

The Philosophical Underpinning of Critical Linguistic Analysis and its implications for Teaching Language Awareness

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1. Introduction

The fact that there are different approaches to the study of language is a by-product of the amorphous nature of language itself. This is reiterated by Newmeyer (1986) who says a sign of the pervasiveness of language is that there are as many different approaches to its study as there are to knowledge in general. While the approach of formal linguistics is the exposition of a grammatical theory that espouses the principles governing the structural regularity in language, the emphasis in the critical linguistic perspective is on the constitutive role of language in constructing various aspects of social life: social relationships and identities. Hawkins (1997) describes this approach as linguistics with a social conscience (78) since the concern is with the applications of language in reflecting and shaping social reality. The focus is on the role of language as a social instrument.

Any discussion of critical linguistic approaches cannot begin in a vacuum. Though posited as the paradigm of linguistic analysis of the late 80's and most of the 90's, this approach has its philosophical underpinnings in the tradition of Bakhtin. This paper, therefore, discusses the philosophical underpinning of the current approaches to

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critical linguistic analysis for the study of language. Among the number of scholars in the field of philosophy, I will focus on Bakhtin and Volosinov because of their explicit opposition of the Saussurian dichotomy between *langue* and *parole*, and their belief that speech is both structured and emergent. In addition, Firth and Halliday's conceptualization of critical analysis of language as the beginnings of critical linguistics will be discussed. Finally, the brief discussion about the implications for teaching language awareness will follow.

2. The Philosophical Underpinning of Critical Linguistic Analysis

Unlike most philosophers who viewed language as a flawed and defective mechanism for logical thinking, some philosophers (Bakhtin 1981, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Foucault 1972, 1977, 1980; Volosinov 1973) argue that analysis of language must begin by treating language as something embedded within contexts of human action.

Bakhtin and the others mentioned above developed the idea that language and context are interdependent phenomena that must be analyzed in concert with each other. As Hasan (1996) points out, Bakhtin is deeply committed to the importance of *parole*-language as it is actualized in verbal interaction, making a sharp distinction (1986) between utterance as a unit of speech communion and the units of language (words and sentences) (167). Bakhtin has the following to say:

[T]he single utterance, with all its individuality and creativity, can in no way be regarded as a completely free combination of forms of language, as is supposed, for example, by Saussure (and by many other linguists after him), who juxtaposed the

utterance (la parole), as a purely individual act, to the system of language as a phenomenon that is purely social and mandatory for the individual... (1986: 96)

This critique against the Saussure's view of language as an abstract system internalized in the minds of individual speakers is also clearly articulated in Volosinov (1973):

Verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of... connection with a concrete situation ... Language acquires life and historically evolves... in concrete verbal communication, and not in the abstract linguistic system of language forms, nor in the individual psyche of speakers. (95)

For Volosinov, "language is a continuous generative process implemented in the social-verbal interaction of speakers" (98) and language must be conceptualized as embedded within a matrix of human interaction. Voloshinov (1973) asserts that the material and social dimensions are essential to semiotic analysis: "ideology may not be divorced from the material reality of the sign. Sign may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse" (21). More important, in Volosinov's theory, is the close link between the study of ideology and semiotics: without signs there is no ideology... Everything ideological possesses semiotic value (9). Bakhtin (1981) also writes about language variation, which he terms heteroglossia:

Thus at any given moment in its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, ... between different socio-ideological

groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (291)

According to Bakhtin, "the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract formal approach and an equally abstract ideological approach" (1981: 259).

Central to the work of Bakhtin is the notion of the dialogic organization of language. What he means by dialogic is the way a single strip of talk can juxtapose language drawn from, and invoking, alternative cultural, social, and linguistic home environments, the interpretation of multiple voices and forms of utterance (Goodwin and Duranti 1992: 19). His idea of dialogic use of language is manifested in his criticism on Dostoyevsky's novels, *Problems of Dostoevskys Poetics* (1984). By focusing on style of the novels, Bakhtin draws our attention to the situational, contingent features of language as opposed to the permanent structures of lexis, grammar and syntax. The concept of dialogic use of language is more clearly articulated in his assertion about the intrinsic intertextuality of all utterances and heteroglossia for speakers and writers:

[T]he expressiveness of individual words is not inherent in the words themselves as units of language, nor does it issue directly from the meaning of these words: it is either a typical generic expression or it is an echo of another's individual expression, which makes the word, as it were, representative of another's whole utterance from a particular evaluation. (1986: 97)

Bakhtin makes it clear that he is talking about the complexities of finding a voice, of being communicatively competent, in heteroglossic speech situations where the speaker or writer is aware of the multiple

voices in social situations.

