CRITICAL READING: INTEGRATING PRINCIPLES OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND GENDER STUDIES

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Introduction

Reading has become the most important skill in EFL teaching in Brazil, if we consider factors such as students' needs in our globalized contemporary society, institutional support, teacher demands and learning-teaching conditions in our elementary and secondary schools. The interest in reading can be observed in the large number of different publications in the area and in the priority given to it in the new national curriculum parameters for foreign language teaching. Besides, several master's and doctoral programs in Applied Linguistics or Language Studies in Brazil include research in reading as one of their main areas, specially since the development of the National ESP Project in Brazil (Moita Lopes, 1996).

In the recent past, studies on reading based on cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence have emphasized the role of background knowledge, known as readers' schemata or mental representations of experience and knowledge. In order for comprehension to take place, readers must activate their schemata,

using both bottom-up and top-down processes, in an interactive way (Meurer, 1991, Heberle & Meurer, 1993).

Different researchers, especially in cognitive psychology and in artificial intelligence, have tried to explain what is involved in the process of making sense out of written texts. According to Kintsch and van Dijk (l978)'s model, comprehension involves several complex processes, and the meaning of the text is expressed as a set of propositions. These propositions represent the semantic structure of the text. Macrostructure (referring to global meaning, to the discourse as a whole) and the microstructure (the surface level of the discourse, the individual propositions and their local relations) are the two levels of the semantic structure. Readers check the propositions of the text in order to depict coherence in the text. But they must also make inferences to understand the text. As the mind cannot process a great deal of information, a larger linguistic unit, such as a text, must be processed in cycles. What is retained in memory must be linked to new chunks of meaning.

Reading comprehension, as seen by researchers who subscribe to the well-known schema theory, is understood as being achieved through the instantiation of schemata. The terms *frames* and *scripts* have also been used to show how background knowledge is organized in the human memory. Frames are fixed units of thoughts used to represent stereotypical situations or facts about the world (Minsky, l98l) and scripts (taken from the script of a play) are related to conceptual dependencies in sequences of events (Schank & Childers, l984). These three notions are used to represent background knowledge, to designate cognitive structures or mental models. New information can be considered to be more easily assimilated if it can fit into the reader's frames, scripts or schemata.

Nowadays new concepts have been incorporated into the theory of text processing (see Meurer, in this volume), more adequately referred to as discourse processing. From the point of view of critical discourse analysis (CDA), readers' schemata depend on readers' action in and perception of the world from a social, historical and political

perspective; therefore, different interpretations to the same text may occur.

The purpose of the present paper is to offer an overall conceptualization of how reading can be looked at from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, focusing also on issues of language and gender. As a final point, I offer a guideline for critical reading, which I hope, may serve as a pedagogical tool in reading classes.

Reading within the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA, previously also known as critical linguistics, critical language awareness or critical language studies, focuses on the bi-directional link between language and society, taking into account sociopolitical and cultural aspects of discourse, a step further than the more traditional description and explanation of language-related phenomena. Theorists in this area are interested not only in describing the different kinds of discourse through the analysis of explicit linguistic elements of texts, but also in showing how these discourses reinforce and are reinforced by the existing status quo, the existing socio-economic structure of society. Two of the main purposes of these studies are to make people aware of how language is used to dominate or reinforce social inequalities, such as those between people of different ethnic, economic, social or intellectual groups, and to analyze changes taking place in social organizations.

The term *critical discourse analysis* (CDA), having originated in Britain, has become an important line of research in language, which has spread to many different countries in Europe, Asia and other countries such as Brazil. The recognition of the academic standing of CDA may be seen in the increasing number of publications in the area, including an extensive entry on *critical linguistics* in *The Linguistics Encyclopaedia* (Fowler, 1996), and in the invitations to major researchers in the area, such as Fairclough, to be main speakers in major international events, such as the 1996 International Association of

Applied Linguistics (AILA) conference in Jyvaskyla, Finland. In 1999 a CDA Conference was held in Birmingham, UK, bringing together researchers from different countries to discuss issues such as the nature of discourse, gender and critical social semiotics.

