

## Critical Discourse Analysis in Literature-Oriented Classes: *A Theoretical Perspective*

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### Abstract

*In the context of English language teaching, teaching literature as a subject in the higher educational level has always been dialectical and debatable. For, this controversial issue may lie in the way literature should be taught. This can either be for fostering linguistic, cultural, literary, or communicative competence of the learner. Moreover, many educationalists tempt to bridge the gap between the contents of the syllabus of literature, the texts chosen, and the methods and approaches used by teachers to teach literary texts in class and carry the lectures out. Teaching literature in the ELT classes requires familiarizing learners with a text with a meaningful context which allows them have adequate understanding of the characters roles, nature of the text, era, setting and plot. In effect, teaching literacy in the language class can contribute highly to developing the learners' intellectual ability, cultural awareness, simulating their imagination, and exposing them to authentic language. In this paper, we tempt to investigate the role of the new criticism approach and critical thinking pedagogy in interpreting a literary text in class, enhancing classroom activities, and thus encouraging learner-centeredness in literature classes.*

**Keywords:** New Criticism Approach, Critical Reading, Discourse Analysis, Literacy Teaching, EFL Context

### INTRODUCTION

In order to construct a recognizable card of different processes accessible to teachers, it is convenient to apply certain methodological

types including lectures, workshops, self-access learning, and informal dialogue. Indeed, the presence of these methods and strategies can help teachers promote and direct the comprehension of learning potential. Generally, they vary in their degree of relevance and their variation affords diversity within an educational experience. As a matter of fact, there may lay a crucial and imperative question that guides the quest of using the multiple approaches in teaching literature such as: who is supposed to enrich the schedule for learning?

Certain demands that must be present in teaching a lecture can establish critical judgments and personal moral values. Indeed, in most teaching and learning situations, educational schedule is decisively enriched and set by external procedures including examination boards, and by the historical context. The educational schedule is also delineated by the interests and kind of approaches of individual teachers which echo their own educational experience. The teaching and learning processes have relatively changed from the traditional approaches, functional and discourse stylistics approaches to a more interactive and experiential approaches across huge dimensions. Indeed, there become a huge need for experiential learning in increasing the learner's meta-cognitive abilities, his ability to exercise newly acquired skills and notable knowledge to real life situations and the ability to become self-directed learner.

Evidently, there are certain ways to incorporate these experiential interactive approaches into drama courses and in enhancing the teaching and learning processes of a dramatic text. Indeed, teaching literature typically belongs to art education because arts have traditionally applied more experiential approaches to teaching compared to other approaches. In effect, traditional art education is arguably an experiential learning process determination that incorporates the integration of theory and practice while other traditional educational trends can be interpreted as text-driven approaches that indicate both telling and theory.

### **1. The New Criticism Approach**

The approach of New Criticism appeared in the late 1940's in the literary theory scene of Anglo-American literature. It was mainly a reaction against new humanism and impressionism. This interpretive theory focuses on criticizing literature itself and in which most critics

assume that literary works are autonomous as it is mostly applied to poetry. In effect, the aim of this approach is to provide reading techniques for the sake of dealing with the artistic advent of literary modernism with Ransom's book *the New Criticism* (1941) whose main role is practical which deals with close reading of the text.

As Searle claims that: "the poem or literary text is treated as a self-sufficient verbal artifact" in this general orientation, the literary text as such was generally viewed as a privileged site for shaping and disseminating cultural values held to be essential attribute of the aesthetic specificity of poetry" (Wallace, 1991, p.01) it has first appeared as a movement in literary theory in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America used mainly for close reading of poetry to emphasize the nature of a literary work as aesthetic piece or a piece of art.

This movement has been vehemently developed by the critical essays of T.S Eliot including *Hamlet and His Problems* in which he criticizes the literary piece. Later, by the end of the century, new critics appeared and they criticized the way Eliot treats literary poems by emphasizing on the literary text itself instead of interpreting its context. Indeed, this approach to literature is seen by many as a formalist critical interpretation which typically emphasize the form, aim, and themes of the literary text.

