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Integrating Critical Discourse Analysis in Teaching Literary Texts to Algerian EFL learners: A Practical Guide

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Abstract:

Teaching literature to EFL learners has always been a frustrating area for teachers and learners, especially because it requires a thoroughgoing analysis of the text's linguistic, social, political, and cultural attributes. Interestingly enough, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an approach to text analysis, has emerged to elucidate the relations existing between language, power, and ideology. Incorporating CDA in literature classes allows learners to think critically about the functions of the authors' linguistic choices and the way discourse influences and is influenced by society. This paper provides a theoretical account of CDA and teaching literature to Algerian learners and introduces some implications, guidelines, and activities on how to implement CDA when teaching literature in EFL classes.

Keywords: Teaching literature, Critical Discourse Analysis, activities, guidelines **Introduction:**

Teaching literature is becoming a strenuous task due to the complex nature of the literary texts that Algerian learners are supposed to read, analyze, interpret, and evaluate. Learners find themselves in the midst of an endless journey of emotional, psychological, and imaginary experiences, all conveyed through some lexical and syntactic patterns that require critical handling. Worse yet, EFL learners fail to link the textual product to its social, cultural, and ideological context, and they end up hating the subject or resorting to some superficial readings about the work's summary, themes, and characters. To overcome such challenges, teachers can always integrate some language-based approaches when teaching literature. Examples include stylistics, discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis.

EFL learners in Algerian universities are exposed to literature and CDA separately. Therefore, they are unable to detect the role of language in construing social institutions or uncovering ideology and power relations embedded in literary texts. The selection of this topic is incentivized by Algerian learners' tendency to make superficial analyses of literary texts disregarding the linguistic workings of those texts. EFL teachers of literature have contributed to aggravate the situation through the excessive dependence on content-based, theme-oriented approaches to teaching literature. Even the activities provided in classes of literature tend to be unoriginal, frustrating, and demotivating.

This article aims at providing some guidelines for EFL teachers on how to integrate CDA in EFL classes through displaying some exemplary literary texts that are part of the learners' syllabus of literature. Passages are extracted from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that is selected based on the existing racial relations and from Virginia Woolf's *A*

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Room of One's Own as a means to illustrate gender power relations in the British society. Suggesting the integration of CDA in classes of literature does not imply that teachers cannot employ other methods when approaching literary texts; EFL teachers can always combine two or more approaches whenever the context dictates this eclecticism.

1- The Status Quo of Teaching Literature in Algerian EFL Classes

Researchers' interest in the way literature is taught in Algerian classes is not arbitrary. It is the outcome of an overall dissatisfaction with the learners' ill impression about the subject. This negative attitude is, in turn, the upshot of the linguistic, cultural, and personal challenges faced by learners as well as the conventional approaches applied by teachers.

1-1 Challenges of Teaching Literature to Algerian EFL Learners

Research about teaching literature in EFL contexts has gained wide currency in different parts of the world, and the Algerian classrooms are no exception. According to Kheladi, the most common problem that Algerian teachers encounter when approaching literary texts is learners' poor language proficiency, which, according to teachers, is getting worse every year despite the reforms introduced by the Ministry of National Education¹. Learners find themselves unable to decode what authors intend to transmit through their discourse. This does not relate only to grammatical and lexical knowledge but also to pragmatic and critical thinking skills. Therefore, as Amaria notes, a limited language ability would hinder the process of interpreting the writer's linguistic choices as well as the text's gist and its cultural and ideological constituents.²

This unfamiliarity with literary discourse has engendered another challenge for EFL teachers and learners in Algeria, which is the lack of interest in literature. Algerian learners consider literature frustrating due to its discursive peculiarities that are, according to them, very intricate³. Besides, the emerging digital generations spend less time reading due to the digital habits they acquired, which induced laziness to read and take pleasure in books. due to the crippling dependence on the new technologies, learners are losing focus, patience, and interest, which is all that reading and literature demand. Another aspect that prompted learners' frustration in literary classes is the teacher-centered approaches that do not leave any space for creativity⁴.

