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‘One-on-One With Obama’: An Analysis

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Choose an authentic text (in English) and use the Critical Discourse Analysis framework presented in Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. London: Polity Press to analyse the text. Discuss the implications of this approach to text analysis for language teaching.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
2. History of Discourse Analysis	3
2.1 Fairclough's Framework for Analysis	5
2.2 Criticism	6
3. Selection of the Text	7
3.1 Reasons for Selection	8
4. One-on-One With Obama' An Analysis	9
ANALYSIS OF TEXT	
4.1 Vocabulary	9
4.1.1 Meanings of Words	9
4.1.2 Wording of Meanings	10
4.1.3 Metaphors	11
4.2 Grammar	12
4.3 Cohesion	13
4.4 Text Structure	13
ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICE	
4.5 Force of Utterances	14
4.6 Coherence of Texts	14
4.7 Intertextuality of Texts	14
5. Implications for Language Teaching	16
5.1 Implications for the Student	18
5.2 Implications for the Teacher	20
6. Conclusion	20
7. References	22
8. Appendix A	24
9. Appendix B	25
10. Appendix C	26

1. Introduction

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.

(Van Dijk, 2001: 352)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is, in the words of Caroline Coffin (2001: 99), “an approach to language analysis which concerns itself with issues of language, power and ideology”. An interdisciplinary approach to discourse, it rejects the study of language as independent from social studies. Rather, it focuses on language as a form of ‘social practice’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258), and seeks to examine both the manner in which discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideology, and the manner in which discourse actively plays a role in shaping these relations.

CDA is clearly political in its objectives. Discourse is “a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation” (Fairclough 1992: 63). And the word ‘critical’, “implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change.”(Fairclough, 1992: 9).

This paper seeks to analyse an authentic English-language text, using the critical discourse analysis framework presented in Norman Fairclough’s 1992 publication *Discourse and Social Change*. It will then proceed to a discussion on the implications which this approach to text analysis may have for language teaching. Prior to this analysis, there will be a brief overview of the history of Critical Discourse Analysis, with particular reference to the highly influential work of Fairclough.

2. History of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is based heavily upon Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (Fairclough, 1992, Fairclough 1999), and the critical linguistics approach which

stemmed from the work led by Roger Fowler at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s (Fairclough 1992, Coffin 2001). Critical linguistics, in tandem with the ‘systemic linguistics’ theory of Halliday, rejected two widespread notions in linguistics at that time:

the treatment of language systems as autonomous and independent of the ‘use’ of language, and the separation of ‘meaning’ from ‘style’ or ‘expression’.

(Fairclough, 1992: 26)

Fairclough supported the ideas of critical linguistics, but felt that in many respects, they did not go far enough. Fowler claims that the effectiveness of critical linguistics lies in “its capacity to equip readers for demystificatory readings of ideology-laden texts” (Fowler, 1996: 6). But Fairclough believed that this focuses excessively on the ‘text as product’, to the detriment of examining how these texts are produced, and how they may be interpreted. For Fairclough, it is equally vital that we understand the process of production of the text, as well as the process of interpretation of the text. We must also understand the social context in which all these processes occur:

CDA gives attention to the dynamic interplay between text production, the text itself, and text interpretation or consumption.

(Coffin, 2001: 99)

Fairclough calls this multidimensional approach his ‘social theory of discourse’ (Fairclough, 1992: 5). He acknowledges that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, several others such as Gramsci, Althusser, Pecheux and Foucault had called for a greater focus on the social importance of language and the significance of ideology, and that this work is ongoing. At this point in his text, Fairclough raises an interesting issue:

What is open to question is whether such theory and research recognizes an importance that that language always had in social life but which has previously not been sufficiently acknowledged, or actually reflects an increase in the social importance of language.

(Fairclough, 1992:6)

He also provides an answer to his own question, which highlights the need for greater critical analysis of all forms of discourse:

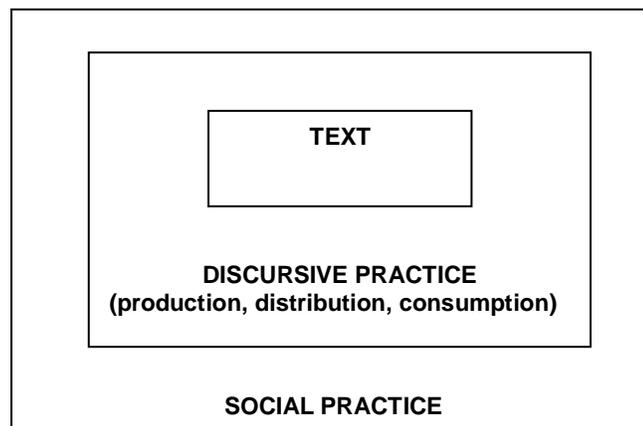
Although both may be true, I believe that there has been a significant shift in the social functioning of language, a shift reflected in the salience of language in the

major social changes which have been taking place over the last few decades. Many of these social changes do not just involve language, but are constituted to a significant extent by changes in language practices...

