

NATURALIZED DISCOURSE IN ARGUMENTS: A TEXTUAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

M.E. Garcia-Jerez

Graduate School of Integrated Sciences for Global Society, Kyushu University, Fukuoka,
Japan.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses that using a textual approach to study social representations in arguments could help to better understand the relationships among naturalized discourse and argumentation. To naturalize an utterance, i.e. to make it commonsensical, is to give an arbitrary utterance the quality of "true" without questioning the ideological context which frames -and, therefore, gives meaning- to that utterance. Naturalized discourse is discourse that has become commonsensical even though it has actually been framed by the values and beliefs of a given social group. This paper argues that using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study discourse at the textual level might be useful to find how social representations could affect the strength of an argument.

KEYWORDS

Social Representations, Argument, Text, Critical Discourse Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Creating representations responds to the need human beings have of making sense of their surroundings and the need of communicating with others. In this view, representations of any kind appear to be natural and commonsensical. Nevertheless, social representations, especially those which respond to the transmission of ideological views, are framed by historical, institutional and socio-political contexts which institutionalize thought and behavior. Discourse carries representations which have been ideologically-framed by the values and beliefs of certain social groups, and therefore, by producing and reproducing social representations, discourse institutionalizes thought and behavior.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a critical approach to study discourse which understands the latter as a form of social practice. In this sense, members of a given group will interact through discourse and, therefore, they will be influenced by it, as much as they will influence it.

CDA, being a method which draws from Critical Theory, can be used to analyze the discourse of those in power. Power in this context is taken from a discursive viewpoint in which it refers to hierarchical relationships shown in communicative situations. The reproduction of naturalized discourse, of arbitrary representations of any social group happens every day and at any level of society. Thus, using a textual approach to analyze arguments in those situations could help the field of argumentation by complementing critical thinking with the use of critical theory as a way

to create awareness from a socio-cognitive viewpoint shown in the use of language by acknowledging the arbitrariness of naturalized discourse.

With this in mind, this paper argues that by using CDA to study discourse in spoken or written texts, we can identify naturalized discourse and analyze the effect naturalized social representations have on arguments.

2. SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND DISCOURSE

2.1 Social Representations

Representations are ways in which we categorize the world around us in order to express ourselves in relation to that world. They are means of understanding the stimuli which surround us, internalizing them and communicating them to others by becoming a code for social exchange. Stuart Hall (1997) writes:

“Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events.” (Hall, 1997: 17)

Hall uses the term "cultural representations" in the context of cultural studies. Serge Moscovici, drawing from the concept of collective representations of Durkheim, introduced the concept of Social Representations in the early 60's.

“[a social representation is] a system of values ideas and practices with a twofold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history.” (quoted from Duveen’s Introduction: The Power of Ideas on Moscovici, 2000: 12)

One of the main distinctions that Moscovici emphasized when separating the terms "collective representations" and "social representations" is the dynamic nature of the latter. Social representations change when society changes, and they are contextualized. As members of a social group we belong to a social reality which is defined by the historical, institutional and socio-political contexts at work in a given period of time. Thus, we reproduce the related representations as they enter our "common sense". And the means we have to share and reproduce these social representations are language and discourse.

“Nobody's mind is free from the effects of the prior conditioning which is imposed by his representations, language and culture. We think, by means of a language; we organize our thoughts, in accordance with a system which is conditioned, both by our representations and by our culture. We see only that which underlying conventions allow us to see, and we remain unaware of these conventions.” (Moscovici, 2000: 23)

When we create representations to talk about our surroundings, we are undergoing a psychological and a sociological process of perception and recognition. Or rather, we are

undergoing the cognitive processes of perceiving and interpreting, and those processes are influenced not only by personal forces but also by societal forces.

When Moscovici says "We see only that which underlying conventions allow us to see", he is saying that a solely individual approach to reality -in which we believe that what we describe comes from our cognitive information processes alone- is inappropriate, because those processes are inherently influenced by interpretations of the world which make it to have sense to everyone who belongs to a given reality. In this view, whether social representations are positive or negative, it is a matter of whether these "underlying conventions" are being influenced by ideologies which carry social constructions in favor or against the subject or the object which is being represented.