The work carried out by Fowler Hodge, and Trew (1979) on critical linguistics in the book *Language and Control* became one of the starting points for more critically oriented language studies, aimed at the ideological deconstruction of different texts. As Fowler and Kress (1979, p. 185) pointed out at that time, their studies suggested that "there are strong and pervasive connections between linguistic structure and social structure" and that "there are social meanings in a natural language which are precisely distinguished in its lexical and syntactic structure and which are articulated when we speak or write". As recently observed by Fowler (1996, p. 4), in relation to their initial work in *Language and Control*:

> Critical linguistics insists that all representation is mediated, moulded by the value-systems that are ingrained in the medium (language in this case) used for representation; it challenges common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance.

The emphasis was and still is that linguistic representations are affected by social values, favoring specific views of reality to the detriment of other views. The greatest challenge for critical discourse analysts seems to be the fact that they must take into account "true multidisciplinarity in order to account for intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture" (Van Dijk, 1993a, p. 253). It seems that CDA has emerged as an alternative for discourse analysts to deal with problems of injustice, oppression, or inequalities of all kinds.

In CDA language is understood as a social semiotic system, that is, as a social process, as one of the possible systems of meaning that constitute human culture (Halliday, 1978, 1985, 1994). Language, text

and social context are inextricably linked in the process of creating meaning, of representing and building human experience. The lexicogrammatical features of language are thus investigated in relation to their use in social activities (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday, 1985).

Several different foci of analysis have deserved the attention of critical discourse analysts, such as language in relation to racism, political ideologies, sexist discourses, and literacy. Van Dijk (1993a, 1993b, 1996) has recently concentrated his analysis on issues of language and racism in relation to dominance and power by elite groups and institutions. He takes into account the sociocognitive dimension of knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies. Kress (1989), who has worked on issues of ideology and language as social semiotic (Hodge & Kress, 1988, 1993), focuses on the concepts of genre, discourse, and text, and discusses linguistic processes in sociocultural practice. Nowadays he is concerned with questions for critical language projects in a multicultural society (Kress, 1996).

Seen under the perspective of critical discourse analysis (CDA), reading constitutes a social practice, and readers are seen as communicatively competent. As Fowler (1996, p. 7) points out,

> . . . the reader . . . is not the passive recipient of fixed meanings: the reader, remember, is discursively equipped prior to the encounter with the text, and reconstructs the text as a system of meanings which may be more or less congruent with the ideology which informs the text.

In this view of reading, the concept of *social cognition* becomes important. Social cognition refers to the set of attitudes, memories, knowledge, beliefs, stereotypical situations and norms of language use which interact with discourse, forming an interface between individual social participants and broader social dimensions, between the individual and the social (van Dijk, 1998). Certain mental representations, (*frames* or *schemata*) are shared by members of a

certain discourse community, and may be incorporated into society, becoming, thus, part of social cognition.

To illustrate, I refer to my analysis of editorials in women's magazines (Heberle, 1997b). The examples below point to values and beliefs about losing weight, bringing up children, family life, love of animals, nature, etc., as if they were common sense, truths; that is, they function as "implicit assumptions" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 78; 202).

Everyone knows it's a nightmare to lose weight. (ed 5)

Bringing up children is full of fun (and sleepless nights!), but anyone with kids knows the sense of responsibility that goes with it. We all hear stories about youngsters who get in with a bad crowd and end up in trouble . . . (ed 9)

But family life is a very important issue for SHE readers (ed 59)

There are three things every woman wants: to feel good, to look good, and a stonkingly good sex life. (ed 103)

We Brits are a great nation of lovers—we love our children, our animals, our countryside. (ed 75)

Amor à primeira vista, coração aos saltos, frio na barriga, avassaladora paixão. Quem já não viveu isso? Todos nós. Homens e mulheres. [Love at first sight, strong heartbeat, devastating passion. Who has not experienced this? All of us. Men and women.] (Nova, Brasil, 1992)

