



**University of Kashan  
Faculty of Humanities  
English Department**

**Title:**

**Teaching Reading with a Critical Attitude: Using Critical Discourse  
Analysis (CDA) to Raise EFL University Students' Critical Language  
Awareness (CLA)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR M.A. DEGREE IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS  
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL)**

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**April, 2010**

**THIS THESIS**

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A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL) AND APPROVED BY THE  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF ....., 2010**

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**UNIVERSITY OF KASHAN**

**KASHAN, IRAN**

**2010**

## **DECLARATION**

I, hereby, declare that the present work, *Teaching Reading with a Critical Attitude: Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Raise EFL University Students' Critical Language Awareness (CLA)*, is the result of my own sincere work and is not plagiarized in any way.

Zeinab Koupae Dar

April, 2010

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all I express my heartfelt thanks to my Lord, Allah, who has been my faithful accompany in all hard times of my life, who has raised me and has taught me to contemplate in the world's phenomena, and has ordered me to think critically about His creatures and not to live a blind life.

I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to a lonely man, my kindest and unique father, Imam Mahdi (peace be upon him), who has shined into my dark life and has let me find my way. I like to thank him for his kind helps and attention.

I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Mohammad Reza Shams, for his sincere help and guidance who patiently offered me constructive suggestions in developing this study.

I also would like to appreciate my advisor, Dr. Ali Rahimi, for helping me sincerely to improve the present study.

I would like to thank my beloved parents who have helped and supported me in my whole life patiently and sincerely. I appreciate their support that let me to continue my studies.

Finally, I wish to thank all of my friends and all those who helped and supported me in accomplishing this study.

## **Abstract**

This study investigated the importance of raising students' critical thinking through explicit teaching of some techniques of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This study aimed to detect any change in the English BA students' abilities in revealing the hidden layers of meaning implied in the texts. There was an attempt in this study to investigate any change both in students' views toward learning English language and in their critical language awareness (CLA) before and after teaching critical reading (CR) through CDA techniques. To this end, three paired news articles were provided from different online news sources. Each pair of the first two pairs of news articles dealt with the same subject. Two articles of each pair were selected from two different news sources; online editions of Press TV and BBC. These news sources usually have different perspectives on different issues. The third pair of news reports which had similar subjects was selected from the English newspaper of New York Times. The participants were 60 BA English students studying in the University of Kashan. They were studying in the fifth and seventh terms. Before teaching CDA techniques, students were asked to analyze these articles critically. After teaching these techniques, they analyzed the same texts for the second time. Then they responded to a questionnaire to reveal any change in their attitudes toward English language learning or any increase in their motivation to learn it. After the examination of students' analyses and the investigation of their answers to the questionnaires, it was revealed that CLA of about 90% of students increased. Their motivation also increased after becoming familiar with the field of CDA in learning English.

*Keywords:* Critical Pedagogy, Critical Reading, Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Language Awareness, English as a Foreign Language

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## **List of Abbreviations**

- ACLA: Active Critical Language Awareness
- ALA: the Association of Language Awareness
- CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis
- CLA: Critical Language Awareness
- CP: Critical Pedagogy
- CR: Critical Reading
- EFL: English as a Foreign Language
- ELT: English Language Teaching
- ESL: English as a Second Language
- ESP: English for Specific Purposes
- IAEA: International Atomic Energy Agency
- IDF: Ideological- Discourse Formation
- L1: the first language
- L2: the second language
- LA: Language Awareness
- NPT: Nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty
- SFL: Systematic-Functional Linguistics

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

People try hard to materialize their wishes in the world. Language is a very powerful tool they use as a weapon to reach their ends. Language is a tool for conveying information, ideologies and emotions. Language and discourse construct, regulate and control knowledge, social relations and institutions (Luke, 2003). It can be seen everywhere is bombarded with loads of contradictory information. Therefore, the face of truth is blurred and it is hard to find right from wrong. Writers or speakers counterfeit realities to inculcate their own thoughts and ideologies. In order to become able to recognize manipulative parts of texts and to distinguish between fact and fiction having a critical mind is essential.

