) which is followed by the section in which the relationship between speaking and this study will be briefly explained. The fourth section states the problem based on which the research was initiated and in the next section the research questions and hypotheses will be presented. Finally, there will be a general overview toward the layout of this study in the last section of this chapter.

1.2. Critical discourse analysis

“Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.” (van Dijk, 1985). CDA is a multidisciplinary approach whose purpose – one of its purposes – is to identify “ideological biases” (Widdowson, 2007) in discourses and to consider how people might be “manipulated” by the “abuse of power” (Huckin, 2002). In so doing, CDA not only makes use of “discursive and text-level” relations, but also it introduces some tools by which “higher-level” and social relations of the discourse are analyzed (Huckin, 2002). These are some reasons why CDA has attracted so many attentions among linguists and scholars and, since its emergence, a remarkable amount of books, papers, and journal articles have been published. Advocates of this approach have tried to track down discriminations and language abuses in texts and talks of the people who try to manipulate thoughts with their words, such as racists, feminists, etc. Furthermore, it should not be ignored that several scholars have shown their interests in applying CDA in – or beyond – classroom and school among which Betsy Rymes (2008) with her book *Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection* can be referred to. They think that with exercising CDA, people might be able to identify these biases and abuses.

One of the concerns of a critical discourse analyst is the importance of “seeking out the origins of social problems and finding ways to analyze them productively” (Bloor and Bloor, 2007). In fact, according to Bloor and Bloor (2007), critical discourse analysts “see discourse both as a product of society and also as a dynamic and changing force that is constantly influencing and reconstructing social practices and values, either positively or negatively”. They explain that a critical discourse analyst might want to deal with “macro” or “micro” issues. That is, they may analyze problems that are of “major international importance” (i.e., macro issues) or the smaller problems which

relate to “single individuals” (i.e., micro issues). Of course, it should be mentioned that these two issues are closely “interrelated” and are good subjects for analysis (p.12). Accordingly, one can start to deal with international issues of feminism or investigate a simple case of abuse of language by a lawyer.

As mentioned earlier, CDA has different aspects and features, each of which is good enough for a research. However, some of its common goals and purposes can be summarized as follows (taken from *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis* by Bloor and Bloor, 2007: 12-13):

- “To analyze discourse practices that reflect or construct social problems;
- To investigate how ideologies can become frozen in language and find ways to break the ice;
- To increase awareness of how to apply these objectives to specific cases of injustice, prejudice, and misuse of power; ...
- To demonstrate the significance of language in the social relations of power;
- To investigate how meaning is created in context;
- To investigate the role of speaker/writer *purpose* and authorial *stance* in the construction of discourse” [original italics].

There have been a lot of interests among scholars to study CDA and its roles in different contexts. Teun van Dijk (1998), for instance, explains that CDA “focuses primarily on *social problems* and political issues” and continues that “More specifically CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society.” Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271-280; reprinted in van Dijk 1998) also believe that the main principles of CDA can be summarized as follows:

1. “CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse Constitutes Society and Culture

4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action.”

In addition, Weiss and Wodak (2003) state that “gender issues, issues of racism, media discourses, political discourses, organizational discourses or dimensions of identity research have become very prominent” (p.12). There are also some research which can be related to English language and learning, such as the work of *César A. Navas Brenes* (2005) who tries to present some discourse analytical tools which he believes are “useful in analyzing and understanding different segments of an oral narrative”. Besides, he believes that “language teachers can apply different concepts from the area of discourse analysis (e.g., foreground, background, centers of interest, and background knowledge) on the teaching of certain skills such as reading or listening comprehension”. In addition, Betsy Rymes (2008) brings examples in which by analyzing talk in classrooms “teachers were able to use their knowledge of these different language practices as a resource to build mutual, collaborative understandings of the ways stories can be told, questions can be responded to, and problems can be solved” (p.7).

1.3. Critical discourse analytical tools

CDA introduces some CDA tools to analyze discourse, both written and spoken. Besides, the discourses which critical discourse analysts tend to analyze might range from political, journalistic, or racial texts to narrower discourses, such as a classroom talk or a parent-child conversation. Through analyzing such discourses, some insights can be gained regarding ideological biases, social and cultural factors, etc. The tools used for analyzing discourse are called CDA tools.

CDA introduces a number of tools, among which one can choose those which are suitable for their purpose of analysis. Utilizing such tools helps us trace embedded ideologies or abuses of language in the desired discourse. Huckin (2002: 7-12) classifies the tools into four ‘levels’:

- (a) “*Word/phrase level concepts*” including “classification, connotation, metaphor, lexical presupposition, modality, and register”;
- (b) “*Sentence/utterance level concepts*” including “transitivity, deletion, topicalization, register, politeness, presupposition, insinuation, and intertextuality;
- (c) “*Text level concepts*” including “genre, heteroglossia, coherence, framing, extended metaphor, foregrounding/backgrounding, omission, and auxiliary embellishments”; and
- (d) “*Higher level concepts*” including “central processing, peripheral processing, heuristics, reading position, naturalization, cultural models and myths, resistance, hegemony, and ideology”.

In this classification, the first three levels are considered to be text/discourse-based, while the fourth one deals with the way “particular discourses can lead to abuses of power” (p.11). The CDA tools which were used in this study include connotation, metaphor, simile, exclusion, nomination, functionalization, physical identification, metonymy, indetermination and differentiation, hedging and modality, anaphora, epistrophe, epanalepsis, hypophora, rhetorical question, procatalepsis, metabasis (see Chapter 2). These tools will be thoroughly defined and explained in the following chapter.