(Fairclough, 1992:6)

2.1 Fairclough's Framework for Analysis

Discourses are forms of social practice. They are also obviously texts (in the wider sense of the word). But Fairclough's framework adds a 'mediating' third dimension "which focuses on discourse as a specifically discursive practice" (Fairclough, 1992: 71). Discursive practice is itself a form of social practice, and focuses on the processes of text production, distribution and consumption. This is represented diagrammatically as follows:



(reproduced from Fairclough, 1992: 73)

Fairclough describes this framework as "an attempt to bring together three analytical traditions, each of which is indispensable for discourse analysis". These analytical traditions are:

- The tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics.
- The macrosociological tradition of analysing social practice in relation to social structures.
- The interpretivist or microsociological tradition of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared commonsense procedures.

(adapted from Fairclough, 1992: 72)

2.2. Criticism

In reality, the three dimensions of this framework overlap considerably, and any analysis of text will necessarily involve some discursive analysis and vice-versa. Thus Fairclough concedes (1992: 74) that the designation of analytical topics as one or the other in his framework is rather imprecise.

Another problem which Fairclough admits to is the overwhelming number of textual features which are potentially worthy of inclusion in any critical discourse analysis (1992: 74). What the book does offer is an overview, or a “large-scale map of the terrain” in the author’s own words, followed by more detailed coverage of “selective analytical focuses which seem especially fruitful” (Fairclough, 1992: 74).

The influential linguist, Henry Widdowson was rather more scathing in his review of the book:

For those already initiated into the thinking of critical linguistics, and committed to its socio-political cause, Fairclough’s text is no doubt clear and cogent. Those who are not members of this particular discourse community, however, will, I suspect, have some difficulty making sense of it.

(Widdowson, 1995: 510-511)

Among the principle shortcomings, Widdowson highlights the excessive amount of overlapping, confusing terminology which he feels Fairclough has failed to explain coherently. As an example, he questions the difference between ‘cohesion’ and ‘text structure’, as well as the main headings ‘modes of rationality’ and ‘systems of knowledge and belief’.

We are also in the dark as to how these modes or systems relate to the ‘elements’ or ‘parts’ of ‘orders of discourse’ which Fairclough has earlier distinguished as being of the following types: genres, styles, activity types, discourses... so much is left unexplained. Terms proliferate and it is hard to know which are meant to be taken as conceptually significant, and which are just ways of saying the same thing.

(Widdowson, 1995: 512)

Although Fairclough has continued to work in this area since the publication of *Discourse and Social Change* over fifteen years ago, and more recently described this book

as “an early formulation of a version of CDA” which was “specialized” for the theme of “processes of social change in their discourse aspect” (Fairclough, 2005: 76), Widdowson remains critical. He believes that Fairclough’s ‘framework’ “is not actually a method of analysis but an approach to interpretation” (Widdowson, 2004: 159), and that it is incomplete in the manner in which it deals with texts. However, he does not dismiss Fairclough’s work entirely. Though Fairclough’s “demonstrations are partial and, in a sense, piecemeal”, they are effective in “revealing aspects of meaning from a particular socio-political perspective... demonstrate the way texts can be constructed, how they can be made relevant to an understanding of social life.” (Widdowson, 1995: 513). It is with Widdowson’s thoughts in mind that we now turn to the analysis-stroke-interpretation of the text.

3. Selection of the Text

The text chosen for analysis in this paper comes from the market-leading¹ U.S. sports magazine *Sports Illustrated* (Appendix A). It was taken from the January 6th 2008 edition of *The Daily Yomiuri*, an English-language daily newspaper in Japan which carries regular supplements from a range of overseas publications.

3.1 Reasons for Selection

It may seem inappropriate to select an article from a sports weekly to subject to critical discourse analysis, but the article in question is clearly political in content. Titled ‘One-on-One With Obama’, it is ostensibly an account of the writer’s casual game of basketball with the Illinois senator Barack Obama, a man who describes the sport as “my first love” (Price: 2007). Few would argue that a politician is always looking to boost his credibility when spending time in the company of a journalist, more so when in the midst of a keenly contested campaign to win the Democratic nomination for the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election. The value of any positive publicity (no matter how trifling) is clear. Furthermore, as Kress remarks:

The everyday, innocent and innocuous, mundane text is as ideologically saturated

¹ According to Magazine Publishers of America’s *Average Circulation for Top 100 ABC Magazines*, *Sports Illustrated (SI)* sells over 3 million copies per issue. CNN/SI claims that over 18 million men, 19% of the adult males in the U.S., read *SI* each week.

as a text which wears its ideological constitution overtly.