The text whether written or oral is a multidimensional structure and is layered like a “sheet of plywood.” Texts consist of syntax, lexicon, grammar, morphology, phonology and semantics. However, understanding grammar and lexicon does not lead to the understanding of text. Finding out the author’s worldview, the historical, social and cultural background of the text is essential. In fact, comprehension of meaning lies not in the text itself but in the complex interaction between the author’s intent and the reader’s ability to decode author’s intent (Dellinger, 1995).

Foreign language learners who are in contact with a new language and culture act as transmitters of foreign thoughts and beliefs to their own culture. They should become aware of the latent layers of meaning within texts since power-hungry men cannot misuse learners’ ignorance and cannot cunningly impose their ideologies and thoughts on them. In the absence of students’ critical thinking, dominant groups can win thoughts and hearts of the educated group of a society who have vital roles in their own country. Therefore, they have the elite’s mentalities of the society under their control and can exploit and colonize the country and at the same time destroy its culture, identity and civilization.

In order to reach critical thinking, in this study students were taught critical reading (CR) by means of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to raise their critical language awareness (CLA). The purpose of an education which uses CDA is developing the learners’ capacities to examine and judge the world carefully and, if necessary, to change it. This purpose, however, is not fulfilled in foreign language programs. According to Van Dijk and Pennycook (as cited

in Cots, 2006), the introduction of CDA in language classes does not necessarily involve a change in teaching method or techniques. Rather, CDA offers a new perspective on language which considers that language use (a) is questionable and problematic (b) reflects social/ideological processes and (c) at the same time, affect those processes.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Language is the main vehicle of communication among people. It is used not only for the expression of needs, information and emotions but for the inculcation of thoughts and ideologies. Discourse can act as a deep phenomenon to hide loads of meaning into its internal layers that only inquiring minds can discover. It should be taken into consideration that most ideological representations and comments are implicit in the texts since it is not easy to oppose them when they are indirectly represented. Therefore, having a critical mind is essential for every man to prevent dominant groups from misusing their ignorance.

According to Akbari (2008), in social systems like educational systems, there are discrimination and marginalization in terms of race, social class or gender. People who have the power to make decisions in society or have the power to design and implement educational systems may use their power to get their ideas and values accepted while the values and ideas of others are not given voice. In the field of EFL where the foreign books are used for teaching, the authors and publishers of the textbooks who are mainly native speakers insert their own beliefs and attitudes into the texts. Therefore, they can not only transform but inculcate their cultural values and beliefs to foreign language learners. To solve this problem, educational systems should provide opportunities for learners to make them familiar at least with a limited number of critical techniques. Therefore, the learners would be able to analyze the discourse and would not be manipulated by others.

There are not many studies that CDA has been used in educational settings to increase students' CLA. Studies done on the domains of CDA can be helpful to illuminate the complexities of language and to reveal many routes to apply it. Teaching these complexities can lead to an increase in people' CLA. Therefore, this study was an attempt to increase Iranian students' CLA by teaching CDA techniques, to realize the necessity of students' having critical mind and make some suggestions to prevent our students from becoming mental slaves.

### **1.3. Objective of the Study**

Because of lack of teaching critical thinking as a separate subject of study in our educational system, the aim of this study was to see the effect of teaching a number of CDA techniques on the students' CLA. The aim was to find if students' opinions about English language would change after learning these techniques. The study aimed to call attention to the necessity of including a critical aspect in our educational system as an essential need for students especially foreign language learners who are unfamiliar with many delicacies of the language they are learning.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, in previous studies, Van Dijk's (1998) model or other CDA models in Iran were not taught in order to raise students' CLA. Experts for individual critical discourse analyses have used these models. It should be considered that these analyses may be contaminated by individual prejudgments and predispositions as Widdowson (1998) believes. Therefore, the objective of this study was teaching an adaptation of some of the techniques of Van Dijk's (1998) model to English students of the University of Kashan to examine its effect on raising students' CLA.