The third problem is linked to the cultural dimensions of the literary text. Learners fail to understand the way social, cultural, and historical background can contribute to the understanding of the literary work. Besides, some ideological, socio-cultural, and political factors can also contribute to the learners' misapprehension of the literary texts they have in class. In cases when literary texts are culturally dense, teachers should not make learners feel that they are outsiders⁵. Learners should understand that the literary texts with which they are provided are not only sources of information, but they include the author's perspectives, ideas, and ideologies regarding a given topic⁶.

In addition to the three above-stated factors, one can name further challenges that Algerian teachers and researchers have encountered in their literature classes. These include the lack of sources at the university's library (especially those of interest to learners), the insufficient time dedicated to literature classes, and teachers' inability to do appropriate selection of the content to be introduced to learners⁷.

1-2 Approaches Employed by Algerian Teachers in Literature Classes

EFL teachers employ various approaches to teaching literature, most of which are content-based and traditional teacher-centered practices. In the Algerian context, the most predominant approach to teaching literature in EFL classes is named the transmissive approach. The latter dictates that the teacher is the sole source of knowledge whose duty is

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to impart pieces of information to students. Therefore, learners are only required to memorize facts linked to some literary movements and their corresponding historical backgrounds in addition to some literary genres and figures. The studies conducted by some Algerian researchers revealed that this traditional approach failed to engage students with the course due to the heavy dependence on lecturing about literature, and hence, the teachers' interpretations are to be taken for granted. This factor would also contribute to lowering learners' motivation about the course⁸.

According to some research papers that investigated the main approaches employed by Algerian teachers to teach literature in EFL classes, the cultural approach stands out as the most popular of them all. This approach is known to be informative and teacher- centered par excellence as it dictates that teachers present their lessons through addressing some questions pertinent to the work's summary, characters, and main themes. The obvious outcomes of such practices are luck of discussion, luck of interest, and a monotonous atmosphere⁹.

Taken into regard the elements being mentioned, a shift towards a more dialogic and integrated mode of teaching literature is foundational. Doing so, learners would be more critical, more interactive, and more linguistically and culturally competent ¹⁰. Integrating Critical Discourse Analysis in classes of literature can be one solution to which teachers may resort to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the course.

2- Critical Discourse Analysis in EFL Contexts

The implementation of language-based approaches in classes of literature is becoming rudimentary, especially due to the multitude of the linguistic and ideological challenges faced by EFL learners. Critical Discourse Analysis is a typical example of these approaches as it enables one to analyze a text at different levels: linguistic, discursive, and ideological.

2-1 An Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis

The definitions attributed to critical discourse analysis, as an independent research paradigm, differ according to the stance, interest, and objectives of the individual researcher or of the scope within which CDA is employed. According to Fairclough et al., CDA is a "problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda"¹¹. However, most of the provided definitions seem to agree on two essential elements: a political interest in ideology and a particular inclination to identify the ways these ideologies and power relations are executed through discourse. Van Dijk describes the relationship between language, power, and ideology in his definition of CDA as follows:

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by a text and talk in the social and political context. [...] [C]ritical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality 12.

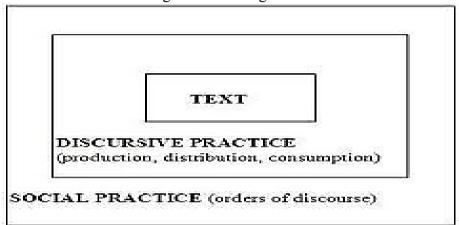
Van Dijk stresses the idea that social patterns, such as power abuse, dominance, and inequality are maintained through discourses, and that language is implicated in issues of ideology and power. Hence, the main task of CDA is to bring to light these issues through the analysis of language.

