IMPLICATIONS OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING TAMIL IN THE CONTEXT OF MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzed the Implications of Critical Discourse Analysis in teaching and learning Tamil in the context of Malaysian Higher Education. This study uses Fairclough's framework (1995), critical questioning framework synthesized from Fairclought's framework (1995), 5 point scale synthesized from Fairclough (1995), translated version of Watson-Glasor's Critical Thinking Skills test frame and a student's opinion elicitation questionnaire. This study comprises of 5 stages based on 5 research questions. They are: 1) critical analysis of the news paper articles by the researcher, 2) review of the differences in the critical ability of the students through the administration of the pre and post tests containing 10 synthesized questions reflecting the Critical Discourse Analysis, 3) study of Critical language Awareness of students through a 5 points evolved for this purpose, 4) study of the Critical Thinking Skills of the students through the administration of Watson-Glaser's Critical Thinking Skills test frame, 5) study of the students views regarding the role of Critical Discourse Analysis for enhancing the critical ability in particular and for language learning in general. The major findings of this study reveal that the teachings of Critical Discourse Analysis helped to enhance students' ability to think critically. The findings of this research will be more valuable to those who are actively participating in research on Critical Discourse Analysis, that may include lecturers as well as the students who are learning Critical Discourse Analysis.

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Tamil Vowels

அ	a	எ	e
ஆ	ā	ஏ	ē
இ	i	ஐ	ai
ஈ	ī	ஒ	o
உ	u	ஓ	ō
ஊ	ū	ஔ	au

Tamil Consonants

க	k	ங	ṅ	ய	y
ச	c	ஞ	ñ	ர	r
ட	ṭ	ண	ṇ	ல	l
த	t	ந	n	வ	v
ப	p	ம	m	ழ	ḻ
ற	ṟ	ன	ṉ	ள	ḷ
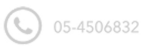
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter is divided into two main sections; namely the introduction and methodology of the study. The first section contains the aim and research questions and significance of findings. The next section describes samples, instruments, design, data collection processes and procedures of data analysis in relation to the present study.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A critical approach to discourse analysis originates from Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1973:6, 1985:7) and critical linguistics (Fowler et al, 1979:9), and is closely related to critical language study, and critical language awareness (Burns, 2001:34). It is multidisciplinary in nature (van Dijk, 2001:60) and includes fields of knowledge such as linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, media and critical studies.

Critical discourse analysis, aims to address the relationship between language, power, and ideology behind text (McCarthy; 2001:54). Critical discourse analysis has been used as a basic approach in education to find answers about the relationships between language, society, power, identity, ideology, politics, and culture.

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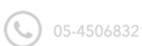
Researchers in the domain of Education around the world have stated that critical discourse analysis is a way to describe, interpret, and explain important educational problems that these texts index and construct (McCarthy, 2001:100). This is because critical discourse analysis enabled the study of policy texts, official curriculum documents, textbooks, teachers' guidebooks, and student writings. It has also been used to analyze formal and informal spoken texts, including classroom talk, administrators' public and staffroom talk and parent-teacher interviews. Several recent studies of critical discourse analysis attempted to track different discourses of texts among school systems (McCarthy, 2001:100). In studying social science education in the Australian secondary schools, Teo (2000:66) examined syllabus documents, textbook forms, teacher comments on students and student work, classroom talk, and students' written assignments.

Critical discourse analysis is also being used as the basis for the teaching of ability to critique texts in Australia and the United Kingdom (Fairclough, 1992a:70). The assumptions of such curricula are: (a) students can be taught to critically analyze the texts of the culture around them as part of literacy and social science education; and (b) critical literacy is the `new basis' for postmodern conditions.

As an institution of higher education, a university is known as a place for higher level of learning. The needs and expectations for advanced or higher level of ability to critique the texts are thus expected from students at a university. According to Bloom (1976:26) having "higher level ability to critique the texts" means having the "mental ability to be critical in analyzing, applying, synthesizing and evaluating facts or materials". Hence the ability to critique texts can be dubbed as crucial to every student.

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The relationship between language and power is a basic principle of critical language awareness as it has developed from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995:222). All students are aware of the language they use, but the degree of the awareness differs. Most of them need to be encouraged, taught and assisted to the critical language awareness processes. These critical thinking skills are teachable and learnable. All students have the right to learn and apply thinking skills, just like other disciplines of knowledge. Critical language awareness processes are considered as important aspects in teaching and learning. Critical language awareness processes are fundamental in the educational process as it can affect one's ability of learning, speed in and effectiveness of learning.