### **1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The study addresses the following questions:

1. Does teaching a number of CDA techniques help raise students' CLA?
2. Does teaching CDA techniques make reading more interesting and motivating for students?
3. What is the level of our English language students' critical thinking?

The study aims to test the following hypotheses:

1. Teaching a number of CDA techniques helps raise students' CLA.
2. Teaching CDA techniques makes reading more interesting and motivating for students.
3. Before teaching CDA techniques English language students' critical thinking is not high.

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

English Language Teaching (ELT) assists the distribution of Western goods to other countries; selling a language or a culture; and finally, imposing a Western capitalist ideology around the world. The spread of ELT cannot be prevented, but its detrimental effects can be improved by incorporating critical ideas, not only at a global-level, but at the level of the classroom. Carrying out this study is very important and invaluable in introducing the frequently ignored dimension of critical discourse analysis and critical language awareness. In

this study, using critical approaches develops an awareness of “self” and a humanized place. This study is also useful to help learners develop their linguistic tools in combination with their critical understandings of the world. Another significant point of this study is making reading texts critically a crucial skill since ideas and events are not communicated neutrally but are transmitted through features of language impregnated with social and political effects. This study is helpful to make students suspicious and prepared to challenge or interrogate texts. In addition, this study reveals how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies in spite of non-critical discourse analysis which is only concerned with the description of text’s formal characteristics. This study that is a challenge to parrot learning, blind memorization and superficial comprehension, brings critical thinking and creativity to students. According to Reichenbach (2001), critical thinking is:

“The careful, deliberate, determination of whether we should accept, reject or suspend judgment about the truth of a claim or a recommendation to act in a certain way. It involves being a reflective, persistent questioner, wanting to know why you should believe or do something and carefully investigating and evaluating the reasons given.” (p.19)

This study helps EFL students to develop CDA skills to avoid being manipulated and by drawing attention to linguistic features and their manipulative power not only leads to linguistic but intellectual developments. This study is also useful to increase students’ awareness of socio-cultural and political influences on the interpretation of texts and make students feel more confident in expressing their critical response to written or spoken discourse. Another significant point of this study is that it provides a solution to Wallace’s (1999) critique who believes that the analyses of critical discourse analysts are introspective . This study moves CDA out of experts’ hands to be used by the social groups as an activity to empower them in their life. This study provides the chance to observe critical analysis of the texts from the readers’ view. It also provides the opportunity for students to perform higher order thinking tasks (e.g., applying, hypothesizing, analyzing, synthesizing, comparing, and evaluating what they read), to use their existing knowledge actively and become independent readers. This study by bringing CLA into the curriculum helps learners to develop more consciousness and control in their own language use and their positioning in others’ language use. CLA is not only relevant but even crucial to modern life since people’s awareness can maintain or remove especial power relations in the world.

There are not many studies which treat CDA as a pedagogical tool taught in classrooms to raise students' CLA. Therefore, this study can help teachers to learn the techniques for a more effective way of teaching materials in order to increase both students' CLA and motivation in English language learning. Besides, this study is helpful in stimulating and facilitating future research on application of CDA to raise students' CLA in educational settings.

## **1.6. Definition of Key Terms**

In this part, five key terms of this study are defined.

### **1.6.1. Critical Pedagogy (CP)**

Critical pedagogy (CP) is in contrast with banking teaching in which teachers' task is pouring knowledge into empty students. In the banking system of education teacher acts as the giver of the information and learners as passive collectors (Freire as cited in Dheram, 2007). Learners, however, should have the opportunity to evaluate what they are learning because learning is an active and creative process. Frechette (2002) states that critical pedagogy is about the analysis of those processes which define what knowledge is important to know, how we should learn it and how the production of knowledge creates social identity. CP asks whose knowledge or worldviews are being taught, how identity is constructed, how many ways of learning there are. The aim of CP is to empower students to take part in the process of their own self-formation (Frechette, 2002).