. . . a maioria das mulheres hoje é muito mais determinada, tem prazer em trabalhar porque assim consegue exercer a inteligência e se informar. Como eu, muitas não viveriam sem o trabalho. [Most women today are much more determined, take pleasure in working and are able to exert intelligence and be informed. Like me, many wouldn't live without working] (Nova, Brasil, Jan 1993)

It is suggested that in case (women) readers do not feel they belong to the social group of people who believe in losing weight, family life or love of animals, for instance, they had better at least start giving such aspects of life a thought. These suggestions or values, thus, may become part of social cognition, being gradually incorporated into society. In argumentation studies, hasty generalizations such as the ones above

constitute a form of fallacy and part of the editors' standpoint: they are generic statements applied to insufficient statistics (Walton, 1992; Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992). The use of generalizations such as the ones in examples 1 to 7 above is persuasive, for it somehow suggests that a vast number of women know or want that, implying that that should be the case with readers too.

Besides looking at the concept of social cognition for a critical orientation to reading, critical discourse analysts focus on a more critical view of textual and contextual features of texts, paying close attention to multilingual and multicultural issues. Critical reading involves the analysis of language forms and of the socio-historical-political context. There is a concern not only with the propositional content but with the ideological message as well. Wallace (1995), for instance, reports on her one-semester critical reading course with undergraduate students from different cultures at Thames Valley University in London. She emphasizes the need to consider the nature of texts, of the reading process, and of classroom interaction, looking at lexicogrammatical and contextual features of texts together with students' and the teacher's ways of reading.

Under CDA, reading concerns the understanding of meanings from a resistant or subversive point of view (Kress, 1989), or "reading with a suspicious eye" (Wallace, 1995, p. 335), that is, reading without accepting the reading position constructed for the reader, the text being looked at from another ideological position. Wallace (p. 341) explains that from the perspective of CDA, "critical reading is posited on non-cooperativeness, a standing back momentarily to gain a different perspective, in ethnographic terms, 'to make the familiar strange'."

Since CDA is seen as "a complex, multidisciplinary . . . domain of study" (van Dijk, 1993a, p. 249), having emerged as an alternative direction to research in linguistics, discourse analysis, semiotics, and pragmatics, it may contribute to the process of critical, subversive, resistant reading. The greatest challenge is to make readers aware of "intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture" (Van Dijk, 1993a, p. 253). This way, readers will be better

equipped to see and understand the bi-directional link between language and society, and the globalized and local sociopolitical, historical and cultural aspects of discourse. Studies in CDA can help readers to perceive how explicit linguistic elements of texts contribute to reinforce/reproduce or challenge the existing status quo, the existing social practices and inequalities, such as those between people of different ethnic, economic, social or intellectual groups.

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

As other critical discourse analysts, Fairclough is also interested in the bidirectional study of language and society. His work focuses on language and power relations, critical language awareness, and discourse and social change (Fairclough, 1989, 1992[a], 1993, 1995). He sees CDA as an alternative way "in social scientific research on social and cultural change, and as a resource in struggles against exploitation and domination" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). Fairclough's social theory of discourse incorporates social context in its framework, viewing language use as a form of social practice in a dialectal relationship with other social factors. He looks at text from a systemic-functional approach to language studies, viewing grammar as units of meaning and not as isolated linguistic units.

Fairclough's study concerns two broad dimensions of analysis, two broad lines of research: social theory and linguistics, and his text analysis focuses on how linguistic forms are situated within a broader context of social relations. His theory tries to join the linguistic studies of discourse and text analysis with the social dimensions of discourse, incorporating the pragmatic, functional aspect of language and the social and historical perspectives of language use. Fairclough (1993, p. 134) explains that "it is vital that critical discourse analysis explore the tension between these two sides of language use, the socially shaped and socially constitutive". Being socially shaped, language use is related to the conventional, the reproductive side of language, that is, the perpetuation of social conventions. The constitutive dimension of

language, on the other hand, relates to the potentiality to transform social relations. Fairclough argues that discourse helps us to construct social identities, social relationships between people, and, on a wider scale, our systems of beliefs (An analysis of these perspectives is found in Meurer, this volume).