Therefore, critical language awareness processes are associated with critical discourse analysis. Students who are trained with critical language awareness processes demonstrate a positive impact on the development of their education. The findings of Resnick's (1987:56) studies have reported an improvement in reading comprehension and average grades, therefore an increase in the solving of problems of Mathematics and Science among students who have undergone a training programme related to the enhancement of critical language awareness. This has shown that thinking skill is important for students to solve problems in their learning, especially for fostering a competitive students' thought for developing students' intellectual ability and for helping students to avoid errors (Khamila, 2004:26).

On the other side, the focus of current education system in Malaysia at both school level and higher education level is on the utilization of metacognitive

strategies especially the critical thinking skills. In fact many educational psychologists argued that critical thinking skills are important aspects in education (Sternberg, 1986:68). In Malaysia, with rapid changes enforced in technical and industrial sectors, it is very important that thinking skills should be made the educational goals where students can be trained to make sense of new information and not just acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Malaysian Education System where it is important that students be trained to think critically and creatively.

In general the objective of implementing critical thinking skills is to direct all schools and higher education institutions to make students master the critical ability of criticizing texts and also become aware of the language being used in a more critical way. Consequently, the students should be: a) capable of think critically and creatively in order to achieve the goals of the Malaysian vision 2020; b) capable of decision making and solving problems; c) able to use their thinking skills and able to understand language or its contents; d) able to treat thinking skills as part of lifelong learning; and finally e) well-balanced in terms of their intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual development.

Therefore, the supreme objective of education in the twenty-first century is the development of critical thinking skills in all its forms for all individuals. Thus, the higher educational institutions must prepare and enable individuals to solve unexpected problems by providing students with the proper tools and proper thinking processes that they can use to deal with multiple and diverse situations that they may encounter.

As emphasized by Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing, president of Lim Kok Wing University (a Malaysian leading private higher education institution) in his comment on the Ninth Malaysia Plan (Rancangan Malaysia Ke-9), "education and manpower development should have, as part of its curriculum, the training of young minds to be critical, creative and adventurous". He added that it is important to make sure that "graduates have the right skills and values that meet market demand..." (New Straits Times, 9 April 2006). Therefore, to survive today's employment market filled with highly challenging 'contemporary realities', university graduates need to possess high level critical ability (Ennis, 1989:70 and McPeck, 1990:15).

This is because students' critical ability will create an important impact on the success and failure in all their academic activities at the university. This emphasizes the need for students to obtain a certain level of critical ability to be able to survive as undergraduates at any institution of higher education or university.

For a university that aims to produce world-class graduates who are globally competitive, research and development in the areas of critical skills, comprising ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking among the students is inevitable. A study involving undergraduates at Malaysia (Mohd. Rozaidi, 2003:24) suggests that the critical ability of university students do need to be further analyzed if any pedagogical aspects of the university are to be improved. Inputs from studies in critical skills can help provide relevant ideas in developing better teaching approaches and methods, as well as provide the graduates with a better chance of survival in the employment market.

As critical discourse analysis involves in analyzing discourse to find hidden meanings and to uncover the relationship between discourse, ideology and power, it seems to be one of the techniques a language teacher may have at his/her disposal to better equip learners with a lifelong ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Language is a very powerful tool since it is used for conveying information, ideologies and emotions. Language and discourse construct, regulate and control knowledge, social relations and institutions (Lemke, 1995:18). The text whether written or oral is a multidimensional structure and is layered like a sheet of plywood (Lemke, 1995:19). Texts consist of syntax, lexicon, grammar, morphology, phonology and semantics. However, understanding grammar and lexicon does not lead to the understanding of text.

One should be able to find out the author's worldview, the historical, social and cultural background of the text itself, complex interaction between the author's intent and the reader's ability to decode the author's intent (Levinson, 1983:15). Since language is an important tool for acquiring knowledge at the tertiary level, it is therefore important for undergraduates to master the ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills, which has a possible link to influence their language proficiency.

Ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills are identified as constructs, proven to be a good predictor of academic performance (Giancarlo and Facione, 2001:24). Hence, it is important for relevant university authorities to pay more attention on the ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills level of their undergraduates. Relevant information on the matter will, beyond doubt, help the university authority to both improve the academic performance of the students and prepare them better for future work.

In relation, the rising number of unemployed graduates in Malaysia, as reported by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), is a cause for concern. According to an EPU survey, 60,000 Malaysian graduates were unemployed in 2013 (The Star, 3 Nov 2013). Therefore, the institutions of higher learning, especially the universities in Malaysia, have to ensure that the graduates produced comply with the country's manpower needs, development of ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills are inevitable.

In a similar vein, as critical discourse analysis is a new approach to text analysis and although it has become popular through the works of discourse analysis researchers, it is rarely used by language teachers. If, however, teachers understand the nature of this approach, they will find it useful in teaching reading and writing to their language learners. Lessons that incorporate critical discourse analysis perspectives can help learners examine critically the source of a text, including its biases and purposes; question the veracity and applicability of the information being provided in terms of their own lives; assess the broader societal messages about

values, attitudes, and power relationships that are being conveyed through the text; and consider their own biases, reactions, and realities in relation to the text (Rich, 2003:33).

