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Integrating corpus linguistics in critical literacy pedagogy: A case study of Lance Armstrong's transformation from a titleholder to a fraud

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Abstract

The study examines the integration of corpus linguistics in critical literacy pedagogy. It stems from the Multiliteracies approach that advocates the need for technologically advanced strategies of teaching to complement the knowledge of present day tech-savvy generation of students. Backed by the various theoretical breakthroughs that have been established by critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis, critical literacy pedagogy has gained substantial momentum in recent decades. To demonstrate how corpus linguistics, which typically employs substantial data, can be used in a critical literacy classroom, the representation of Lance Armstrong in media discourse before and after his admission of doping is examined. The analysis of the corpora demonstrates how the computer-based methods of corpus linguistics can be used to conduct a systematic analysis of the different linguistic features that are fundamental in divulging ideology in discourse.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the decades, the conception of literacy has been revolutionized from being essentially confined to reading and writing (Baguley et al, 2010) to a term that denotes digital literacy, visual literacy, information literacy,

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critical literacy, media literacy, and so on. Thus, literacy is perceived today in its plural form as literacies to reflect the “diverse repertoires of knowledge and language learning” needed in today’s educational contexts (Kaur and Sidhu, 2007, p.115). The current technological advances and the continuous interconnectedness of diverse cultures, that the world experienced and still experiencing, transformed the basic conception of teaching. This is evidently observed in today’s globalized classrooms whereby “teachers and learners are challenged to confront existing realities of cultural and linguistic diversity with the rapid development of technology” (Kaur and Sidhu, 2007, p.113).

One of the fundamental literacies that emerged as indispensable in the pedagogy of today’s classrooms is critical literacy. However, critical literacy, according to Kaur (2013), is relatively difficult to acquire by students because it embraces different context-based and multifaceted perspectives. Consequently, this study examines the incorporation of corpus linguistics, a computer-based method of analysing discourse, in the teaching of critical literacy to ease the integration of its major principles in the students’ frame of thought. The media’s reaction to Lance Armstrong’s confession of doping is used in this study to examine how corpus linguistics can be used to systematically analyse discourse to reveal the ideology of the discourse makers.

2. Critical literacy

Although the conception of critical literacy has been defined diversely in literature, it is unanimously established that critical literacy is fundamental to create awareness among students regarding the diverse linguistic strategies that discourse makers utilise to control readers by manipulating their frame of thoughts. Critical literacy, Shor (1999, p.1) indicated, is crucial to be part of the teaching pedagogy as it “connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity”. Hence, it is vital for students to have the capacity to deconstruct texts. This, in turn, will make them conscious of the selections that writers make because every selection “foregrounds what was selected and hides, silences or backgrounds what was not selected” (Janks, 2000, p.176). The importance of critical literacy is especially highlighted in today’s context because text retrieval is not only limited to conventional mass media, but it also comprises the internet and its diverse manifestations that include blogs, YouTube channels, and so on. Therefore, students must be able to critically process discourse because failure to do so can result in them being “marginalised, discriminated against, or unable to take an active and informed place in life. In short, the student will not be in control of his or her social future” (Anstey and Bull, 2006, p. 37).

An interconnected framework to critical literacy is critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is commonly combined with critical literacy to facilitate language awareness among learners via providing them with the fundamental tools for the critical analysis of texts (Pennycook, 2008). This interrelation is resulted from the connected objectives of both frameworks whereby, similar to critical literacy, which addresses “social, economic and cultural injustice and inequality” in language (Luke and Dooley, 2011, p.856), CDA is perceived as the analysis of “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 2001, p.2). There are three concepts that learners must acquire to be able to critically analyse a text, these concepts are discourse, ideology, and power. Discourse is interrelated to language because language is an immaterial set of patterns and regulations that function together on different levels of the system (e.g. syntactic, semantic, phonological, pragmatic levels). Discourse, however, is the materialization of these patterns in a real life language use. Consequently, discourse functions “above the level of grammar and semantics to capture what happens when these language forms are played out in different social, political and cultural arenas” (Simpson and Mayr, 2009, p.5). Ideology is an abstract set of a person’s views and perceptions that are modelled by certain institutions or group members in society in which the person lives, and these dogmas are manifested to dominate and control the person’s frame of thought. To Van Dijk (2009), Ideology has the capacity to control and organize the societal depiction of social groups and their members which is typically manifested in discourse. Power denotes the notion that in any social context, powerful social groups exercise their dominance and control on the less powerful members. Power is intertwined with language because language manifests power, conveys power, and also is used to defy power. Powerful discourse is able to reshape the way a public defines a phenomenon, or the way they comprehend society through their beliefs, understandings, and opinions (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Generally, discourse functions as a fundamental vessel that discourse makers use to transmit power and ideology. According to

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