According to Akbari (2008), critical pedagogy in ELT is an attitude to language teaching which relates the classroom context to the wider social context and aims at social transformation through education. In CP, the belief is what happens in the classroom should make changes outside it or what is learned in the classroom should be applicable outside it. In CP, language is not just a system but an ideology too. Akbari (2008) believes CP is a way to liberation and hope; it is a route to liberation since it questions the legitimacy of accepted power relations and recognizes the necessity of going beyond social constraints; it is also a way to hope since it helps marginalized groups to find ways of changing their present situation and improve their social conditions. In classroom, when CP gives voice to students, it is liberating since it legitimizes their voices. CP also helps marginalized groups in classrooms to learn ways of changing society for a better, more democratic life.

### **1.6.2. Critical Reading (CR)**

To find out what critical reading is, the difference between the critical reader and non-critical reader illuminated by Kurland (2000) is represented. According to Kurland (2000), for

non-critical readers, texts provide facts. Knowledge is gained by memorizing the statements within a text. Critical readers recognize that every text is the unique creation of a unique author. A non-critical reader might read a history book to learn the facts or to discover an accepted interpretation of the events. A critical reader might read the same book to appreciate how a particular perspective on the events and a particular selection of facts can lead to particular understanding. Non-critical reading is satisfied with recognizing what a text says and restating the key statements. Critical reading moves further. Having recognized what a text “says”, it deals with what the text “does” by such statements, if the text is offering examples, arguing, sympathizing or making a contrast to clarify a point. Finally, based on the earlier analysis critical readers conclude what the text, as a whole, “means” (Kurland, 2000).

Wallace (2005) believes reading has turned to decoding of texts, pronouncing correctly or practicing language structures (p. 4). For early learners and for advance learners, reading means comprehending the text. In fact, the eventual goal of reading is comprehension of texts. Wallace (2005) introduces reading as a social, critical and interpretative process rather than as a skill.

Wallace (2005) believes critical reading involves closer than customary attention to text, i.e. a heightened consciousness (p. 30). It is the reverse of automaticity which was the focus of conventional reading. In order to activate consciousness, ways of understanding what the language in text is doing are needed especially when ideologies of texts are concealed.

### **1.6.3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

According to Boston (2002), CDA is the study of formal linguistic devices of texts for different purposes of recognizing the ideological biases which may be overt or hidden and recognizing what the text/author’s illocutionary intentions are (Boston, 2002). CDA is a relatively new approach to text analysis. Its focus is on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are built through written and spoken texts in communities, schools and classrooms. CDA is very useful in teaching critical reading. CDA is both a technique and a task: the technique is to de-construct the text; the task is to discover the hidden meaning. CDA also leads to critical language awareness (CLA) (Luke, 2003).

According to Cots (2006), CDA sees discourse as a form of “social practice”, in which language use is seen at the same time as socially influenced and influential. Another characteristic of CDA is that it tries to reveal connections between language use, power, and ideology (Cots, 2006).

#### **1.6.4. Critical Language Awareness (CLA)**

Critical language awareness (CLA) has roots in language awareness (LA). According to Donmall (as cited in Farias, 2005), language awareness involves sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life. Language awareness is a mental and internal capacity which learner gradually develops by giving motivated and conscious attention to language in use to discover its patterns. It is also a pedagogic approach which helps learners to learn how languages work. It helps to develop a spirit of enquiry. Language awareness is not an explicit way of teaching, it is developed by the learner. One of the features of LA is that because learners put their energy and attention in the learning process, a better learning happens. Another feature is learners' awareness of the difference between their own performance and native speaker's performance by paying deliberate attention to language features.

CLA refers to the same approach, but the focus is on the relationship between language and social context. In CLA, the focus is on the ways in which language represents the world and reflects and constructs social relations (Clark and Ivanic 1999). CLA is defined more fully as essentially a pedagogic procedure indebted to critical discourse analysis and language awareness respectively. From CDA is derived a view of discourse as shaped by relations of power; from LA the interest in examining language as a specific object of study. Therefore, CLA exemplifies CDA in teaching contexts while strengthening basic principles of LA (Wallace, 1999). In fact, CLA is both a pedagogical approach and an explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning. In this study, CLA refers to the internal capacity which is developed by studying CDA.