(Kress in Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. and Coulthard, M. (eds.), 1996: 268)

This paper aims to show that the text in question is indeed ‘ideologically saturated’. Furthermore, it will be argued that critical discourse analysis of such a text is of particularly high value in the language learning environment, given the obvious appeal of the genre to non-native readers of English. A recent, small-scale survey of adult English students in Japan (Appendix B) showed that when given a choice of English-language literature to read, male students overwhelmingly selected the sports magazine on offer.

4. ‘One-on-One With Obama’: an Analysis

Based upon Fairclough’s framework (1992: 75), some brief analysis of the magazine article, ‘One-on-One with Obama’ will be undertaken in the following order:

ANALYSIS OF TEXT

- **4.1 Vocabulary**
- **4.2 Grammar**
- **4.3 Cohesion**
- **4.4 Text Structure**

ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

- **4.5 Force of Utterances**
- **4.6 Coherence of Texts**
- **4.7 Intertextuality of Texts**

While it is hoped that this framework allows for a selection of pertinent observations to be made about the text, it is by no means claimed that this is an exhaustive analysis of features relevant to CDA. Those aspects deemed less relevant to the selected text are barely touched upon.

In order to assess the effectiveness of this article as a text for critical discourse analysis in the classroom, it was used in three adult English ‘conversation’ classes. All classes were conducted in January 2008, comprising a total of 27 students, 15 female and 12 male. All were Japanese native-speakers, and ability levels would be considered to range from low-intermediate to high-intermediate. Some of the findings of these classes are referred to in the following analysis.

ANALYSIS OF TEXT

4.1. Vocabulary

Introducing critical discourse analysis to language teaching does not by any means cast doubt on the importance of vocabulary (McCarthy, 1991: 64), and to underline this, we take it as our first topic for analysis. Fairclough's framework for CDA focuses on vocabulary in three ways:

- **Meanings of words**
- **Wording of meanings**
- **Metaphors**

4.1.1. Meanings of words

Most words have more than one meaning, and meanings differ to various extents. Skilled users of a language are usually able to select the writer's intended meaning rapidly, and without too much difficulty. However, lower-level learners may experience difficulties with some words which present no difficulties for the more advanced user. In classes where the article was used, 'duck' caused some initial amusement among students who immediately thought of the bird, before being made aware of the colloquial transitive verb form, meaning 'to avoid'.

Another term which caused an element of confusion was the phrasal verb 'throw out'. Several students thought of the notion of 'disposal', and examining the term in its context, "...casually threw out the word n-----" assumed a meaning of "rejected the word n-----". 'Acid test' required explanation for most learners. Even though many had correctly surmised a sense of gravity, seriousness, they also often considered the stand alone meaning of 'acid', and consequently gave words such as 'unpleasant', and 'dangerous'. A native speaker would normally assume the meaning to be 'a crucial, definitive test', without such negative connotations.

Use of the verb 'bit' caused a great deal of confusion, so much so that in the absence of any explanation coming readily to mind, several advanced students misread it as 'hit'. The difficulty in deducing the writer's intended meaning is multi-layered. Many

beginner-level students even failed to recognise ‘bit’ as the past tense of the word ‘bite’, and assumed the homonym noun meaning of ‘a small quantity or piece’, leading to a misinterpretation that Obama was reluctant to play. Indeed, ‘bit’ is used in the context of ‘a small amount’, later in the article.

We would not expect a native-speaker to encounter any of these aforementioned problems. However, there are other potential difficulties. Firstly, there is the high concentration of specialist basketball terminology, which presents a challenge to the reader who is not well-versed in the sport. For example:

“If you wanted to bang inside a bit,” he says, “you could.”
I’m no fool. I start banging.

(Price, 2007)

The context gives us several clues, and we can assume that the action is a rather aggressive form of physical movement, but understanding may remain very vague.

Of course the title of the article itself has multiple meanings. Interestingly, a large number of students were able to deduce the figurative meaning (i.e. ‘a private conversation’) but due to cultural differences, few understood the more literal meaning of ‘taking part in a particular two-player variation of basketball’.

4.1.2 Wording of meanings

It would appear that the writer’s liberal use of specialist basketball-related terminology in this article is quite deliberate. It serves two purposes, the first being that it helps the core readership (i.e. the North American sports fan) to identify with the writer, and establish a ‘trust’ in his opinions. But more importantly, it helps the reader to identify with the subject of the discourse, Barack Obama. He’s just like ‘the average guy’. He can ‘talk trash’ (albeit “without seeming mean”) and even knows enough about the game (and is magnanimous enough) to give his opponent advice on ‘banging inside’.

Of course, this is clearly not ‘the average guy.’ And the text has already made this starkly apparent, from the very first sentence:

...You may be a U.S. senator, a living symbol of racial healing and perhaps even the next President of the United States....