In order to account for these two dimensions of discourse and to link specific instances of language use with the social context, Fairclough adopts Halliday's (1978, 1985, 1994) systemic-functional grammar. This grammar allows Fairclough to carry out his text analysis in accordance with his social-theoretical perspective, since it takes into account every instance of language use as subsuming three functions at the same time (the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual functions of language).

Examining language use, Fairclough proposes we should investigate conventions which regulate discursive events in relation to what he calls orders of discourse (following Foucault), that is, higher level conventions set up by social institutions and power relations. These orders of discourse structure the social conventions concerning discourse and they comprehend all discursive practices of an institution. Some of the discursive practices in schools, for example, include those of the classroom, of homework, of the playground and of the teachers' rooms. Fairclough tells us that the boundaries between different orders of discourse are fuzzy and open to dispute. Several different and at times contradictory discourses may co-exist within institutions and different social domains. Fairclough believes that critical discourse analysis should explore the opaque relations between discourses and social processes, in terms of ideology and power relations.

Fairclough's analytical framework: text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice

Fairclough's analytical framework comprises three levels of analysis: the text, the discursive practice and the sociocultural practice. For Fairclough (1993, p. 136), "each discursive event has three dimensions or facets: it is a spoken or written text, it is an instance of

discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of text, and it is a piece of social practice". The author believes that in order to carry out a critical discourse analysis of any discursive event, one needs to focus on these three different dimensions. The analysis of text concerns the study of macro and microstructures of the language produced in a certain discursive event. The analysis of social practice is the examination of the discursive event in terms of what is happening at a certain time in a certain sociocultural context. The dimensions of text and social practice are mediated by the discursive practice, which refers to the social processes of text production, consumption, and distribution.

Analysis of the first dimension, text, involves examination of both linguistic form and meaning. It is here that Fairclough applies Halliday's systemic-functional grammar and its ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. The ideational function concerns, as Fairclough says, "the representation and signification of the world and experience" (p. 136). This representation is analyzed in terms of the grammatical category of transitivity, which specifies the different processes (types of verbs), the participants and the circumstances involved in the social interaction (Halliday, 1994). There are verbs of action (material processes), of feelings and thoughts (mental processes), of saying (verbal processes), or those which establish relations, classify or identify entities (relational processes).

The interpersonal meaning refers to the meanings of the social relations established between participants of the social interaction, to the interactive aspect of the event, the kind of involvement between the participants of the event: the speaker/writer and audience. Analysis of the interpersonal meaning concerns the way in which the writer/speaker is interacting with his/her interlocutor: mood (whether the social exchange is being conveyed in statements, questions, commands, or offers) and modality (the degree of assertiveness being used in the exchange). The textual function of the text refers basically to the thematic structure of the text, to what Fairclough (1993, p. 136) refers to as "the

distribution of given versus new and foregrounded versus backgrounded information".

Fairclough's text analysis, which takes into account the grammatical categories of the ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings, consists basically of four main parts: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure.

The second dimension of the author's analytical framework, discourse practice, comprehends analysis of the processes of text production, interpretation, distribution and consumption. It concerns the analysis of how people produce and interpret texts, and their relation to the orders of discourse: it is the analysis of sociocognitive aspects of text production and interpretation. Besides looking into how a text is seen as cohesive and coherent, this level of analysis also involves the study of which discourse types are being drawn upon in the text.

Analysis of the third dimension, social practice, may involve investigation in different levels of society: from the most localized to institutional or even wider societal contexts. As questions of power and ideology are dealt with at this level of analysis, Fairclough argues that two concepts, namely, interdiscursivity and hegemony, are needed. These notions are also important for the levels of text and discursive practice.

Fairclough (1993, p. 137) says that interdiscursivity means "an endless combination and recombination of genres and discourses", or "the constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres". This means that a text contains traces of previous texts and restructures conventions to produce other texts. Incorporating the concept of interdiscursivity helps the critical discourse analyst to account for the creative, heterogeneous aspect of a discursive event.