#### **1.6.5. English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

English as a foreign language (EFL) refers to the use or study of English by speakers with a different native language. EFL indicates the use of English in a non-English-speaking region. Study can occur either in the student's home country, as part of the normal school curriculum or otherwise, or, for the more privileged minority, in a country that they visit as a sort of educational tourist, particularly immediately before or after graduating from university. Typically, EFL is learned to either pass exams as a necessary part of one's education, or for career progression while working for an organization or business with an international focus.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1. Overview

This chapter is made of seven parts. Firstly, the domain of critical pedagogy is illustrated. Secondly, CDA, its development and its directions and Van Dijk, Wodak and Fairclough as the main scholars in this field are presented. Then, some critiques about CDA are offered. In the fourth and fifth parts, CLA and its role in education are explained extensively. The last part deals with the studies done in the critical areas.

#### 2.2. Some Important Aspects of Critical pedagogy (CP)

According to Freire (1973), humans have the capacity to act consciously and therefore they are not passive but active beings. Humans are not adaptive beings who merely adjust to reality but integrated ones who concurrently shape and reflect on their world (Freire, 1973). Freire (1973) believes that historical shifts have effects on the consciousness and agency of humans. If people cannot understand the conditions they are living, they cannot become social agents and will instead be carried along by social changes. If people have a permanently critical mind they can become truly integrated with their time.

The ideal outcome of critical pedagogy is **critical consciousness**. According to Freire (1973), conscientization is an ongoing process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness. In this process learner breaks through current knowledge and beliefs to reach new levels of awareness in particular, awareness of oppression. Freire (1973) explains that critical consciousness is an educative tool for learners to question their historical and social situation, which Freire has called it “reading the world”. The goal of critical consciousness, according to Freire (1973), should be acting as “subjects” in the making of a democratic society. If people do not have critical consciousness as Freire (1973) mentions, they are affected by fanaticized consciousness. The basis of fanaticized consciousness is more emotionality than reason; it leads to irrationality, passivity and fear of freedom (pp. 19-20). Teachers’ role, according to Freire (1973), is to recognize this kind of consciousness and help learners to use a critical consciousness. Freire (1973) states, “Education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage. It cannot fear the analysis of reality or, under pain of revealing itself as

a farce, avoid creative discussion” (p. 38). Education as an act of love awakens critical awareness.

Learners’ **first language** is another important concept which should be given considerable attention in critical studies. According to Akbari (2008), a common assumption is that learners’ first language interferes with second language development. Foreign language teachers are given advice not to use it as much as possible. From a critical aspect, we should not deny the significance of learners’ first languages. Learner’s first language is part of their identity. If teachers want to give their learners voice to become empowered, they should respect learners’ identity, values and in fact their language.

The **goal** of using critical pedagogy is connecting education with a better world through active involvement with democracy. In critical pedagogy, it is warned against the continued prevalence of North American and European influences. There is a belief that democracy is a fragile category. Therefore, central aspect for the survival of CP is educational policy and practice within this era. Learners should be encouraged to reflect critically on their situation. It is also significant to instruct critical pedagogical principles to teachers in order to prepare them to interrogate harmful ideologies and practices. Another goal of CP is destruction of dependency of learners on their teachers or other authorities. CP is a state of becoming, a way of being in the world and with the world. CP brings depth and wisdom to the areas of contemporary education. It is a never-ending process which involves struggle and hope at the same time; struggle to differentiate between wrong or right and hope to change the improper conditions (Wink & Wink, 2008).

The last point of this part refers to another important aspect which should be considered in CP. CP should be designed for all people regardless of their education. It should be presented in a simple language or it will be used just by academics and will be inaccessible for marginalized people.

### **2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Some Related Concepts**

According to Boston (2002), discourse analysis is the study of any piece of language longer than the sentence level. In non-critical discourse analysis, formal characteristics of text are analyzed in terms of grammar, vocabulary, genre analysis, etc. Fairclough (1992) mentions critical approaches are different from non-critical ones in not just describing discursive practices, but showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and how it shapes social identities, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants.