(Price, 2007)

There is only one person on the planet who could, at the time of writing, be all these things. Obama's chief rival for the Democratic Party nomination, Hillary Clinton meets two of the criteria, but few would define her as 'a living symbol of racial healing'. This is a title which many would readily associate with Obama. But is there really so much difference in their public comments on racial issues? I would suggest that the true meaning of the expression lies in the physical appearance of Barack Obama. If so, why did the author not write "You may be a U.S. senator and perhaps even the first black President of the United States"? In an election where race and skin colour are never far from the surface of the debate, and so much has been said about the so-called 'Bradley Effect' (which describes the difference between what members of the public (particularly white males will say in relation to a black candidate when asked by pollsters and the change in their behaviour when they actually vote)², the author refers to the candidate's race in a highly-positive manner, encouraging the core readership to view this candidate as someone whom they could vote for. A white blue-collar male may be more inclined to vote for 'a living symbol of racial healing' than 'a black man'.

4.1.3 Metaphors

There are an interesting number of metaphors present in this text. The most explicit of these is of course, the 'basketball as a metaphor for life' notion, which Michelle Obama's family hold so dearly, according to the author. The notion of winning at all costs ("Everyone, even you, uses whatever he's got to win.") is a common one in life, and it is perhaps even more pertinent in the political arena. But the image of Obama's political career as a rocket, on its unstoppable rise (the word 'rise' appears twice in the text), is also notable, particularly at the end of the article:

He shuffles out wide, turns and sets, face blank. I thunder toward him, arm outstretched, feeling suddenly like Hillary and Edwards and anyone else in Iowa trying desperately to stop Obama's rise.

The ball drops through the net like a stone.

² See Siddique, H. (2008)

(Price, 2007)

The soaring Obama is juxtaposed with the ball dropping like a stone, highlighting to the reader / voter that, in spite of his meteoric rise, this is a man of substance. The ball may be seen as a metaphor for Obama too. Ultimately, after all the glitz and hype of electioneering, this is a man of stone – strong, steadfast and unyielding. He is depicted as exactly the sort of man required to lead the nation.

4.2 Grammar

Fairclough (1992: 235) also lists three dimensions of grammar which may be analysed, along with the function of language to which they correspond:

- **Transitivity (ideational function)**
- **Theme (textual function)**
- **Modality (interpersonal function)**

Each of these dimensions is present in the selected text. The article is dominated by material (action) processes, suited to the predominantly male readership. Publications aimed towards women are more ‘female’, with an ideal and emotive emphasis (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996: 251). It contributes to the image of Obama as a man of action; “He’s here to play”. The voice is also largely active. The article begins with a marked theme: “Here’s the beauty of pickup basketball”.

The subject of the article, Mr. Obama, displays a high level of categorical modality, as we would perhaps expect in a leading politician (“Believe me..”, “All right... I’ve got your game cased out.”). The writer’s level of modality, on the other hand, varies. Initially, it is subjective, and contains several markers of low affinity, including hedging and a tag question (“You may be a U.S. senator”, “...perhaps even...”, “I’ve got no choice then, do I?”). This contrasts starkly with Obama’s first recorded words in the article (“Believe me... you can get shot for doing that”). The writer furthers this notion of low affinity by commenting: “He’s not serious. I think”. This may be in order to emphasise the decisive nature of the Senator, as well as to disarm the reader and initially promote the writer as just another sports fan, in order to establish a greater bond of trust. But after the opening

paragraphs, the writer's mode is visibly different: "Actually, Michelle understands." "So it's no surprise...". He does ultimately claim the voice of authority, as a journalist, and as someone with first-hand experience of Senator Obama and his wife.

4.3 Cohesion

This is a highly-cohesive text. In the first paragraph, the author establishes a strong bond with the reader through a range of cohesive ties. In just five sentences, he uses the pronoun 'you'/'your' five times, 'I' three times, and unites them with the use of 'Everyone' in the fifth sentence. The author is telling the readers that they are just the same as him; all are equal on the basketball court and everyone gets treated the same (including our protagonist, Barack Obama). The pronoun 'he' is also used in a general sense, which suggests that the writer is not particularly concerned with gender bias in the article, despite *Sports Illustrated's* claim to have a female readership of 5 million³. This encourages the predominantly male readers to identify further with the writer, establishing a relationship wherein the reader is more likely to be persuaded by this fellow sports fan than some political scientist speaking amore academic, unfamiliar language. Pronouns continue to be widely used throughout the text. In the fifth paragraph, there is repetition of the conjunctives 'but' and 'without'. However, the most cohesive element in the text is the basketball jargon, which continues throughout.

4.4 Text Structure

The 'architecture' of this text (Fairclough, 1992: 77) is in many ways, typical of a standard feature on a professional athlete. It opens with some justification for the feature, i.e. why this sports figure is worthy of such attention. This is followed by some testament to his/her abilities, as well as his/her strength of character. Quotes from experts and family members are often included to provide character references. There is also some mention of any perceivable weaknesses in the subject's 'game' (possibly either physical or personal flaws), and how they overcome or compensate for them. The article then returns to eulogise further on the merits of the athlete. Examples of sporting prowess are provided to support these claims, often making use of scores and statistics, and the article ends on a

³ CNN/SI claims that over 5 million women read *SI* weekly.

forward-looking note, suggesting that this sports star will go on to reach greater heights in the future.