1.4. Speaking

When it comes to teaching speaking, a lot of attention is drawn to concepts such as pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, tasks, interaction, etc. Different methods

have different perspectives towards these concepts, and, so far, a lot of researches have been conducted in these areas and several books have been published (see Hall & Verplaeste 2000, Hellerman, Cole, & Zuengler 2001, Kumaravadivelu 1999, Sullivan 2000, Wells 1999, Cazden 1988, Nassaji & Wells 2000, Duff 2000, Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris 2009, Rod Ellis 2003). Chastain (1988: 270) argues that:

“Speaking a language involves more than simply knowing the linguistic components of the message, and developing language skills requires more than grammatical comprehension and vocabulary memorization. Teachers and students come to language classes with conscious or subconscious attitudes, expectations, interests, and needs. These are especially germane to establishing course objectives for speaking, which has tended to receive the greatest attention and emphasis in recent years ...”

In this research it has been attempted to test the effect of CDA tools on the improvement of speaking skills of advanced learners of English. The reason for choosing advanced learners is that they are assumed to be able to communicate in L2 and have an acceptable level of accuracy and fluency and perhaps it is time to implement some CDA tools in their speaking so that they are able to make better impressions than before on their audience. In fact, some tools extracted from CDA were taken, hoping to be able to help the learners practice them and thus, improve their speaking in L2. Another matter that can be interesting is to know whether or not the learning of these tools can help motivate learners.

1.5. Statement of the problem

The main focus of this study is to investigate a more or less new way of improving speaking skills of English learners. This study, however, does not try to work on the learners' accuracy, fluency, grammar, or vocabulary. On the other

hand, it addresses advanced learners, those who are able to communicate in L2 in a comprehensible way, those who have an acceptable level of accuracy and fluency, and those who have little problem with English grammar and know a good deal of L2 vocabularies. Now that they have learned English to the advanced level, it was assumed that by introducing some CDA tools to them, they may be able to improve their oral performances, specifically speaking, in English. Another issue that might exist in advanced classes is that when learners learn how to use language to express themselves and how to communicate in L2, they may lose their desire of moving forward and learning more. Simply put, they may think that they know enough. Thus, there is the possibility of getting demotivated to learn more and improve their proficiency. Therefore, the researcher was curious to know whether teaching CDA tools to advanced learners could create a positive attitude among them toward learning English language.

1.6. Purpose of the study

This study aims at considering whether exercising CDA tools enhances talks of advanced learners of English. In fact, the conveying of meaning by English learners was assumed to be done fluently enough, mostly through simple forms of language avoiding rhetoric and techniques which could give their speeches more power to impress their audiences by elaborately implementing such tools. It was also presupposed that this could lead to students' motivation. That is, as they learn and utilize CDA tools in their speeches – and probably notice that they can impress their audiences better than before, they get motivated and willing to practice, use, and/or share these techniques. Consequently, two questions were posed as the research questions:

Q1: Does the teaching of CDA tools to advanced students of English have any significant effects on improving their speaking skills?

Q2: Does classroom critical discourse analysis enhance students' motivation?

Based on the two questions, the following null hypotheses were stated:

H₀ (1): Teaching CDA tools to advanced students of English has no significant effects on improving their speaking abilities.

H₀ (2): Classroom critical discourse analysis does not enhance students' motivation.

1.7. This work

The present study aims at evaluating the effects of CDA tools on the improvement of speaking skills of English learners. In addition, it is tried to see whether this classroom critical discourse analysis enhances learners' motivation. In this section, the layout of this work will be presented and the framework based on which this paper was composed will be discussed.

This work consists mainly of five chapters. Just before the first chapter, the abstract is presented. Chapter one, titled 'introduction', is an introduction to the study. First, it gives a general overview of the key terms, namely CDA, CDA tools, and speaking skills. Then the problem on which the study was based is given and the questions and hypotheses are introduced.

The second chapter goes under the title 'review of the literature' and, as the name implies, discusses the relevant previous studies. It starts with an overview about speaking skills and then continues with such related concepts as pragmatics, conversational maxims, and speech act theory. Then, the significant concept of M.A.K. Halliday's systemic/functional grammar will be explained and discussed. The next concept presented in this chapter is CDA. In this section, the history of CDA is presented and various aspects of this approach are introduced.

At the end of this section the CDA tools which were used in the treatment of the study are defined and explained.

Chapter three, by the title ‘methods’, summarizes data collection procedures. It starts with introducing the participants and the research settings. Then, the instruments through which the data were collected are discussed and last, but not least, the procedures of the experiment and the groups of the study are explained.

Chapter four, titled ‘data analysis and interpretation’, contains the step by step procedures of data analysis. In this chapter, all statistical analyses used for the interpretation of the results, via SPSS 17.00, are provided. In the rest of the chapter, the processes through which the two null hypotheses of the research were tested and rejected are presented.

The fifth chapter of this study is the conclusion of the research. It, first, restates the problem and gives a quite brief overview of the whole study and, then, the discussion of the findings will be presented. Moreover, this chapter includes pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research.

At the end, the references are provided. The last part of this paper will be appendices, which consist of a TOEFL test which was administered at the beginning of the study, the pre-test, the post-test, and the questionnaire which was conducted as a means of collecting data for the second research question.