Research on the ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills in relation to Tamil language learners is still in its infancy stage. In regard to this, studies on the relationship between critical discourse analysis and these three language skills, ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills especially with Tamil language learners as the sample have not been studied before. As ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills are claimed to be important in the acquisition of language skills particularly writing and reading (Oliver, 1996:29), which are indispensable language skills that can help undergraduates secure their academic success, the need of critical discourse analysis as an approach to boost learners ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills is at upmost.

Therefore, this study will investigate the effect of teaching on the ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills when they critically analyze given news paper articles before and after teaching and learning the critical discourse analysis. This study also will investigate the benefits of teaching critical discourse analysis from the students' perspective. Following this, the study will address the research questions as discussed in next section.

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1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study being inspired by Fairclough's framework (1995:45) aims to investigate whether teaching critical discourse analysis would have any effect on student's ability to critique the texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills. This study also aims to gather students' perspective regarding the benefits of teaching critical discourse analysis. Therefore the objectives of this study are:

i) To investigate the differences found in both the newspapers based on critical discourse analysis (from the researcher's view).

ii) To compare students critical analysis of the newspapers before and after the learning and teaching of critical discourse analysis (i.e Critical Questioning Framework for Text Analysis).

iii) To investigate students' critical language awareness's achievement before and after the teaching of critical discourse analysis.

iv) To assess students' critical thinking skills achievement before and after the teaching and learning of critical discourse analysis.

v) To investigate the benefits of teaching and learning of critical discourse analysis from the students' perspective.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As this study aims to investigate if teaching of critical discourse analysis would have any significant effect on students' ability to critique the texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills. This study also is aimed to gather students' perspectives regarding the benefits of teaching and learning of critical discourse analysis. To empirically examine this assumption, the following research questions were posed and investigated in the present study:

i) What are the differences in both the newspapers based on critical discourse analysis through this research (from the point of view of the researcher)?

ii) What are the differences observed in students' pre and post test critical analysis of the newspapers based on the critical questioning framework?

iii) What is the achievement of students' pre and post test of critical language awareness?

iv) What is the achievement of students' pre and post test of critical thinking skills?

v) Does teaching and learning of critical discourse analysis benefit students?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Critical discourse analysis functions as developing an insight into the discursive structures of various texts and genres along with their socio-political effects. Moreover, it aims at raising awareness of the readers and listeners to the hidden parts of discourses. Linguists working in discourse analysis expect an active critical role by their students when exposed to a text and not just to know the tip of the ideological iceberg (van Dijk, 1998:56).

Critical discourse analysis of the texts attempts to create a sensitivity and consciousness about the implicitly left, invisible section, misinformation, manipulation, and misinterpretation by some writers and speakers. Another implication of critical discourse analysis studies is the readers will gain awareness and become conscious of different aspects a text produces such as the writer's socio-political background, the historical setting, and the cultural tendencies. These elements are the essential ingredients of ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills as the ultimate goal of all educational enterprise (Carney, 2002:18). It is a powerful method against limited-sighted, closed-minded mentalities of most current educational systems.

Another important insight that can be gained from critical discourse analysis studies is that language is a very strong device in bringing up certain ideologies. Therefore, critical discourse analysis propagates the idea that enhancement of ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills is important

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to a society in which justice and equality are materialized and power is not equally distributed among people.

The study offers few contributions by teaching and learning critical discourse analysis in Tamil language classroom. First, it is a pioneering study applying the principles and techniques of critical discourse analysis in the context of Tamil language teaching and learning. Based on the model of Fairclough's (1995b:40) critical discourse analysis, 10 critical questions were synthesized for testing critical ability of the students. And so for, such testing frame was adapted for making the students evaluate critically text from the news paper. The five parameters, namely accuracy, relevancy, completeness, interpretation and repetition even though appear in any language teaching, but in this study they are specifically used for creating awareness about them among the students. The translated version of Watson-Glaser critical thinking skills test (2002:12) was administrated and this is considered as a contribution since such a test was not part of Tamil language curriculum.
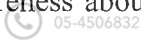
This would give an insight to teachers in the teaching of Tamil language, more specifically, incorporating critical discourse analysis in their daily teaching. This will make a move from formal and descriptive analysis of language materials towards a critical approach which expected with no doubt to boost students' ability to critique the texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills. Further, it may help in the process of writing test items that include the elements of critical discourse analysis to test ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills among the students. Finally, the results of the study are

considered to be of value in potentially providing a practical starting point for other Tamil teachers to do likewise.