To reach a better understanding of CDA, **manipulation** as one of the crucial concepts related to it is explained. According to Van Dijk (2006), manipulation is different from legitimate mind control as in persuasion. It is illegitimate control by means of discourse. By analyzing a discourse it is revealed if it is ideological or not. When there are us/them polarization and a systematic negative representation of others in terms of negative values and actions, that discourse is manipulative. But it does not mean that every discourse is manipulative, for example a discussion in a newspaper or on television is persuasive. Manipulation and its consequence, social inequality, happen in special conditions. These conditions exist when the manipulator is dominant, recipients lack relevant knowledge or their knowledge is incomplete and the situation is in the interest of the dominant group and against the interests of the dominated group.

According to Van Dijk (2006), we can have three kinds of manipulation. They are social, cognitive and discursive. In social manipulation there is illegitimate domination leading to social inequality. Cognitive manipulation is mind control. In this manipulation there is interference with the processes of understanding. Discursive manipulation involves the usual forms of ideological discourse; for instance, our good things and their bad things are emphasized. According to Dijk (2006), dominant groups use the process of manipulation to maintain their power. Manipulation can be done by dominant groups in many (other) ways as well, e.g. through persuasion, providing information, instruction and other social practices which are aimed at influencing the knowledge, beliefs and indirectly the actions of the recipients. For instance, when headlines instead of expressing the most important details emphasize trivial ones, they lead to an impaired understanding. When speakers try to hinder understanding they speak faster and less distinctively. They also use more complex sentences about a subject less familiar to the audience.

Van Dijk (2006) points out manipulators want readers or listeners understand a discourse as they do. To do this, they use discourse strategies. In these strategies (e.g. generalization) the emphasis is on those aspects which are consistent with their interests. These strategies also de-emphasize those properties inconsistent with their interests. Manipulation is influential when its focus is on more general beliefs such as knowledge, attitudes and ideologies and not on personal matters. Because social beliefs control what people do and say in many situations.

Van Dijk (2006) introduces some contextual features in which audience may be considered as victims. That is they are caught in special situations that are not able to resist, detect or avoid manipulation. These features can be:

1. Incomplete or lack of relevant knowledge which hinders counter-arguments against false or biased statements.
2. Basic norms, values and ideologies which cannot be denied or ignored.
3. Strong emotions which make people vulnerable.
4. Social positions, jobs, etc. which make people accept the discourses, arguments, etc. of elite persons, groups or organizations.

According to Van Dijk (2006), as long as critical voices do not dominate in the society or do not dominate the important organizations, they are not considered as serious problems for the manipulators. The impact of manipulation decreases when critical voices become more powerful and more widespread (for example when important organizations support them) by providing enough counter-information or counter-argument. “In sum, manipulative discourse focuses on those properties of recipients that make them vulnerable to manipulation” (Van Dijk, 2006).

Another important concept related to CDA is **ideology**. According to Van Dijk (2001), ideologies are special form of social cognition shared by social groups. They consist of a specific kind of ideas. They are not personal beliefs. Van Dijk (2001) assumes ideologies are somehow structured. If it is assumed that some ideological beliefs are more important than others, a hierarchical organization can be considered for ideologies. Van Dijk (2001) continues that ideologies can be good or bad depending on their social consequences. Therefore, both racism and antiracism are ideologies, and so are sexism and feminism. Ideologies may establish or maintain social dominance or lead to opposition (Sheyholislami, 2001).

The distinctive feature of CDA, according to Widdowson (1998), is its commitment to social justice. CDA tries to reveal how language is used and abused in the exercise of power and the suppression of human rights. Therefore, **power** is another important concept related to CDA. Fairclough (1995, p. 27) defines power from two aspects both in terms of unequal relationships between participants in discourse events and unequal capacity to control text production in particular sociocultural contexts. According to Fairclough (1995, p. 27), within institutions there are different ideological–discursive formations (IDFs) associated with groups. Within institutions only one IDF is dominant. IDF is a sort of speech community with its own discourse and ideological norms. An IDF is capable of naturalizing ideologies i.e. to introduce them as non-ideological common sense. The objective of CDA is to denaturalize