Many critics have implemented their principles and critical interpretations in studying literary texts. The main focus was on poetry as Penn Warren and others who approached the notion of aesthetic poetry which has been explored revealing poetry as a work of art and a means of communication. A notable example is the poetic theory of Richards in which the students are allowed to understand a poem through the act of critical thinking and interpretation by being given a poem without information about the poet or a title, so, they can realize them through the approach of New Criticism in addition to studying the form and language through literary interpretation.

## **2. Critical Theory**

Critical theory is a school of thought which challenges major ways of exploring different phenomena. It can be originated from the so-called 'Frankfurt School' including the work of scholars such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse,. The emphasis of critical theory is exposing existing modes oppression and providing

possibilities which may release those once excluded and neglected. Harrey (2012) According to Horkheimer (2002):

Theory for most researchers is the sumtotal of propositions about a subject, the propositions being so linked with each other that a few are basic and the rest derive from these. The smaller the number of primary principles in comparison with the derivations, the more perfects the theory. The real validity of the theory depends on the derived propositions being consonant with the actual facts. If experience and theory contradict each other, one of the two must be reexamined. Either the scientist has failed to observe correctly or something is wrong with the principles of the theory. In relation to facts, therefore, a theory always remains a hypothesis. One must be ready to change it if its weaknesses begin to show as one works through the material. Theory is stored-up knowledge, put in a form that makes it useful for the closest possible description of facts (p.188)

In fact, Critical Theory represents a school of academic thought and is typically associated with the Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt University. A major issue of critical theory is to “destabilize dominant modes of understanding by surfacing underlying assumptions and rendering power relations explicit.” As Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) claim “what men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men” (p, 04). In effect, critical theory tempts to expose the domination which is hidden behind that which at first appears neutral and essential. Indeed, the aim of positivism is extremely a main issue of critique for critical theorists. Critical theory reinterprets existing orders as it provides alternative modes of understanding which emancipates those restricted by conventional theory. In Horkheimer’s (1982) terms the theory is critical in so far as it seeks “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 2002, p, 244).

Critical theory tempts to question neutral performative notion and examines the dehumanizing outcome of executive control. The bequest of critical theory has inclusivity through the democratization of control and decision making. While also emphasizing communicative processes and how major issues have been created and afforded. Critical theory therefore opens up possibilities for discourse, analysis of power, and historical understandings. In effect, critical

theory provides contemplation in research and writing, providing researchers with empirical assumptions. Agger (1991, p, 111)

Critical theory is an approach that studies society dialectically and analyze political economy, and ideologies. It is a normative approach that is based on the judgment that domination is a problem, and that a domination free society is needed. It explores political struggles in a given society. The term critical is highly relevant for political communication. In fact, political communication is mainly critical because it involves acts of speech which emphasizes political opinions and practices of particular actors.

On the other hand, modern politics is a deep competitive system, in which elections contribute to distribute and redistribute power. This vision of criticism derives in the tradition of Kantian enlightenment which reveals the Enlightenment as an age of criticism. Opposed to Kant's general understanding of critique, Karl Marx and the Marxian tradition shows the categorical imperative as different to overcome all forms of slavery and to end alienation. This school of thought offers a more adequate understanding of being critical, such as questioning power, and the struggle for a good society. Critical theory is thus seen as a critique of society. Marxism tradition uses the term "critical" to confirm that not all science is critical, but that most of it has a more administrative character which considers power structures.

Wiley & Sons (2015) critical Theory's main focus was on the work of Karl Marx. Critical theory has various dimensions. The first is related to epistemology, the next three involve ontology and the latter two its praxeology. Epistemology is a theory of knowledge, it deals with how the very concepts that constitute a theory are built and organized. Ontology is yet a theory of being; it involves questioning the development of reality, while Praxeology is the study of human political action and ethics.

Since critical theory is a critique of domination, it questions all thought and practices that justify domination. Marx (1997) identified the core of critical theory as the: "categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being" (p. 257) Critical theory reveals how a good society for all is possible and that domination alienates humans from reaching such a society. In deconstructing alienation and

domination, critical theory also requests self-determined, participatory, and democracy.