1.7 SAMPLING FOR THE STUDY

The researcher has used the purposive sampling methods to select a sample of undergraduate students majoring in Tamil Linguistics from the Faculty of Language and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This is because the Department has a strength of 20-25 students in each class (admitted every academic year). As such, the researcher chose all the students of the third year class as they have almost completed courses on basic, structural and some of the applied linguistic areas. The sample size of the study is 20 students, 18 female students and 2 male students. Also, all the students have almost homogenous Tamil language proficiency level based on student proficiency paper grade reports of the previous semester. It is important to make sure the students' Tamil proficiency level is homogeneous as this variable may influence students' ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills.

1.8 INSTRUMENTS

The study involves three instruments as discussed below:

1.8.1 THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF FAIRCLOUGH

The articles were analysed by the researcher using Fairclough's (1995b:40) three-dimensional framework within the paradigm of critical discourse analysis.

The framework was chosen for the analysis because of its emphasis upon language as a form of social practice (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999:45). Fairclough's three-dimensional framework was used to study the close link between language and ideology, as he theorized that the link between the two has caused language "to become perhaps the primary medium of social control and power" (Fairclough, 1999:2). In order to study the link between language and ideology, Fairclough, 2001:6 postulates that it is necessary to go beyond a textual study. Thus, the three dimensions of his framework refer to an analysis of the formal features of the text itself, discursive practices (ie. the participants' production and consumption of the text), and social practices or institutions that have shaped the discursive event (Fairclough, 2001:16).

1.8.2 NEWS ARTICLES

One pair of news articles was selected as authentic texts which were ideologically loaded. News is one of the genres surrounded by student's daily life. This genre has the potential of being manipulated. News sources are in the hands of dominant groups or are related with them and the news articles broadcast their ideologies. The authentic texts reflect real-life situations. These kinds of texts are more practical while they reflect the events which happen in daily life.

Another important aspect of authenticity is that it makes students more motivated because learning a text is related to what happens around them.

Therefore, researcher has chosen a pair of news articles which is related to *Matriculation* (Government funded pre-U course) intake of Tamil students The Malaysian *Matriculation* Programme is a one year pre-university preparatory programme

offered by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia (Wikipedia, 2013 April 6). Starting 2005, the selection process for the programme is done through a race-based quota system, where 90% of the places are reserved for Malay students while the remaining 10% are open for non-Malays. To enroll in any public universities students have to complete any one of pre-U programmes among *Matriculation* or Form 6. One major benefit of the Malaysian *Matriculation* Programme compared to Form 6 is shorter duration since Matriculation programme is for just one year fully funded by government while Form 6 is one and a half year and self financed. So those who finish the *Matriculation* programme will enroll into a local public university one year earlier than those taking Form 6, which is a great advantage in terms of graduating with a Bachelor degree one year faster than those who belong to the same age group. Other than that, the *Matriculation* programme is arguably much easier to score than Form 6 (Wikipedia, 2013 April 8). In otherwords, the percentage of those getting straight A's (CGPA 4.00) in *Matriculation* is way higher than Form 6 students. As a result, those taking *Matriculation* often get into competitive university courses like medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, law, accounting, etc. at prestigious universities like the University of Malaya.

Two pairs of news reports, each pair dealing with the same subject were selected from two different newspapers; *Malaysia Nanban* and *Tamil Nesan* which conflict in their views. Both these newspapers have a long period of service in the publishing sector. The subjects of news reports are selected from the controversial ones and also related to education. Controversial issues have a higher possibility of being ideologically written.

Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000:27) suggest teachers who want to boost students' ability to critique texts, critical language awareness and critical thinking skills a regular part of all classroom work they should change emphasis from finding right answer to eliciting ranges of interpretation. Following their suggestions and based on the Fairclough's model (Fairclough, 1995b:14) of critical discourse analysis which the students have learned, students could analyze the texts of news paper articles about *Matriculation* seats allocated to Indians, a minority ethnic group of Malaysia.

The researcher chose to focus on the news articles covering the issue of *Matriculation* over a period of a week, 1st June 2013 to 7th June 2013. This is because the announcement that the government has allocated more seats for Indians compared to the previous year was made on 1st June 2013. As this was a much-anticipated announcement, there was some coverage in the media prior to it. Following the announcement, there was also a fair amount of media coverage as various parties responded to the announcement with comments and opinions of their own. Therefore, to collect an ideologically orientated text and to provide a more comprehensive critical discourse analysis centered on this issue. The research focuses on the whole first week of the month in which the announcement was made. Both the labeled articles from *Malaysia Nanban* and *Tamil Nesan* are included under Appendix A and B. The news articles are presented as seen on the printouts. No alterations have been made. Therefore spelling or grammatical errors if there is any, have been reproduced as it is.