Bakhtin seeks to return to discourse its function of actively establishing our conscious, felt relation to our objective conditions. The particular styles which are to be found within a common language are conceptualized as competing discursive practices which establish ideological perspectives on reality rather than represent it. In this dialogical conception of language the structure of a style is not determined by a pre-existing logic of content or intention, but by the requirements for asserting a certain position in relation to ones conditions. Bakhtin's idea of social language is evident in the following quote from Hasan (1996): "language seen socially is discourse specific to a particular stratum in society, defined by some social attribute such as class, profession, race, gender, age" (179). Volosinov (1983) sums up Bakhtin's idea of social language in the following three conditions:

1. ideology may not be divorced from the material reality of sign...;
2. the sign may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse...;
3. communication and the forms of communication may not be divorced from the material basis. (quoted in Hassan 1996: 179)

Bakhtin's perspective on the relationship between language and context insightfully anticipates Habermas' (1970) critique of the monologic competence embedded within Chomskyan linguistics. Bakhtin takes up this point when he states "the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language, but rather it exists in other peoples mouth, in other peoples contexts, serving other peoples intentions"

(1984: 20). In fact, as Bakhtin rightly observes, the use of language is ideologically effected by the ruling social group: "the ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgments which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual" (Volosinov 1973: 23). The relevance of the fundamental notions in Bakhtin's writings, language, context, dialogue, and ideology is evident.

Although, Bakhtin's starting point is for exploring problems of art and culture, his view of language becomes insightfully relevant to the development of the critical linguistic analysis, because Bakhtin and critical linguists take a similar stance with respect to their view of language as something embedded within contexts of human action. Bakhtin (1981) seeks to resolve the antagonism between subjective idealism and scientific rationalism by insisting upon the social character of language. For him language is an ongoing creative act performed in history, but it is a creation of the community, not individuals. In reality language never exists as abstraction and always as discourse; it is not a system of neutral norms but a historical continuum of human actions charged with value. Bakhtin argues that speech, though arising from the intentions of speakers, assumes normative forms of socially determined conventions or genres and hence may be systematically investigated. While Saussurean linguistics has provided modern structuralism with models for literary study, Bakhtin offers poetics and rhetoric as models for the study of language.

3. Firth/Halliday's conceptualization of critical linguistic approach

As the above discussion shows, for Bakhtin the role of language is

found as discursive practice in which function can not be separated from form. However, to a great degree Bakhtin's remarkable popularity can be ascribed to the rapid increasing concern with literary theory rather than linguistic theory. Moreover, as Hasan (1996) points out, "the notion of social situation remains underdeveloped" (169) in Bakhtin's theory, and lacks the theoretical elaboration of the relation between context and text, because:

a developed theory of social context would at least have two attributes: one, it would explain the principle whereby the immediate social situation is related to social milieu; and two it would specify the composition of social situation itself, making salient those of its significant elements which are relevant to the understanding of the linguistic facts as they impinge on utterances and utterance type. (169)

Firth's conceptualization of "context of situation" as an approach to language study becomes crucial in view of the above critique of Bakhtin. Labov's sociolinguistic approach and Hyme's ethnographic focus are relevant to research on language use as well. In spite of their common emphasis on the need for socially-realistic linguistics, however, they have different emphases. It is in Halliday that one sees the emergence of the concept of close interlinking of functional and structural properties of language which is crucial in conceptualization of critical analyses of language.

Firth's concern is with use of language in social context because he considers language as having a creative function in the context of situation. For Firth, the context of situation in the words of Kachru (1981) is a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events (73) and a linguistic event is seen as a spectrum of statements at



various levels, e.g., phonetic, phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, contextual (70). Firth's non-monolithic view of language and theory of linguistics based on the functions of language in context, therefore, provides valuable insights for the type of research which is well established under the term of sociolinguistics. (see Bernstein 1958, 1959, 1971; Gumperz 1964, 1967; Hymes 1962, 1968, 1972, 1974; Lakoff 1975; Mitchell 1957, 1975).

According to Firth (1957a: 181), the constituents of the context of situation are as follows:

- A. Participants in situation
- B. Verbal and non-verbal actions of participants
- C. Effects of the verbal action
- D. Relevant features of objects and others (i.e., surrounding situations, type of discourse, personal interchanges of participants)

The emphasis on looking at language in terms of function in context of situation is also found in Hymes (1962, 1969, 1971, 1972, 1974). Hymes acknowledges his own work as building on that of other linguists such as Firth and Jakobson. Hymes emphasizes that what language is cannot be separated from how and why it is used, and that considerations of use are often prerequisite to recognition and understanding of much of linguistic form (Saville-Troike 1989:3). Therefore, Hymes's approach to language is a functionalist approach, based on the systematic relationship between language and language use.