Marxist approaches and critical theory can be interpreted as a form of political communication. They communicate crucial deformations of society and potentials for political change and struggles by which humans can overcome these deposits. Critical theory is yet a critique of ideology: ideologies are forms of thought which represent aspects of human existence that are historical and changeable. Ideology critique evokes everything that exists in society is created by humans through social relationships as those social relationships can be changed; as Marx (1997) claims: “problems into the self-conscious human form” (p. 214) this means that these problems are made to make humans conscious of the obstacles they face in society and the causes of these problems. Since there is no alternative to capitalism or neoliberalism, the outcomes of social activity are unchangeable issues.

### **3. Critical Discourse Analysis**

The term Discourse can be identified in terms of two main paradigms: structural and functional. Structurally, it is a certain unit of language, and functionally, the focus on language use Schiffrin (1994). Structuralists are concerned mostly with the language form, such as grammar, viewing language as an individual ownership. Andersen (1988), whereas functionalists emphasize language use such as content. Paradigms may vary and can influence definitions of discourse. For instance, defining discourse from the structuralist paradigm refers to discourse as language above the sentence such as a type of language structure, and from the functionalist paradigm it is viewed as language use Shiffrin (1994).

According to Fairclough (1993), CDA is identified as a branch of discourse analysis, which is concerned with analyzing structural relationships of dominance, power and control as manifested in language claiming:

Discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of

these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (p. 135)

On the other hand, CDA is defined as a field which emphasizes reading and analyzing written and spoken texts to show the digressive sources of power and dominance. It explores how these digressive sources are reproduced within social, political and historical contexts. In other words, CDA tempts to examine critically social inequality as it is built by language use of discourse. Djik (1998) Vitally, the term “critical” may be associated with the work of some “critical linguists” and be influenced by the Frankfurt School or J. H. Thompson (1984). In effect, the term “critical” was first applied to characterize an approach that was called Critical Linguistics. Fowler et al (1979). As Wodak (2001) claims that the use of language and discourse can lead to constructing social events which could illustrate systematic analysis. Besides, Lodges and the term “critical” in discourse analysis is viewed by Lodges & Nilep (2007) as implying a broad understanding of critical scholarship (p.04) which is featured by analyzing carefully empirical data involving an amount of distance from the data in order to investigate the things from a deep perspective.

Generally, Critical Discourse Analysis derives from a critical theory of language which considers using language as a form of social practice which depends on a particular historical context and which is the means by which existing social relations are reproduced. The main claim of CDA was raised by Neo-Marxism and post-Modernist social theories, along with Foucault (1972) and Pecheux (1975), who introduced the relation of ideology with discourse, which became the major tool through which ideology is conveyed, and reproduced. For instance, Foucault represented knowledge, and its context.

According to Halliday (1978), critical discourse analysis tempts to represent patterns of experience and enables human beings to construct a mental picture of reality, and be aware of what goes on around them and inside them. (p.47) Halliday’s functional grammar represents two things to formal grammar: ‘patterns of experience’ and ‘patterns of ideologies’. For instance, using different grammatical structures of passive and active voice may refer to different ideological interpretations. So, language being used represents ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. For, ideational function

represents the external world such as ideas and ideologies. Interpersonal function concerns the speaker's role in the discourse situation, such as the interacting and communication with others.

Critical Discourse Analysis can also be related to critical issues in psychology, and social sciences as it may go back to the early 1970s. By this, CDA can be viewed as a reaction against the multiple paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s. It has actually appeared as a new direction of discourse analysis in the 1980s through works of some linguists, such as Fairclough, van Dijk, and Wodak. It can go back to study the relationship between discourse and society and it was really developed as a movement in 1992. (Billig, 2002; Wodak, 1991)

#### **4. Critical Literacy Pedagogy in Literature Classes**

In fact, Critical Literacy in English Literature involves studying, reading, and interpreting alternative texts and other materials using innovative pedagogies such as critical pedagogy and critical literacy when teaching literacy. For instance, considering teaching literature from a critical angle helps improving the traditional canon through including alternative literary texts, and knowledge. This approach will ultimately allow learners to draw various meanings and interpretations based on their own personal life experiences and history. Indeed, teachers of literacy may use pedagogical tools and activities in their classes and provide sample lesson plans in which they can apply critical literacy lens to novels, plays, and poems and familiarize the learners with alternative texts. (Parmar & Kinsky, 2013, in Hammond, 2006)