CDA, as a paradigm instituted to investigate the relationships that bind language, power, and ideology, was propelled into the linguistic scene in the 1970s. Its origins are rooted in the school of Critical Linguistics, which marked linguists' interest in topics focusing on language use as well as power and social hierarchy in social institutions¹³. Critical Linguistics derives its central principles from the Hallidayan theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the Foucaultian theory of ideology, especially its notion of discourse and its relationship with concepts like power and knowledge¹⁴. The 1990s witnessed the tremendous growth of CDA as an approach as it moved from theory to

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practice and started to be applied in various areas of study like media discourse, discourse of social and racial discrimination, motion picture production, and education¹⁵.

Different attempts have been made to draw a systemic methodology for doing CDA; all of which consider two prime stages: Macro analysis (studying linguistic and semiotic aspects of the text) and microanalysis (pinpointing social, cultural, and ideological properties of the text)¹⁶. One acknowledged CDA model is concocted by the linguist Norman Fairclough. Fairclough's model is a three-layer approach that comprises the descriptive/textual stage, the interpretive/discursive stage, and the explanatory/ sociocultural stage. The first stage is meant to analyze vocabulary, grammar, and elements constituting coherence and cohesion. To do so, employing Halliday's SFL is necessary. The interpretive stage, commonly known as the discursive practice, aims at designating the relationship between the text and the discursive process (the process of production and interpretation), which can be fulfilled by way of probing elements like speech acts and intertextuality (every text embodies elements from other texts). The explanatory stage, also named the socio-cultural practice, entails studying the historical, social, economic, and cultural factors that are germane to the subject of analysis¹⁷. Figure 1 illustrates the interconnectedness of the three stages of Fairclough's model.



Figure_:(01) Fairclough's Model of CDA¹⁸

2-2 The Significance of Implementing Critical Discourse Analysis in EFL Classes

Education is one of the fields that had recourse to incorporating CDA as an analytical framework. Initial endeavors of linguistic analysis in education sought to understand the ways people make meaning in educational situations. Researchers in this field have employed CDA since the late 1990s to understand the relationship between language and society. These endeavors demonstrated the applicability of CDA in the educational arena and expanded the scope of this approach¹⁹. The compatibility of CDA and education allowed a straightforward application of CDA in educational settings. In fact, CDA can be an effective tool for investigating "the ways in which text, talk, and other semiotic interactions involved in learning are constructed in varying contexts". CDA has also provided the discipline of education with methods of conceptualizing interactions and interpreting semiotic social practices that exist in educational settings. More significant still is that CDA supplies educational researchers with the equipment and tools necessary for understanding, examining, and addressing issues of power and inequality that plague systems of education all over the world ²¹.

There has been a range of areas and topics that employed CDA as an analytical framework in EFL contexts, and most of these studies focused on the variables of age, ideology, and gender. Analysts were primarily interested in how age influences an individual's learning process through investigating how discourse patterns change accordingly. They were also intent on how indoctrination takes place in EFL settings.

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Moreover, educational researchers employed CDA to explore how features like suffering, persecution, and emancipation are reflected in language Gender in the educational context was also an enticing topic for practitioners in the field of critical discourse analysis. Numerous works explored the influence of gender on learning achievement, gender representation in educational materials, and the impact of gender on in-classroom interactions ²².

Using CDA in EFL classes is proved efficient in a multitude of ways. According to Rogti, the implementation of this approach when teaching literature makes the subject more dialectical and debatable. Besides, it contributes to fostering learners' linguistic and communicative skills. Introducing CDA is one way to enhance learners' awareness of the function of language in social interaction as it enables them to uncover the power relations present in a text and the ideologies maneuvering them. Therefore, learners need to question the significance of every linguistic item and the way it contributes to the overall function of the text²³.

3- Activities Illustrating the Implementation of CDA in Literature Classes

Activity One

Since doing CDA requires much time and effort, teachers are encouraged to provide their learners with some instructive questions and elucidative guidelines to help them proceed through the three stages of CDA. Evidently, teachers are supposed to select the passages that reflect the ideological orientations of the writer. Equally important here is the inclusion of the background/context of the passages being selected. These passages should be extracted from a literary text that learners have read or read about.