For Hymes (1974) "speech is prior to code, function to structure, context to message, the appropriate to the arbitrary or simply possible" (6). Hymes considers language as performing a range of

communicative and societal functions. The essential concept of Hymes's theory of language lies in his notion of communicative competence. In rejecting Chomsky's notion of competence as grammatical knowledge, Hymes argues that there is another kind of competence other than grammatical competence which is "a person's ability to produce, understand, and discriminate any and all of grammatical sentences of language." (Hymes 1974: 75).

He suggests "communicative competence", the ability to choose between a range of possible utterances the one which is appropriate to the situation. For Hymes, "communicative competence" consists of a range of abilities including grammatical knowledge but not reducible to grammatical knowledge. Excluding language use from linguistic theory, as Figueroa (1994) correctly points out, "excludes social meaning from linguistic theory" (55). According to Hymes, "the interaction of language and social life must encompass the multiple relationships between linguistic means and social meaning" (Hymes 1974: 31).

Hymes's investigation of communicative competence can be seen in the spirit of Firth (Berns 1990: 30) because Firth's interpretation of context of situation provides a theoretical orientation for describing the communicative competence of each speaker in speech situation. Though not specifically linguistics in its orientation - Hymes major concern is with the ethnography of speaking - his thoughts have influence on the development of the concept of context of situation.

Labov (1963, 1966, 1972a, 1972b, 1975, 1988) was also aware of the significance of the role of social context in language study and did a great many empirical studies and refined analytical frameworks. Considering language to be a social fact located in community at large rather than in the individual, Labov emphasized the need for "socially realistic linguistics" (1972: xiii), especially in the United States. He clearly demonstrates the crucial relationship between linguistic pattern

and the social pattern that form the background of linguistic behavior. Labov's sociolinguistics is the study of language within the social context of speech community, but this is "not to be misinterpreted as a functionalist study of language use" (Figueroa 1994: 72). It is "a study of language use for what it reveals about linguistic structure" (72). Labov's concern is ultimately with the linguistic facts.

Building on Firth's approach to language, Halliday offers a schematic representation of language as a social semiotic, "a scheme which captures his view that language is explainable only as the realization of meanings that are inherent in the social system, or culture, and not out there, separate from language" (Berns 1990: 14). This is evident when Halliday says that "the nature of language is closely related to the demands that we make on it, the function it has to serve" (1970: 142). This reconstitution of semiotics in opposition to mainstream semiotics which stresses system and product, rather than speakers or other participants in concrete social contexts is traced back to Voloshinov (1973) and Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986) who provide a powerful impetus and orientation to a new form of semiotics.

Accordingly, for Halliday, semiotic is "the study of sign systems, and thus of meaning in the most general sense" (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 4) and social semiotic means that "forms of expression within a language answer, not just to social and economic circumstances, characteristics of speech situation, etc., but to the meanings a culture assigns to itself and its components" (Fowler 1991: 37). It is in this sense that Halliday uses the term semiotic to define a perspective on language: language is one among a number of systems of meaning which, taken all together, constitute human culture.

In his conceptualization of social semiotics which is concerned with social structure and language, Halliday has further developed the notion of context of situation which is the core of the Hallidayan

functional approach to language. For Halliday, "context play a part in determining what we say; and what we say plays a part in determining the context. As we learn how to mean, we learn to predict each from the other" (1978: 3) and "context in which meanings are exchanged are not devoid of social value" (2). Halliday (1971) emphasizes that context of situation should be in the core of the analysis of linguistic function. Context of situation is represented by Halliday as a complex of three dimensions (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 45-46). First, the field is the field of social action in which language is playing some part. Second, the tenor is the set of role relations of participants that are involved in the creation of the text. Third, the *mode* is the channel selected, which is essentially the function assigned to language in the structure of situation; it also includes the medium (spoken or written).

The fact that language can serve a variety of purposes, Halliday maintains, is precisely because of the functional characteristic of language. Halliday proposes a set of metafunctions where each metafunction is "a set of highly generalized, abstract functional components which comprise the semantic system" (Berns 1990: 12) to enrich the concept of function. The metafunctions form an interrelated set of three components of the linguistic system that are realized in every text a speaker creates: interpersonal, ideational, and textual (Halliday 1970, 1978, 1985; Halliday and Hasan 1989). This approach to the semantic system is called systemic-functional linguistics. Every text a speaker or writer creates has the interpersonal function to establish and maintain social relationships in terms of their own experience of the world and for giving structure to that experience; the ideational function to give expression to the speakers experience of the processes and circumstances, i.e. "its function in generating representations of the world" (Fairclough 1995: 17); the textual

function to construct texts which are relevant to the situations. However, these metafunctions are not separated but always realized as interrelated. Halliday (1970) makes it clear that "whatever we are using language for, we need to make some reference to the categories of our experience: we need to take on some role in the interpersonal situation: and we need to embody these in the form of text" (29).