‘One-on-One With Obama’ may be about a politician, but it follows this pattern, all the way to the triumphant shot at the conclusion. The author is providing the author with a classic account of a hero who overcomes all the odds to make the winning shot in the dying moments, when the pressure is at its most intense.

4.5 Force of Utterances

Obviously this article is not looking for a direct actional response from the reader in the form of physical activity or an answer to a question. The one question which the author addresses to the reader (“I’ve got no choice then, do I?”) is clearly rhetorical, given the context and the genre of this text. Interestingly, the character in this article who speaks with the highest degree of force is the Senator’s wife, Michelle Obama (“Don’t break his nose”, “Go play”). Some could argue that this is pandering to the stereotype of the vocally aggressive black female.

4.6 Coherence

Fairclough believes that coherence should be considered as a ‘property of interpretations’ rather than a ‘property of texts’ (1992: 83). This article is extremely coherent, if we interpret it as a sports feature story. It utilises many conventions which are typical of the genre, and the basketball game provides a setting for the author and his subject to go ‘head-to-head’. However, if we are to interpret this as a piece of political comment, it is more problematic.

4.7 Intertextuality

This article draws upon several other texts: the writer’s personal meeting with Obama is obviously the primary source of this text. But there are several others. The writer’s personal dialogue with Michelle Obama is clearly evident, and Mrs Obama is quoted on two separate occasions. Her brother Craig Robinson is also quoted, although the

source of this quotation is not given. The presence of Mr Robinson in the text is crucial. It is notable though, that his early opinion of the presidential hopeful is not directly quoted. This allows the possibility that Robinson's glowing character reference for his future brother-in-law has actually been distilled by the writer, into the form it takes in this text:

He liked what he saw. Obama was confident, but not cocky, unselfish but unafraid to shoot. On court, he showed the same balance that has fueled his political rise; he could talk trash without seeming mean, compete feverishly without seeming angry.
(Price, 2007)

Does Mr Robinson really claim to have gained such an insight into the personality of Mr Obama from an informal game of basketball? There are no indications in the language whether his quoted words were said in a jocular or serious tone. From a British perspective, it does seem quite inconceivable that there are Chicago families which genuinely consider basketball performance to be an 'acid test', in determining a prospective spouse's character. Perhaps the writer appreciates that the sporting analogies alone are insufficient in fleshing out the image of a Presidential candidate, as he makes a brief switch to the far weightier topic of race. This proves to be extremely brief though; we learn of an incident where a close white friend, a coach, used the derogatory term 'nigger', and that this reminded Obama that "race is complicated", before quickly returning to the safety of sports-talk.

This would imply that the writer has anticipated more than one audience – the sports fan which is highly knowledgeable about the game of basketball and its terminology and constitutes the main demographic of *Sports Illustrated's* readership), and the politically-aware member of the electorate who appreciates the role which the issue of race plays in the candidacy of Barack Obama. (Of course, it must be noted that the two types of reader are by no means mutually exclusive from one another.) Nevertheless, the writer (or perhaps editor) is clearly unwilling to allow the article to become too heavily focused on the issue of racial discrimination, to the extent that they are not prepared to allow the highly-offensive word to appear in print (it is depicted as "n-----").

Although this text is clearly labelled as having one individual author (the byline reads "by S.L. Price"), the nature of the publishing industry suggests that several others have been involved in the production of the final version. We are unable to determine

whether the brevity of the discussion on race was the writer's choice, or whether it was a consequence of an editing decision. We are also uncertain whether the decision was taken because of space limitations, or on ideological grounds. We can however, assume that a great deal of the complete dialogue between the writer and his subject has been omitted from the published text.

We now turn to the issue of interdiscursivity, or 'constitutive intertextuality' (Fairclough, 1992: 113). The activity is superficially a narrative of a one-on-one game of pick-up basketball, with the author writing for the reader, a sports fan. The article is typical of the sports magazine column. It blends narrative with opinion, using a populist form of language, littered with specialist sports terminology. Tenor is rather informal, sometimes even casual ("Hey, its pickup"). However, the style of the article is actually extremely complicated. The 'everyman' tone which the writer adopts for the most part occasionally gives way to a far more authoritative voice: "Obama exudes none of that Washington ambition". Caldas-Coulthard and Holland argue that:

Sudden switches into informal modes of discourse may also serve another purpose – releasing the writer from expectations of rigour and precision that a more formal style may evoke in the readership.

(Caldas-Coulthard and Holland, 2000: 136)

It would appear that the writer in this text takes advantage of this. By ensuring that the article never becomes rooted in the more formal style, Price evades any scrutiny of the opinions which are embedded in the text.