Social representations are the means of communicating ideologies and are, in turn, framed by them. And since they are shared by the group, they are commonsensical to all members of the group. That is, the members of a group will not question the origin of their way of thinking, talking and behaving in relation to a given ideology.

2.2 Ideology

When Destutt de Tracy coined the word, he described ideology as a "science des idées". Ideology is, in a wide sense, a way to lead thought. Ideology distinguishes itself from psychology and metaphysics, and, as a science of ideas, it designates the science which emerges from the analysis of our perception of the world (Nocera, 2009).

Ever since *Eléments d'Idéologie*, the notion of ideology has been treated in various ways. One of the most popular frames to understand ideology is the Marxist view of the concept, who used the term "ideology" to refer to forms of 'false consciousness' created by misleading values imposed by the ruling class in order to legitimate the exercise of dominance over the working class. Ideology, generally speaking, is the set of values and beliefs which are consensual to all the members of a group. Van Dijk (2000), drawing from Moscovici's socio-cognitive view, illustrates ideology as a multidisciplinary concept:

"The cognitive definition of ideology is given in terms of the social cognitions that are shared by the members of a group. The social dimension explains what kind of groups, relations between groups and institutions are involved in the development and reproduction of ideologies. The discourse dimension of ideologies explains how ideologies influence our daily texts and talk, how we understand ideological discourse, and how discourse is involved in the reproduction of ideology in society." (Van Dijk, 2000)

For Moscovici, social representations have two main roles: a) they conventionalize, and b) they prescribe (Moscovici, 2000: 22-23). This conventionalizing and prescriptive nature of social representations in the context of social psychology is in line with the view of discourse as a social practice in the context of critical discourse analysis (CDA):

"Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive

both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people.” (Fairclough and Wodak, quoted from Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 5-6)

2.3 Discourse

Discourse serves the purpose of regulating and institutionalizing ways of talking and behaving by producing and reproducing ideologies through the use of language. It exercises power not as a physically violent imposition of dominance, but one less explicit sort of dominance executed through the imposition of social representations. Discourse regulates and institutionalizes by perpetuating dominance in the use and re-use of power through words.

For Bourdieu, discourse is the legitimation of ideological values, beliefs and practices exercised through the production and reproduction of representations which become natural and commonsensical to given social groups in spite of their arbitrariness. As explained by Fairclough:

“One can think of the ultimate objective for a dominant discourse type as, in the words of the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, ‘recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness’. To put the same point tersely (and less elegantly), if a discourse type so dominates an institution that dominated types are more or less entirely suppressed or contained, then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary (in the sense of being one among several possible ways of ‘seeing’ things) and will come to be seen as natural and legitimate because it is simply the way of conducting oneself. I will refer to this, as others have done, as the naturalization of a discourse type. Naturalization is a matter of degree, and the extent to which a discourse type is naturalized may change, in accordance with the shifting ‘balance of forces’ in social struggle. [...] Ideologies come to be ideological common sense to the extent that the discourse types which embody them become naturalized.” (Fairclough, 2001: 76)

Based on this notion of naturalization, the concept of “naturalized discourse” refers to discursive extracts (words, sentences, etc.) which have become commonsensical in their linguistic embodiment. Fairclough, drawing from Foucault, had used the term “ideological discursive formations” to conceptualize this idea. Nonetheless, I find the term “naturalized discourse” more appropriate for the current discussion. Naturalized discourse involves, then, an ideological and commonsensical legitimation of a social representation shown in the textual level of discourse.

3. Discourse and Text

In discourse studies, text is considered either a piece of spoken or written discourse, and it is highly relevant to CDA because it entitles an important part of the analysis of discourse. “Discourse, and any specific instance of discursive practice, is seen as simultaneously (i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), and (iii) sociocultural practice.” (Fairclough, 1995: 97)

According to Fairclough, textual analysis is as important as social analysis when studying discourse. He argues that using more systematic approaches when carrying out discourse analysis helps to identify not only what is in the text, but also what is left out of the text. "Choice entails exclusion as well as inclusion" (Fairclough, 1995: 210). He emphasizes the relevance of looking into form and not only content when analyzing text for social research, and he also points out the relevance of intertextual analysis when connecting text analysis and social and cultural analysis. Analyzing discourse in its textual dimension implies the use of various methods which are not only pertaining to CDA, but which CDA borrows and gather for a deeper social understanding of communicative situations. It is for this reason that analyzing discourse using CDA in order to discover and explain naturalized discourse is pertinent.