Despite the fact that this approach to teaching literature is not highly applicable in the literacy scene, it is vital because it is a mediator between language use and social power. Although, social aspects of language use have been neglected in EFL classrooms (Osborn 2000; Pennycook, 2001) and learners are somehow passive in having classroom activities (Walsh 1991; Wallace 1992). Arguably, here EFL teaching ignores how texts deal with essential matters of ideology and power relations in society (Wallace 1992)

The critical approach to teaching and learning literature contributes to carry the process where by a premise is accepted because it is repeated, Critical Literacy also encourages learners to discover how social and political factors contribute to the production of the language they are learning so that learners are more aware of the



social and political factors behind their choice to use particular language variations. Cummins (2000) For instance, Transformative Pedagogy is a critical literacy type which involves a collaborative interaction between students and teachers which helps them get critical awareness of the sociopolitical use of language and use language in a meaningful way to change and react to social reality. (Van 2009: 07-08)

Though it was not initially appeared as an approach to teaching literature, critical literacy pedagogy developed in English language classes Wallace (1995). EFL teachers became much more interested in critical literacy pedagogy after the 1990's, after the adoption of Freire's ideas into the EFL classes. This approach contributes to developing critical awareness of the role of EFL in social relations, including those afforded by power structures, and how literary texts are related to identity matters, political power, ethnicity, and religion. (Benesch, 2009; Crookes, 2001)

Ideally, all literary texts long to make readers imagine the world in a special way through using certain linguistic devices. As Locke & Cleary (2001) claim that readers of literature tempt to add to the act of reading some digressive lens melting with the designs of the literary text in a particular manner (p.121)

## **5. Critical Reading of a Literary Text**

The introduction of a methodological approach based on problem solving and making learners critical thinkers appeared by Freire (1970) this refers to different situations or presented in class and learners are encouraged to exploit on them and create different solutions. Freire (1970) evokes that this process requires uncovering social reality, striving for consciousness, and critically intervene in reality. This teaching method tempts to consider learners as mere treasuries of knowledge.

Indeed, implementing methodological practices that improve learners' active learning, different ways of knowing, sources of knowledge, as well as different ways of assessment. Bobkina & Stivanova (2016) Critical literacy pedagogy is somehow associated with critical awareness of the role of language in social interaction, learners' experiences and realities, analysis, and and problem-solving.

Teachers of literacy are responsible for providing appropriate conditions which enable students to act as active participants.

Besides, teachers help students to communicate effectively and learn from each other. According to Degener (2001), the teachers' role is essential for the successful implementation of the method as they design, plan, and put into practice educational activities. When applied to language teaching, this approach aims at adding "critical quality to the existing textbooks and everyday instruction" (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012, p. 224).

Language and literature teaching and discourse with its social nature allows learners interpret the literary texts they read for the sake of challenging beliefs that evoke certain social structures of power. Norton & Toohey (2004) Literature learning and teaching are at the heart of educational curriculum. "As far as the curriculum is concerned, there is a strong conviction that it should be constructed taking into account students' experiences and realities, with special emphasis on the use of authentic materials" (Bobkina & Stefanova 2016, p. 684)

Critical reading of literature usually requires interaction between the reader and the literary text. The reader needs to reflect and interpret, and imagine the world, as he has to be intercultural and aware and be ready to analyze and evaluate the text. Working with literary texts in the EFL and literature classes involve certain critical thinking skills which can be referred to as a set of processes whose aim is using language, interpreting the world, having self-reflection, intercultural awareness, critical awareness, and problem-solving.

There are many types of teaching critical thinking skills which share the same dimension of the critical reading approach which is the emphasis on the reader's response, and his relation with the author and the context of the creation of the literary work for interpreting it. In fact, the intersection between reader-centered critical reading and critical literacy provides a unique opportunity for learners to reflect on how the linguistic features of the text affect the creation of meaning and critical thinking skills involved in working with literary texts in the EFL classroom. Also, how this meaning is affected by their life experience and understanding of the social phenomenon represented in the literary work. (Bobkina & Stefanova, p.685)