According to Fairclough (1993, p. 137), hegemony is "a more or less partial and temporary achievement, an 'unstable equilibrium' which is a focus of struggle, open to disarticulation and rearticulation." One area of struggle which is discussed by Fairclough is the discursive practice in contemporary British universities, where promotional, personalized discourse and traditional, more formal discourse co-exist,

with the former gradually becoming more influential. Whereas the notion of interdiscursivity relates to the creative, constitutive aspect of a discursive practice, hegemonic relations and hegemonic struggle restrict this creativity. Fairclough illustrates this by referring to the emerging number of discursive practices used by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s against male-dominated practices in the 1950s. Hegemony and interdiscursivity are related to historical change, a crucial aspect, in Fairclough's view, of critical discourse analysis.

As it takes into account an "interdiscursive mix" of theories and approaches to the study of language and society, Fairclough's theory of discourse may be used by educators to look at reading as a critical process, integrating text analysis, socio-cognitive aspects and social-historical context. He sensibly integrates theoretical perspectives and concepts from both social theories and from linguistics for his study of discourse, and he is able to apply his theoretical framework to texts found in everyday social practices.

Relevance of Fairclough's studies for reading

Bloome and Talwalkar (1997) see the relevance of Fairclough's work in relation to three new trends in reading, writing and literacy studies, which they refer to as a) social context studies, b) empowerment studies, and c) new literacy studies. The first kind of reading and writing studies gives attention to social factors and their influence in producing and/or interpreting texts. The second set of studies concerns reading and writing as "a way to re-view the world in which students live" (Bloome & Talwalkar 1997, p. 109). Based on the studies by the late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, reading is thus viewed as a process for students to develop a critical perspective on the world.

According to Bloome and Talwalkar (1997), Fairclough's CDA is insightful for these two trends in reading and writing to raise questions about the nature of language and about students' identities and their interpretations of texts. It may also contribute to raise students' awareness of how specific ideological messages prevail in texts and of how texts impose certain readings of the world. These authors also add,

> For both social context studies and empowerment studies, critical discourse analysis provides an explicit discussion of language and power relations that can be adapted and incorporated into the analysis of reading and writing events . . . . At the very least, critical discourse analysis provokes a more careful reflection on how social context is being defined in studies of social aspects of literacy and on how theory-method links are being made (p. 109).

The third trend in reading is referred to as new literacy studies (Bloome & Talwalkar, 1997). Advocates of this new trend consider reading and writing as fundamentally cultural and/or social processes, social practices and social events as well, looking at people's interactions in different social contexts, the social construction of cultural events and continuity and change in societal and institutional organizations. Again, Bloome and Talwalkar (1997, p. 109) see Fairclough's work pertinent to this last trend. They explain,

> Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis, with its sensitivity to power relations and hegemonic relations within and among social institutions, provides one view of social context that can help in the definition of reading, writing and literacy as social processes.

In relation to this third trend, these authors add that CDA may be parallel to what is known as a community-centered view of reading (Willet & Bloome, in Bloome & Talwalkar, 1997), which considers students' experience and recognition of the multiple tensions and cultural and ideological contexts, from several different social communities and institutions.

The theoretical perspectives reviewed so far suggest that CDA can provide a viable and useful alternative for reading, which goes beyond the mere decodification of the propositional content of texts to encompass socially relevant issues. I now turn to another

interdisciplinary area of research that can greatly contribute to the area of critical reading.