5. Implications for Language Teaching

Up until relatively recently, foreign language teaching was almost exclusively focused on a 'bottom-up' approach, starting with isolated words or even single letters, and dividing study up into separate areas such as vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation. Such an approach, often referred to as an 'atomistic approach' (Cook, 1989:83) assumes that this form of study is necessary to provide students with the 'building blocks' required for effective communication.

This paper does not seek to dispute the importance of this atomistic approach or

question whether it has a role to play in English language teaching. Communicative effectiveness is far harder to assess than progress in isolated areas such as grammar or vocabulary (Cook, 1989:84), and the atomistic approach therefore holds a great deal of appeal for both teachers and students. It also provides a framework which allows the linguist to analyse the text in a coherent manner. However, this is not the priority of the language student:

The aims and methods of linguistics are thus quite different from those of the language student, who needs to use the language, not to understand its internal workings.

(Cook, 1989: 85)

In using their first language, people adopt a far more ‘holistic’ approach, quickly scanning the text (whether written or spoken) to determine answers to basic ‘Who?’, ‘What?’, ‘Where?’, ‘When?’, ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’ -type questions, creating a basic framework (or ‘scaffolding’, in the words of Cook) upon which a greater understanding of the text can be built. Having established the general context, one is able to make more rapid, and more accurate assessment of intended meaning. We are also often able to correctly fill-in any of the gaps which commonly occur in texts, due to poor sound quality, distraction etc. To fail to utilise the same skills when tackling a foreign language would be counter-productive, not to mention impossible.

Human beings make general hypotheses about discourse, no matter how little of the language they know. It is impossible, and it would be foolish, to stop them doing so, for this is how competent language users handle discourse. What we must help students to do is to formulate the right hypotheses.

(Cook, 1989: 82)

CDA can assist the language teacher in doing this.

There are now student texts available which encourage the learner to simultaneously engage with the text at the macro-level, and the lower levels. Both Cook (1989: 84) and McCarthy (1991: 168) cite Greenall and Swan’s *Effective Reading* (1986) as a textbook which does this effectively. It groups activities under the following headings:

- Predicting
- Extracting main ideas

- Dealing with unfamiliar words
- Linking ideas
- Understanding writer's style
- Further work

These activities incorporate many of the 'traditional parts' of language into an approach which takes a fuller, more integrated view of the text. 'Dealing with unfamiliar words' goes much further than merely looking up words in a dictionary. Students are urged to look for those "words and phrases which are defined in the passage" (Cook, 1989: 84), and also to consider whether particular words have positive or negative connotations in the context which they appear. 'Understanding the writer's style', looking at meaning and reasons for particular stylistic choices may also be seen as a major step towards a CDA approach in the classroom.

5.1 Implications for the Student

The use of CDA as a tool for use in the classroom is now commonly referred to as Critical Language Awareness (CLA), a term coined by four academics from Lancaster University in the late 1980s, one of whom was Norman Fairclough (Clark and Ivanic, 1999: 64). The group believed that the introduction of CLA into the classroom would boost the development of 'language consciousness', giving learners more control over their own use of language, as well as a greater understanding of how they are reflected in the language use of others (Clark and Ivanic, 1999: 64). They also argued that:

the understandings gained by CLA should equip learners to recognise, challenge and ultimately contribute to changing social inequities inscribed in discourse practices, and thus be more responsible citizens.

(Clark and Ivanic, 1999: 64)

With regard to my own teaching situation, I would highlight the use of the word 'ultimately' in the above quotation. CLA is aimed at all students, not only those in a second language learning environment, and it would be unreasonable to expect lower-intermediate level students to be able to analyse lengthy academic texts and immediately challenge their content. It should however, be the 'ultimate' aim.

In the 3 intermediate-level classes where 'One-on-One With Obama' was

examined, many students were able to vocally challenge the content. All class members were given a questionnaire, the first half of which was completed prior to the article being distributed, and the latter part after the reading of the article (Appendix C). All students expressed an interest in the U.S. Presidential Election. This itself is a symptom of increasing globalization, further highlighting the need for CDA (Fairclough 2006). 18 of the 27 students expressed a preference for Senator Obama prior to reading the text, and of the 9 others (6 preferred Senator Clinton, 3 had no preference), 7 had a far better opinion of him after reading the text. However, despite admitting that reading the article had caused their image of Obama to improve, students in all 3 classes expressed a concern that this article had influenced their thinking, but had told them very little about his abilities as a political leader.

Additionally, CLA also has a value in encouraging students to challenge texts in their native language. The following exchange occurred in a conversation class in November 2006, after a class member had commented on having seen an example of the Arabic television network Al Jazeera:

STUDENT 1: It's...a.... verypropaganda style of news. I ... don't think it's good

STUDENT 2: We are very lucky here. In Japan... we... Japanese have the best T.V. in the world.

(Several class members make facial expressions indicating mild surprise and scepticism. There is a pause in the conversation)

TEACHER: Uhm, Keiko... I don't want to change the subject, but... can I ask you why you believe Japanese television to be the best in the world?