Example: This is an extract from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, wherein the protagonist encounters some exhausted African workers. Read it carefully and answer the following questions.

They were dying slowly--it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,--nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom [...] The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young--almost a boy--but you know with them it's hard to tell.²⁴

Ouestions

- 1. What type of processes (verbs) is dominant? Justify.
- 2. How do you explain the choices of modality in this passage?
- 3. Are there euphemisms or metaphors? What connotations do they convey?
- 4. Which topics are chosen to fill theme position in the clause (initial position)? Justify.
- 5. Are there presuppositions or assumptions made by the writer?
- 6. Which expressions/words are ambiguous? What connotations do they convey?

Answering the above-stated questions enables learners to detect that the writer actually disdains Africans, making them appear as helpless and mindless as animals, which is the metaphor conveyed throughout the whole novella. Analyzing the relational processes (linking verbs) associated with Africans like "to be" and "to seem" along with the modality employed (nouns, adjectives, and adverbs) like "nothing", "black shadows", "confusedly", "vacant", "blind", learners can deduce that the writer considers Africa a hell on earth, which is the second metaphor. The writer's presuppositions and assumptions can be made transparent if learners analyze personal pronouns and vagueness. The writer portrays Africans as the "other", using pronouns like "they" to refer to them while using "I" and "me" to point to the protagonist Marlow. Vague words and expressions like "kind of", "seem", "almost", and "you know" are used to demonstrate the writer's indecisiveness regarding the way human beings (Africans in particular) think, feel, and behave.

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• Activity Two

Another activity that enables learners to see how power relations are enacted in discourse is providing learners with two texts that convey two oppositional views/ideologies regarding a given topic. For instance, comparing Ernest Hemingway's sexist view about women to the way females are portrayed in Virginia Woolf's feminist writings.

Analyzing the lexical choices (Verbs and adjectives in particular) attributed to women in passages belonging to the two above-stated authors allows learners to detect the writers' views about gender roles in society. Eventually, learners can account for the different social, cultural, historical, and individual factors standing behind the writers' attitudes.

Teachers can even ask learners to study the way males and females are portrayed within a single literary work, which necessitates that learners examine whether the connotations attributed to each community are positive or negative. The conclusion that learners would draw is that demonstrating any ideology necessitates that the writer exhibits a positive representation of the self and a negative representation of the other.

Example: This is an extract from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Read it carefully and Spotify the way males and females are portrayed.

It is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex, naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values which prevail, speaking crudely, football and sport are "important"; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes, "trivial". And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings CIA women in a drawing room.²⁵

Doing this categorization of "male VS female" enables learners to ascertain that writers try always to demonstrate their adherence to a given social group that is, according to them, of inferior standing compared to the other group, which is treated as superior, powerful, and dominant. "Otherness" is depicted at the very start of the extract through the expression "the other sex". Therefore, the ultimate objective of any literary text is to elicit sympathy and solidarity towards the subordinate group. In the above-stated passage, Woolf is demonstrating how powerless and unimportant women are compared to their male counterparts, which can be detected through analyzing the words attributed to each group. Words associated with men's activities hold positive connotations like "important" while females' interests are described as "trivial" and "insignificant". Women appear in inferior contexts like "only a woman" who can never be "as good as a man". Even the processes being used (verbs) indicate that all social values are "made by the other sex" as if they were imposed by men, which is why they "prevail". Passivation is utilized in the last instance as a way to focus on the action of making those values (they are not arbitrary; they are established by men). When analyzing intertextuality, learners can observe that the writer makes use of the text of literature to argue that even literary texts are evaluated according to some manly perspectives and preferences. That being so, most female writers then decided to produce literature under the guise of male pen names or discuss male topics like sport and war.