Reading through gender lens

Language use contributes to reproduce and to create reality, as seen under the principles of CDA. For the development of critical, resistant reading, it is also necessary to become aware of gender roles and identities. By analyzing the lexicogrammatical choices and contextual features in a text, readers can develop sensibility to better understand writers' perspective and the way they classify and name people, objects and ideas. Thus, awareness of the selective and classificatory power of language and of the various social identities can contribute to critical reading. It is important, thus, for readers to see "how issues of gender are represented in languages" (Cameron, 1990, p. 12). As Coates points out,

> As children, we become language users and, through using language, become gendered members of the community: both language and gender are developed through our participation in everyday social practice. In other words, language and gender are inextricably linked. (1993, p. 204)

The term *gender*, which has received different definitions, is understood as a socially constructed category, differentiated from the biological male/female opposition. Gender intersects with other social variables such as the social activity taking place, the degree of intimacy between the interactants, age, education, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, occupation, class, sexual orientation, political/religious/ affiliation and the background knowledge the interactants have on the subject (Cameron, 1992; Coates, 1993; Mills, 1995). Researchers working with language and gender nowadays understand that all these factors interact. Being aware of gender roles and identities may offer subsidies

for a better understanding of the nexus between language and gender in texts.

Recent publications have increasingly looked into gender and language issues. Caldas-Coulthard (1993, 1996), Talbot (1992) and Lazar (1993) have analyzed different aspects of language use and gender issues within CDA. Women's magazines have also deserved attention in CDA by Brazilian researchers, including studies such as those by Caldas-Coulthard (1996), Figueiredo (1994, 1995, 1996), Heberle (1994, 1996, 1997b) and Ostermann (1994, 1995, 1996). These studies concentrate on the construction of identities in women's magazines by analyzing specific linguistic realizations in different sections of these magazines, showing how specific lexicogrammatical items evidence contradictory values of femininity and convey oppressive ideological meanings which position women mostly within the private sphere. These studies point to women's contradictory role in society and show that the linguistic choices still contribute to convey a conservative model of sexuality, in spite of the transgressive and modern image as portrayed in women's magazines.

More recently, Caldas-Coulthard (1996, p. 268) has carried out a critical discourse analysis of first-person narratives in women's magazines (especially Marie Claire) about supposedly forbidden sexual encounters and has concluded that these narratives "provide readers with forms of sexual deviance and prohibited love affairs but maintain a moral attitude of condemnation towards the facts portrayed". The women who transgress repent afterwards, an attitude that accords with hegemonic middle-class values.

Researchers such as Sunderland (1994) see the importance for language teachers of looking at their work through gendered eyes. Regarding a current thought about language education, she says that

> it is not only a question of teaching about the subject matter and methodology, linguistics and pedagogy, what to teach and how to teach best. It is also a matter of learning, and of

the individual learner, whose gender, as well as her age, class, ethnic background and personality, can all have a bearing on her learning processes, the roles she plays, her interpretation of classroom texts, and the relations she has with other participants in the classroom (1994, p. 8).

As previously pointed out by Bloome and Talwalkar, current studies on reading and writing have emphasized students' experience and the recognition of different cultural, institutional and ideological contexts. Gender, thus, along with other social variables, may also be recognized as playing a significant role in society. Readers may be encouraged to develop sensitivity and ability to recognize linguistic forms that discriminate people because of their sociocultural, political or sexual orientation. They should also be encouraged to perceive that writers determine what should be included or excluded from the real events and how events should be represented (Fairclough, 1989). Likewise, they should also understand that writers are powerful because "they can reproduce what is most convenient for them in terms of their aims and ideological point of view" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1992, p. 71).

In terms of EFL teaching in Brazil, issues of gender can be highlighted through the analysis of verbal and visual elements that deal with gender differences and those which may reflect biased statements. The purpose is, thus, to make students aware of discriminatory language and stereotypical images used in educational materials.

Questions to help develop critical reading

In this section I present suggestions of questions which may contribute to the process of reading as proposed by CDA, taking into account Fairclough's three-dimensional framework presented above (text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice). A sample text analysis can be seen in Heberle (forthcoming).