STUDENT 2 *(to teacher and other students)*: Don't you think so? I... because... NHK... it said on NHK, I remember... it said we have the best television... and I think it is very good... We have very nice drama programmes... and travel programmes...

(Three class members interjected rather aggressively at this stage, and four voices overlapped, making the dialogue rather incoherent Student 2 was reminded by other students that NHK is the Japanese state broadcaster, and she was also forced to concede that she had never actually watched television overseas.)

(The Friday Class, 2006)

We are unable to determine whether or not NHK actually made such a claim, but this was how Student 2 interpreted the discourse. She was able to perceive a strong ideological 'bias' in an overseas television channel, but she failed to question the objectivity of a media outlet in her native culture and language.

5.2 Implications for the Teacher

A critical approach can also make the teacher more aware of the implications of his/her choice of discourse for the students. This encompasses all aspects of classroom discourse, from choice of textbooks and other materials, to spoken communication between teacher and student.

A focus on text and discourse can help us to notice and analyse aspects of usage which have previously gone unnoticed and untaught – the better a text analyst the teacher can be, the better equipped – all other things being equal – his or her students are likely to be in using the language properly.

(McCarthy and Carter, in Coffin, 2001)

Even just ensuring that what is being said is actually likely to be of interest to the listener is a key step in improving one's role in the classroom.

6. Conclusion

In making his case for the power of discourse, Fairclough (1995: 219) remarks that “we live in an age in which power is predominantly exercised through the generation of consent rather than through coercion”. Perhaps western societies are now living in an age in which the generation of consent is no longer quite so straight-forward. Compared to nations where democracy is still emerging, and the people have had to struggle for a role in the process of government, the electorates of established, wealthy, liberal democracies are comparatively apathetic towards politics. A large percentage of those eligible to participate in the selection of government have no interest in reading manifestos, watching party political broadcasts, candidate debates or any of the other more ‘traditional’ methods of transmitting political views. Thus, politicians are increasingly searching for new ways to secure votes, ways which allow them enter the private domain of the potential supporter and convey their message in a less overtly ‘political’ manner.

This leads to the increasingly common phenomenon of ‘lifestyle’ features on political figures, be it in sports or so-called women’s magazines. The extent to which the

genres are blurred may vary, and sometimes the message may be more subtle, but the purpose of the article (from the politician's viewpoint, at least) is always to make the person more appealing to the reader-stroke-voter. In an increasingly 'consumer-driven' society, the politician will use any means available to improve the brand-image. We have a responsibility to help students recognise the changes in discursive practices (Bhatia, 2001: 68-69).

Fairclough's framework for CDA is not without drawbacks. Take for example, the description of Obama's physical appearance. Given that this narrative is set in a sporting context, it would be unnatural to avoid making some reference to the senator's extremely low-level of body-fat as it is a matter of common knowledge to U.S. citizens. U.S. voters also consider the physical fitness of the President to be a bigger issue than Japanese voters consider their Prime Minister's to be. Culture, politics and sports all become intertwined, creating a rich text for study. Why do U.S. voters consider it more important than Japanese? What are the implications of using 'whippet-thin' to describe the Senator's physique, rather than 'boney'? This provoked stimulating discussions in all 3 classes where the text was used. But how does one analyse this systematically, in terms of the CDA framework? There are so many aspects of discourse to consider.

But is it actually necessary to 'systematically analyse' discourse? If we focus on the main tenets of CDA (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), there is no doubt that it can be of immense value in bringing language to life for the student, and encouraging a more active role in learning. Olshtain and Celce-Murcia (2001: 707) warn us "It would be ill-advised to teach language via the communicative approach without relying heavily on discourse analysis". Even Widdowson sees its value:

What is most plainly distinctive about critical discourse analysis is its sense of responsibility and its commitment to social justice. This is linguistics with a conscience and a cause, one which seeks to reveal how language is used and abused in the exercise of power and the suppression of human rights.'

(Widdowson, in Coffin, 2001: 99)

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Appendix A: 'One-on-One With Obama'

By S.L. Price

Here's the beauty of pickup basketball: You may be a U.S. senator, a living symbol of racial healing and perhaps even the next President of the United States, but if you're gliding in for an easy layup and each point is precious, I've got no choice then, do I? You're getting hacked. So, yes, I'm hammering that arm and crashing headlong into your whippet-thin frame; and, yes, it's a foul so flagrant, so absurdly desperate, that all you can do, body buckling, is laugh. Hey, it's pickup. Everyone, even you, uses whatever he's got to win.

"Believe me," Barack Obama says, walking to the top of the key, "you can get shot for doing that."

He's not serious. I think. But he wants me off his back, and invoking jumpy Secret Service men is a wise ploy. With the race for the Democratic presidential nomination whisker-close, Obama can't afford to show up for some Dubuque meet-and-greet with a mysterious fat lip. His wife, Michelle, warned me, "Don't break his nose, give him a black eye or knock his teeth out. Or I'll have to come find you."