Ideally, critical reading of literacy had appeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for the sake of making a careful and close reading of

literary texts. It appeared in forms critical literacy specialists would recognize in some of the material used by progressive educators in the 1930s. In the EFL context, there has been a shift from New Criticism approach to reader response approach. Rosenblatt (1978) recently put great emphasis on personal response to literacy reading. It has been argued that literary texts produce diverse meanings which depend on the readers' affective responses. More specifically, literacy becomes a means for shaping the reader's moral and intellectual self. As Cervetti et al (2001) claim: "while doing honor to the way critique and being critical as manifestations of human capacity appear repeatedly across cultures and time, there is also distance to be put between, for example, critical reading and what in the last forty years or so has come to be called critical literacy" (cited in Graham & Crooks, p.26). Indeed, critical literacy involves the presence of an action orientation which is reading the word in order to change it.

In exercising critical literacy, a reader needs a critical engagement with the word and the world also needs an adequate knowledge of both. Teachers of literacy usually tempt to use various ways to use these prerequisites into their teaching literacy class. On the other hand, learners need to use their background knowledge they already have and bring to the class, which serve to be as an efficient starting point. In addition to gaining background knowledge, the learners' linguistic knowledge should also be considered in critical literacy learning class. In fact, such literacy education would clearly hold a focus on critical literacy development emphasizing on language use.

Teachers foster learners' involvement within the critical activity they incorporate their life experiences into the classroom process, associate them with critical literacy tools and resources, increase their critical reflection, involve them in taking action, and be active in the teaching learning process. Ideally, learners usually tempt to consciously choose content to deal with social issues and concerns experienced by them which help them contribute to the content of the text. Teachers of literacy also incorporate learners' past events into early steps of their critical skills through gathering their global knowledge and experiences.

Besides, teachers of literacy need to implement an inductive approach to students' life experiences throughout their literature lessons in different ways; for example, using a feminist or descriptive

pedagogical approach in literature classes. Prior to using the feminist approach, Zubair (2003) established a link between the literary works context and her female learners' personal experience and social lives through their classroom discussions through asking questions.

Indeed, through critical literacy practice, teachers of literacy may give resources to their learners during the learning process to facilitate their critical literacy and critical thinking development. For instance, teacher of literacy may use complex critical literacy terms to their learners' readings and reflection which can be increased through their imagination and critical reading in class. As Chun (2016) claims that critical literacy education facilitates students' critical reflection on the word during the learning process and the most usual way in which teachers do so is through classroom discussions based on critical questions. Critical literacy's aim is to involve learners in taking action, as it emphasizes on creating critical reflection with transformative action, as Freire's (1970) advocates that literature shows writing as a consistent tool for learners' experience with transformative action which takes the form of writing letters to real and imagined people.

Many scholars have claimed that learners have deep engagement with various aspects of their critical literacy experience, such as instructional materials, writing activities and classroom discussions (Chun, 2016 & Mattos, 2012) Learners can have adequate understanding of particular social issues and develop critically as literate individuals (Hammond, 2006) and became more critically aware of their own attitudes and assumptions.

Further, learners of literacy can develop their critical thinking and express their attitudes Zubair (2003) and took action to raise their awareness and afford social justice Comber & Nixon (2011) Critical literacy practice contributes to foster learners' language development as reported by themselves and their teachers as well and their teachers. Therefore, the relevance of critical literacy is much appreciated to the learners' lives and its significance to their critical skills development. Finally, critical discourse usually involves certain obstacles and challenges, especially for teachers who strive for social justice tempt set particular short-term goals in pursuit of their long-term visions. For, combining these obstacles is assessment of the fact that critical literacy is a relevant target, a deeply rewarding issue.

## CONCLUSION

This study has given a background and view about discourse in general and Critical Discourse Analysis in particular. It has shown that Critical Discourse is originally developed from the theory formerly identified as Critical Linguistics regarding language or discourse as social practice. It takes into consideration the context of language use to be crucial and thorough, as it puts particular emphasis on the relation between language and power and its research about various discourses such as political and gender discourses. The tendency of critical discourse is associated with political issues, and its focus is diverse and rich in multiple terms. In critical analysis, the literary text is used to refer to the larger reasonable unit which represents the basic unit of communication, whereas discourse is viewed as social practice in which it is examined as part of society to understand why the literary text is produced and to see its interaction with social environment.

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