One important component of Halliday's theory is the system of transitivity, the fundamental and powerful semantic concept which plays a central part in realizing the ideational function. According to Fowler (1991), "a central insight of Halliday's theory is that transitivity is the foundation of representation" (71). As an essential tool in the analysis of representation, transitivity refers to how meaning is represented in the clause by showing how speakers or writers encode in language their mental pictures of reality. As an analytic tool of linguistic representation, transitivity analysis presents a semantic perspective on the ideas expressed by a clause which is a basic syntactic unit, a patterned ordering of words and phrases.

The essential premise of Halliday's theory of language lies in his conceptualization of social semiotics which is concerned with social structure and language. As Halliday (1979) asserts, "it is not only text (what people mean) but also the semantic system (what they can mean) that embodies the ambiguity, antagonism, imperfection, inequality and change that characterize the social system and the social structure" (114). Halliday calls these semantic systems "meaning potential". Further the relevance of his theory of language to the study of language as manifestation of ideology is evident when he says "the institutional and ideological background give value to the text and constrain its interpretation" (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 49). In this way, Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics offers frameworks for establishing the relationship between ideology and language theorized

by and reflected in numerous studies which began with the critical linguistics of the late 1970's (Fowler, et al.; Kress and Hodge; subsequently Hasan; Kress; Lemke; Martin; OToole; Threadgold) and beyond (Baik; van Dijk; Fairclough; Fowler; Pandey; Thompson).

Critical linguistic approach is "a critique of the structures and goals of a society which has impregnated its language with social meanings many of which we regard as negative, dehumanizing and restrictive in their effects" (Fowler and Kress 1979: 196).

4. Implications for teaching language awareness

The approach of critical linguistic analysis discussed above has implications for teaching language awareness to adults as well as students in and out of school setting, and opens new ground for research that would devise strategies and methods of achieving this educational goal. The organization and self-education of groups in the community and workplace as well as in school can continue to be the fundamental elements in steps toward the democratization of our social life and toward any meaningful social change.

Critical language awareness is available as an activity that the individual can practice and "this practice can be a valuable intervention in the deconstruction of the all too-comfortable common sense" (Fowler 1991: 232) represented in various texts, specially newspapers. Newspaper readers cannot easily read through a newspaper article disinterestedly, and be aware of what is biased. What we really need is an educational programme in critical reading within which critical linguistics would be a new methodological input.

Based on his study of the English textbooks in two Koreas, Baik (1994) demonstrates that English education serves toward the

propagation of the negative power relations. Baik (1994) suggests that English textbooks need to be critically re-evaluated so that students may develop critical language awareness. By analyzing the Disney animated movies, Pandey (1997) identifies the linguistic items through which differential prejudice toward speakers of the standard English dialect and Black English dialect operates in discourse. Based on her study, Pandey (1997) suggests the need for teaching language awareness to children and devising strategies and methods for achieving it.

The necessity for teaching critical language awareness, however, is not limited to the children in school settings. Unlike the textbooks and animated movies used as instruments of the educational process, newspapers impact a much broader range of consumers. For the majority of people, reading the newspaper makes up their most substantial and significant consumption of printed discourse. Therefore, the pervasive role of ideology through the newspapers is even greater. In this sense, the necessity of critical language awareness programs introduced by Clark et al. (1991) and Fairclough (1992) is very suggestive.

Language awareness programs need to be informed by critical views of language and discourse, as well as a conception of language learning which integrated the development of language awareness with the learners own prior experience and with the development of capacities for practice. Fairclough (1995) stresses the role of education at the heart of relation of language and ideology when he argues:

Not only is education itself a key domain of linguistically mediated power, it also mediates other key domains for learners, including the adult world of work. But it is additionally at its best a site of reflection upon and analysis of

the sociolinguistic order and the order of discourse, and in so far as educational institutions equip learners with a critical language awareness, they equip them with a resource for intervention in and reshaping of discursive practices and the power relations that ground them, both in other domains and within educational itself. (217)

Fairclough (1995) adds that "it is important for learners to scrutinize doctrines of and attitudes towards sociolinguistic practice: they are part of what such a programme should make learners aware of" (251). To achieve to this goal, another factor, the educators, in instilling the critical language awareness should not be underestimated. As Y. Kachru (1996) correctly argues, the educators need to realize that "language education does not and should not mean perpetuation of outdated prejudices and attitudes that result from them" (191).

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