Naturalized discourse, however, is not only part of the discourse of those in privileged positions of power. Power here is "conceptualized both in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed... in particular sociocultural contexts" (Fairclough, 1995: 1). Naturalized discourse is not only found in discursive events such as political speeches and newspapers, but it can also be found in discursive events such as a student's assignment, to give an example, where the asymmetrical dichotomy of the writer and her or his considered audience is unclear.

It is true that a student writing an assignment for his or her English class has no alleged power to influence the masses with the way he or she writes the assignment. In this sort of discursive event, CDA, not having a clearly defined dichotomy of power, is mainly relevant if we want to find out, for example, what a group of students think of a given topic, e.g. immigration. We can use CDA to discover and explain how homogenized non-powerful groups discursively behave in relation to immigration by analyzing topicalization, lexicalization, global and local coherence, etc. However, in this situation, we are not utilizing these methods to study the effect of a specific figure of power on the student who is writing the assignment, but we are using CDA to analyze how working societal forces affect their discourse in their writings.

In this discussion, I argue that CDA can be utilized to study discourse in this kind of contexts in order to identify naturalized discourse and analyze the effect it has on arguments.

4. ARGUMENT AND DISCOURSE

A general definition of argumentation is that it is reason giving in order to justify or criticize a proposition. And reasoning "involves dealing with claims with an eye to their contexts, to completing claims, and to the people who hold them. It calls for the critical evaluation of these ideas by shared standards; a readiness to modify claims in response to criticism; and a continuing critical scrutiny both of the claims provisionally accepted and of any new ones that may be put forward subsequently. A "reasoned" judgment is thus a judgment in defense of which adequate and appropriate reasons can be produced." (Toulmin et al, 1984: 10)

Reasoning is, then, the process by which we arrive to well-thought arguments. However, reasons, or rather good reasons, are not equally appealing to different participants even in the same communicative situation. The key here is "It calls for the critical evaluation of these ideas by shared standards". Here, "shared standards" is used to give the idea that by sharing the context, or rather, by sharing the understanding of the current context, we can reason and argue.

But understanding the social and cultural context in which an argument is advanced is not as easy a task as it can seem. Even by leaving aside the obvious matter that an argument is a piece of discourse in itself, we have to consider that discourse, as we have discussed before, builds the context in which an argument will be considered appropriate or relevant. These “shared standards” are related to values and beliefs which belong to a contextual reality which is built through discourse.

As said before, naturalized discourse involves an ideological and commonsensical legitimation of a social representation shown at the textual level of discourse. To make this definition more specific, we need to add that, here, “social representation” stands for those representations which are arbitrary in their ideological nature. That is to say, naturalized discourse does not deal with representations which do not reproduce ideologies.

An argument is not usually assessed as “true or false”, but rather as “strong or weak”. Arguments are not criticized as right or wrong in their content but in their form, as in being correctly constructed. Nevertheless, when analyzed from a textual approach, if not always, there could be situations in which naturalized discourse might actually be affecting the arguments, because the textual embodiment of the argument might be naturalizing ideologies which are actually opposing one’s main claim.

Discourse understood as a social process in which we build meaning through interaction assumes a certain level of obviousness by us, human beings, as users. The understanding of social representations being framed by ideologies is not a conscious one. As a member of a group, there are values and beliefs at work when we define the world. However, even if we do not identify ourselves with the beliefs of a certain social group, as members of society, we are constantly receiving and reproducing legitimated discourse which might oppose our own views, but which we have come to accept as it is inserted in our everyday life as “common sense”. It is for this reason that analyzing naturalized discourse in arguments is relevant. Recognizing and analyzing discursive formations embodied at the textual level of arguments could help us understand better the relationship between naturalized discourse and argumentation.

4.1 Argument at the Textual Level

It is important to emphasize that the pieces of text which may denote naturalized discourse cannot be considered “(mere) linguistic mistakes” on which the base of a well-built argument is unlikely to be disregarded.