Actually, Michelle understands. She hails from a Chicago family that believes the game -- when you pass, when you call fouls, how you check the ball -- reveals character. Once her romance with Barack got serious, she pressed her brother, Craig Robinson, to conduct the acid test: Go play. Robinson tried to duck it; he had starred at Princeton, and Barack had been a benchwarmer for his Hawaiian high school team. "All I could think was, This guy's going to be terrible, and I have to report that back," says Robinson, who's now the coach at Brown. "And you can't fudge it, because if he turns out to be a jerk and you knew but didn't say it, you're in trouble."

He liked what he saw. Obama was confident but not cocky, unselfish but unafraid to shoot. On court he showed the same balance that has fueled his political rise; he could talk trash without seeming mean, compete feverishly without seeming angry. Yet few knew how central the sport -- "my first love," he calls it -- was to his self-image as a mixed-race child: How the greatest gift from his absent dad was a basketball, how playing gave him his closest white friends and a place where black skin wasn't a disadvantage. When a coach, a close friend, casually threw out the word n-----, Obama says, "It reminded me that race is complicated, that people are complicated, that you could have ugly strains even among people who were otherwise decent.... It does not necessarily mean they're bad people."

So it's no surprise that Obama bit at the chance to play one-on-one. We met at the YMCA in Spencer, Iowa, in a gym with signs scolding, do not dunk balls or hang on rim! No problem. We both graduated high school in 1979, and the days when a soda bottle could roll beneath our jumping feet have long passed. At 6' 1 1/2", Obama is all lefty, quick with long arms. Before we start, he grabs some opposition research from my son, who readily says I'm "not in basketball shape" and will thus spend his teenage years peering through the barred windows of our basement.

"All right," Obama announces. "I've got your game cased out."

"It's all over?" I ask.

"It's all over."

Obama exudes none of that anxious Washington ambition; he's not weighing words. He's here to play.

The first game flies by in a blur of missed (mine) and made (his) jumpers: I lose 11-5. Obama throws out a cheap "Wooooo!" whenever I shoot but never resorts to ticky-tack calls; before the second game he notes our 15-pound weight difference. "If you wanted to bang inside a bit," he says, "you could."

I'm no fool. I start banging. After I commit that criminal foul under the basket, he lofts an air ball and I pull ahead 2-1. But we're both gasping, and proceed to play the ugliest, slowest game in history. A handler steps in, says his man must leave, so we decide to play to seven.

Obama hits two jumpers to go up 3-2, and I remember what Michelle told me: "He's very good at the last minute."

"All right," I say coyly, flipping him the ball. "This is for the presidency...."

He drills a 19-footer, heels barely leaving the ground. "Did you hear me?" I say.

"Why do you think I hit it?" he says.

I back him down twice to tie 4-4. He drains two more, but I swish one to cut it to 6-5. Now Obama closes in, blocks my last shot, grabs the ball. He shuffles out wide, turns and sets, face blank. I thunder toward him, arm outstretched, feeling suddenly like Hillary and Edwards and anyone else in Iowa trying desperately to stop Obama's rise.

The ball drops through the net like a stone.

APPENDIX B: Results of Survey of Students Reading Material Preferences

40 students (20 male and 20 female) were asked to select one of the following English-language texts to read privately during class:

PUBLICATION	GENRE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
The Beano	children's comic	3 (7.5%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)
Cosmopolitan	women's magazine	8 (20%)	0 (0%)	8 (40%)
The Daily Yomiuri	daily newspaper	4 (10%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)
The Language Teacher	English language teaching journal	1 (2.5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
National Geographic	science & geography magazine	4 (10%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)
Q	music magazine	4 (10%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)
Sports Illustrated	sports magazine	13 (32.5%)	12 (60%)	1 (5%)
Time	news magazine	3 (7.5%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)

APPENDIX C: Questionnaire

Name:

Questionnaire

(Please respond by selecting 1-5)

1. Generally, are you interested in sports?

1 2 3 4 5
Yes, very interested No, not at all interested

2. Are you interested in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Race?

1 2 3 4 5
Yes, very interested No, not at all interested

3. Do you currently have a preference for any particular candidate?

1 2 3 4 5
Yes, strong preference No, no preference at all

3a. If your answer was 1-4, please indicate which candidate you have a preference for:

3b. What words can you think of to describe this person?

*****Now, please read the article you have been given. Don't worry about how much or how little you understand!*****

4. What is the main theme of this article? (Choose one)

basketball **love** **people** **politics** **sports**

5. Are you generally interested in basketball?

1 2 3 4 5
Yes, very interested No, not at all interested

6. Do you now have a better or worse opinion of Mr _____?

1 2 3 4 5
Much better **No change** **Much worse**

7. What words would you use to use to describe him now?
