Discourse is defined by what it is not, what is set in opposition to. Discourse is often considered to be different from text, sentence and ideology (Mills 2004 p. 3). Discourse can be approached by various frameworks. To this relation, Schiffrin (1994), among others, has discussed the various frameworks, concepts, and methods available for the analysis of discourse available within linguistics.

In the context of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which has been viewed as a different field of study from Discourse Analysis (DA), there have been different critical discourse analysts who share their views on how to analyze discourse, to name a few, Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter (2000), Philips and W. Jogersen (2002); Fairclough, (2003); and those who attempt to provide a practical guidance and examples on how to analyze discourse critically such as Martin and Rose (2003), who elaborates a step by step guidance of how to work with discourse and van Leeuwen(2008), who proposes new tools for critical discourse analysis.

A single book, however, that presents and discusses all the different approaches to critical discourse analysis for students and readers in general may be limited in number. Of these limited in number books, the second edition of Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (2009) is more than worth paying attention to. The book is the result of a long endeavor to provide readers with a comprehensive book introducing the different approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis which was started in the form of a seminar on CDA at the department of Linguistics (University of Vienna) in 1999 (Wodak and Meyer 2009).

Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis is a collaborative work involving such important names in the field of critical discourse analysis as Norman Fairclough, Siegfried Jäger, Florentine Maier, Gerlinde Mautner, Martin Reisigl, Teun A. van Dijk and Theo van Leeuwen, which does not only offer the step by step guidance of how to critically approach discourse but also the history, agenda, theory, and methodology of the field.

There are seven chapters in the book and each chapter is the contribution of the different writers. Wodak and Meyer, who in addition to being the editors are also two of the contributors, tackle the issue of the history, agenda, theory and methodology of critical discourse analysis from their perspective. Despite very brief, the history they discuss provides readers with the essential information on the impetus for the emergence of CDA. Here, they also, quoting Billig (2008), present in my point of view, an excellent self-reflective question for scholars employing CDA; “do scholars who employ CDA write in the same way mainly by using nominalization extensively, like the many texts they criticize?”
Chapter 2 of the book presents Foucaultian critical discourse analysis. Jager and Maier, basing their approach on Foucault’s notion of discourse theory, present detailed steps on how to analyze a discourse. I find that the procedure of how to critically analyze discourse they offer is more detailed and practical, not necessarily better, in comparison to others proposed by other contributors. Nevertheless, their discussion on discourse and dispositive is a very challenging topic for readers with limited background on CDA.

Van Dijk offers a different term to CDA in chapter 3. He prefers to employ the term Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to CDA since “the term suggests that such a critical approach not only involves critical analysis, but also critical theory, as well as critical application” (p.62). For van Dijk CDS “is not just any social or political research but is premised on the fact that some forms of text and talk may be unjust” (p.63). Then it is one of the tasks of CDS scholars to critically discuss the norms that determine such ‘discursive injustice’ and expose and help to combat such injustice.

It is strongly believed that critique, ideology, and power are the three inseparable concepts in any discussion of all variants of CDA. Reisigl and Wodak deal with this issue in chapter 4. They also discuss discourse, text and context (p.89). For them discourse is located within specific fields of social action, both constituted and constitutive socially, related to macro topic and critical discussion about validity claims. Their approach is a discourse-historical approach (DHA) which provides some possible tools and principles for analyzing discourse (p.93). Reisigl and Wodak go to further extent by providing tables showing examples of how to analyze discourse about climate change as their example for the execution of the approach. Nevertheless, my students find this to be a quite source for headache.

As a field of study, CDA or CDS in van Dijk’s term has been well established. It has a distinctive and standard methodology as Wodak and Meyer explicated in the first chapter of the book. However, recent development seems to have introduced a ‘new’ tool to CDA whose great potency is increasingly more and more realized and used by CDA practitioners. Gerlinde Mautner introduces the contribution that corpus linguistics, this “new” methodology, may offer to CDA in chapter 5. Despite the fact that “it is not yet regarded as being the core of CDA’s methodological canon”, Mautner believes that corpus linguistics can “allow critical discourse analysts to work with much larger data volumes than they can when using purely manual techniques (p.123). However, as the chapter serves as ‘an introduction’ it only discusses corpus linguistics in general and does not offer detailed step-by-step guidance on how to use it for a project.

As I personally am interested in the approach offered by van Leeuwen, I find chapter 6, where van Leeuwen elaborates discourse as recontextualization, to be enlightening and empowering. Despite the fact that there are terms used which are often very challenging to grasp, van Leeuwen presents an interesting approach to analyzing discourse. This chapter is apparently the shorter version of his approach that he offers and discusses in his Discourse and Practice, New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis (2008), published by oxford. His effort to extend discourse analysis to ‘new’ semiotic modes, pictures and children toys, is worth noticing and appreciating. This makes critical discourse analysis a more challenging field of study.
The book is wrapped with the discussion on the approach proposed by one of the giants in CDA, Norman Fairclough who proposes a dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis in social research. Fairclough begins his discussion by explicating theory and concepts of his approach. For Fairclough, Discourse is (a) meaning making as an element of the social process, (b), the language associated with a particular social field or practice, and (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective. Basing on Bhaskar’s ‘explanatory critique’ (Bhaskar, 1986; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) Fairclough offers his procedures of analyzing discourse in four stages consisting of Focusing on a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect (stage 1), Identifying obstacles to addressing the social wrong (stage 2), Considering whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong (stage 3), and Identifying possible ways past the obstacles (stage 4) (p. 167).

As a single book that tackles many important issues in critical theory, compiles different approaches to analyzing discourse, discusses and presents detailed execution of the approach, Method of Critical Discourse Analysis is not only empowering and enlightening but also practical and applicable for readers and students in particular who would want to grow and extend their interest in critically analyzing discourse. Nevertheless it is not without, not a weakness may be, but a room for improvement to be precise. Perhaps the next edition will dedicate more chapters on how to work on more real examples without being reduced in their discussion or explanation. And a glossary, as the companion to the index the book already has, of what a term means and defined by different contributors may be more than helpful to clarify confusion contributed by the various references a term used in the book has.

REFERENCES