A textual approach to argumentation is not a reduction of an argument to its linguistic level, but almost the opposite: It is an approach which helps understand that some arguments might comply to, allow me to call it, macro level structure, while being incomplete or weak in a micro level. Studying discourse at a textual level is different than studying linguistic features alone. Textual analysis involves linguistic analysis, intertextual analysis and social analysis: It implies the description, the interpretation and the explanation of discourse.

The analysis of features such as grammatical forms, chosen vocabulary, among others, will first serve the function of describing the text and seeing what linguistic systems have been chosen by the authors to convey their message. Intertextual analysis is related to “how texts draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize and dialogue with other texts” (Fairclough, 2003: 17). We interpret the text by analyzing the assumptions which have been implied in what is said in the text and

what has been left out of the text. Finally, the social analysis, or the explanation of the text, is concerned mainly with the sociocultural practice within which the text is produced.

The diagrammatic representation of this model would be as it follows:

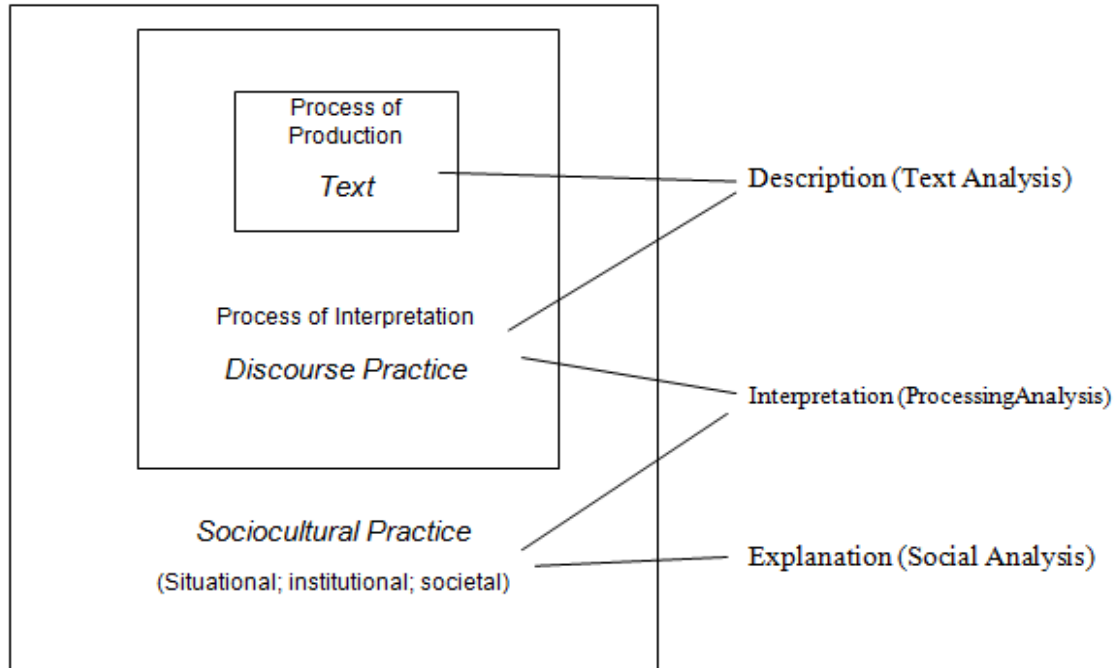


Figure 1. Taken from Critical Discourse Analysis. The Critical Study of Language (Fairclough, 1995)

4.1.1 Text Analysis – Description

Text analysis is understood as the analysis of linguistic features, including the content and the form of the texts. It has been said that CDA is not a method in itself, but it borrows methodological tools from other approaches to text and discourse studies. There are various strategies from which a researcher can borrow to carry out the textual analysis. Some examples are:

- a) Syntax analysis, the sentence structures chosen to deliver an utterance, or the kind of verbs used to relate subjects and objects in a sentence.
- b) Lexicalization, the specific lexical items which were used to build the meaning of concepts.
- c) Local semantics, the local coherence of a text given by levels of implicitness, specificity and strategies related to meaning.
- d) Global semantics, the topicalization of information considered important.

The importance of textual analysis for CDA lies on how specific the analysis of the text is and how we can, later on, interpret this analysis and explain it within a social framework.

4.1.2 Processing Analysis – Interpretation

The processing analysis is closely related to the intertextual analysis.