General questions for the analysis of text, based on Oliveira (1989), Kress (1989), Wallace (1992, 1995), Fairclough (1995), Motta-Roth (1998), Motta-Roth and Heberle (1994):

1. Where and when was the text written?
2. Why was it written?
3. What is the text about?
4. Who is the text addressed to? Who are its probable readers?
5. How is the topic developed?
6. What are other ways of writing about the topic?
7. Does the text producer establish an interactive, friendly relationship with the readers, or is s/he distant, formal, and impersonal?
8. What kind of genre is the text?
9. What is the generic structure, or basic text structure (Winter, 1994; Meurer & Motta-Roth, 1997) of the text?
10. Are there elements of promotional discourse, such as positive evaluative words?
11. Are there personalized, self-promotional features to characterize specific groups of people or objects?
12. What interdiscursive elements are there? For example, are there elements of simulated conversation, self-promotion, personal qualities, advertising, educational/ government/ religious discourse?

Lexicogrammatical questions (based on Halliday, 1994; Fairclough, 1989, 1992ª, 1992b; McCarthy & Carter, 1994):

Regarding lexical choice:

1. What kind of vocabulary predominates in the text? Are there formal, technical words or informal and colloquial expressions (suggesting a closer relationship with readers)?

2.   Are there words which simulate oral language, such as discourse markers as *well* or *you know*?
3.   Does the vocabulary appeal to emotions or is it more logical and argumentative?
4.   Are there words which are ideologically significant?
5.   What metaphors are used?
6.   Which verbs, nouns, and adjectives contribute to project identities (of the text producer, receiver, of a specific group of people?)
7.   Does the use of the pronouns *we* (meaning the producer of the text and the reader) or *you* refer to a specific positively classified social group?

In terms of grammar:

1.   What kinds of verb processes are there (Halliday, 1994)? In other words, are there verbs of action (material processes), of feelings and thoughts (mental processes), of saying (verbal processes), or those which establish relations, classify or identify entities (relational processes)? What verb tenses are used?
2.   Are sentences in the active or passive voice? Are the agents of the actions explicit or implicit?
3.   Are sentences joined by coordination or subordination?

In terms of visual elements (the images, figures, illustrations and symbols, based on Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, Hodge and Kress, 1988, and Grimm, 1999:

1.   What visual resources are used besides the verbal text (colors, symbols, figures)?
2.   What visual aspect is emphasized or foregrounded?
3.   In what ways do the illustrations/pictures relate to the verbal text?
4.   What sociocultural aspects can be identified in the visual signs? (For example, The Big Ben in London)?

Regarding issues of gender, based on Lazar (1993) and Florent et al (1994):

1.   Does the text contain sings of assimetry in male-female relationships?
2.   Does the text promote equitable power-sharing between the sexes?
3.   Does the text reinforce or reassert traditional gender ideology? Are there traces of sexism?
4.   Are there signs of stereotyped attitudes?

These questions can be seen as glimpses of alternatives for critical reading, which should be integrated with the study of different genres, produced on a variety of discursive events and used in different social circumstances (Meurer, forthcoming). I believe that in EFL classes students should manipulate and criticize many different kinds of texts, including editors' letters in magazines, advertisements, film/book reviews, business letters, interviews, news reports, and extracts from books, just to mention a few, in accordance with recent views in critical reading (Heberle, 1997a; Wallace, 1995). A variety of authentic texts such as these can be used for classroom discussion, if possible with the interrelated analytical levels of text, discursive practice and social practice, as proposed by Fairclough.

Concluding remarks

Principles of CDA and of gender-related studies towards a critical, social, and historical perspective to analyze discourse may effectively contribute to critical reading, in accordance with current educational discussions, where language awareness, consciousness-raising activities, and critical pedagogy are fundamental (See, for example, Gee, 1990; Fairclough, 1995). Working with written texts in EFL

classrooms under the principles outlined in this article may be a feasible way to improve our students' critical reading skills, allowing them to better understand the interrelation between linguistic structure and social structure, and to see that discourses determine and are determined by social values and conventions. Likewise, offering our students the possibility to look at texts within a critical, social, and historical perspective may represent a step towards more committed citizenship.

To conclude, as Wallace (1992, p. 80), I see the way to work with texts in EFL reading as a means to "help EFL readers feel more confident in taking up assertive positions against the text, to encourage them to feel they have options in the way they choose to read texts, and to help them feel in a more equal relationship with the writer".

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