“Intertextuality means that the texts are linked to other texts, both in the past and in the present. Such connections are established in different ways: through explicit reference to a topic or main actor; through references to the same events; by allusions or evocations; by the transfer of main arguments from one to the next, and so on.” (Wodak, 2015: 7)

The analysis of the connections described above will conform the intertextual analysis. Analyzing intertextuality can help us comprehend how the social practice of discourse is impregnated in any 'new' text.

If the interpretation and, therefore, the processing analysis is somewhere in between text and discourse practice, according to Fairclough's three-dimensional model, then it is the intertextual analysis which closes the gap by contextualizing the text in a given discursive event whose socially accepted 'form' will define the text and its related discourse.

4.1.3 Social Analysis – Explanation

As seen in figure 1, the social analysis is concerned with the discourse practice and mainly with the sociocultural practice within which the text is produced.

This analysis is the last part of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. After the stages of description (text analysis) and interpretation (processing/intertextual analysis), the social analysis serves the purpose to explain the social and cultural conditions which framed what was said or written in a text.

4.2 Why a Textual Approach

It is important to know that most critical discourse analysts understand the methods of CDA as non-dogmatic; that is to say, there is not one way to use the various methods associated with CDA. Critical discourse analysts do not see CDA as a method, but rather a perspective (Van Dijk, 1993). The various methods used by critical discourse analysts will vary according to the main objective of the analysis.

I argue that it is the critical stance of critical discourse analysis which allows us to discover and explain why naturalized discourse could affect arguments. I believe that the relevance of a textual approach to analyze arguments lies on the relation between textual analysis and the socio-cognitive nature of social representations which we discussed in the first part: Since legitimation of arbitrary social representations happens by making representations commonsensical, after producing and reproducing ideological discourse, at some point, we could be so unaware of this process that even if we are consciously making a claim and justifying it in a rather proper way, we might unconsciously be drawing from discourse which belongs to a different ideological stance, thus, undermining our own argument.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be argued that seen from other viewpoints, studying arguments from a textual viewpoint might actually be leaving aside different and perhaps more relevant parts of the study of argumentation. Nonetheless, critical discourse analysis shows us that a textual analysis approach to discourse is highly relevant to study discourse and there is no argument without discourse. It is important from a critical standpoint to leave the possibility open of this kind of discursive situation in argumentation.

This critical point of view to study the text of arguments is highly relevant for fields such as applied linguistics and education, where intercultural awareness is key to understand the cultural and social contexts which actually define the arguments at stake in situations such as debates from students from different countries, to give an example.

International academic contexts in general, and intercultural and cross-cultural studies more particularly, could benefit from a deeper analysis of the effect of socio-cultural contexts in argumentation. Moreover, a textual approach is not only important to argumentation, but also to other fields, such as applied linguistics and contrastive rhetoric. A textual approach to the study of arguments could actually improve critical thinking, by improving our social awareness, as mentioned before.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) comprises this twofold end: On the one hand, it helps the analyst to maintain his or her critical stance while carrying out his or her study on argument, and on the other hand, encourages detail-oriented analysis of content and form of the arguments by carefully describing, interpreting and explaining the social practice which is discourse.

References

- [1] Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE.
- [2] Moscovici, S. (2000). *Social Representations. Explorations in Social Psychology*. New York University Press.
- [3] Nocera, P. (2009) *Discurso, Escritura e Historia en L'Idéologie de Destutt de Tracy*. Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas Vol. 21.
- [4] Van Dijk, T.A. (2000). Ideology and discourse. A Multidisciplinary Introduction. (Paper). Retrieved from <http://www.discourses.org/UnpublishedArticles/Ideology%20and%20discourse.pdf>
- [5] Wodak, R. And Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. SAGE.
- [6] Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power*. Second Edition. Longman.
- [7] Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- [8] Toulmin, S., Rieke, R., Janik, A. (1984). *An Introduction to Reasoning*. Second Edition. Macmillan Publishing Company.
- [9] Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing Discourse Analysis. Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- [10] Wodak, R. 2015. Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach. The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction. 1–14.
- [11] Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. In Teun A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Studies in Critical Discourse Analysis*. Special issue of *Discourse & Society*, 4(2) 249-283.