• Activity Three

Learners can do some presentations about self-selected passages from the novels that they have already tackled in their literature classes. The teacher should divide the work among learners so that every group follows a different approach (Fairclough's model, Van Dijk's model, or Wodak's model).

If some Learners opted for the same passages, they may later compare the results of their analyses. These presentations help learners to discuss linguistic and structural choices and offer varied interpretations of the same passage.

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Activity Four

Teachers can ask their learners to write a passage to react to a previously studied piece of literature, and which, according to them, embodies certain ideological orientations like classism, sexism, or racism. Later, learners will try to justify the lexicogrammatical choices they used and explain how they function as an antithesis to the text they have selected. This way, learners can enhance their critical reading and writing.

To help learners proceed through this activity, teachers are encouraged to provide their students with some exemplary texts that have been produced as a reaction to a given literary work. One classical example is Chinua Achebe's "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*", wherein Achebe attacks *Heart of Darkness* and accuses Joseph Conrad of depicting Africa as "the other world" This example would help learners figure out the writers' perspective about Africans through the analysis of the linguistic and pragmatic structures they opted for.

Activity Five

After reading a particular literary work, learners can bring the novel to the classroom and illustrate how some power relations are represented through the writer's lexicogrammatical choices. Here, too, the teacher is recommended to guide learners with some questions about the work under discussion.

Example: If the teacher is presenting *Heart of Darkness*, and after providing learners with an overview of the novella, s/he can ask questions like:

- 1. What lexical choices are used to evince the theme of darkness?
- 2. How do the author's grammatical choices reflect his view about colonialism?
- 3. What does passivation indicate in the novel?
- 4. Why does the author mention the characters by profession not by name?
- 5. What can you say about the writer's excessive use of modals and hedges?

To answer the above-stated questions, learners should extract from the novella lexical and grammatical structures that appertain to these questions as a way to gauge the writer's viewpoint about Africa and its people. To answer the first question, for instance, learners are required to analyze nouns and adjectives (or noun phrases and adjective phrases) associated with Africans (terror, black shadows, savage, wild, frightful) as well as the adverbs modifying the verbs along which Africans occur. Studying lexical juxtapositions like "white-black" helps learners to see how dark Africa is seen compared to Europe. Learners can even study other lexical relations like collocations and synonymy to explore the contrast that the writer intends to show between the two continents. Vagueness when describing or naming people and places and the complex sentence structures being used can also insinuate the dark mood of the novel. After extracting passive sentences from the novel, learners can guess that passivation is used, in most cases, to tell that Africans are deprived of their free will, which in turn, helps to determine the writer's view about colonialism. Passive sentences like "they were called criminals" displays how colonialism turned Africans helpless and powerless. Learners can also observe that the text is abundant with hedges and modals that indicate uncertainty like "may and "could". These are mostly employed to signify how challenging the understanding of human psychology is.

• Activity Six

As for the literary texts that have been translated to other languages, learners can always compare the source text to its translation to perceive the way ideological orientations can affect the linguistic choices and the process of translation at large. After comparing and contrasting the linguistic and cultural patterns present in both texts, learners can tell whether the writer's ideology in the source text is replicated in the target text. In the case of Algerian classes, it is recommended that teachers employ Arabic translations of the literary texts they select.

4- General Tips

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In fact, teachers and learners alike may face some barriers when trying to use CDA in literature classes for the first time. These barriers are either due to their unfamiliarity with CDA as an approach to text analysis or to their inability to put into practice the theory related to the workings of CDA. What follows is a set of tips and guidelines that help teachers design their courses and activities using critical discourse analysis.

- 1. It is recommended that teachers move gradually in their questions from the descriptive stage to the socio-cultural stage.
- 2. To make the teaching process more comprehensive, it is necessary to use CDA along with some thematic approaches to teaching literature like the cultural model.
- 3. Even if learners are having CDA as a separate subject, teachers should remind them each time of the meaning of some important concepts like intertextuality, processes, ideology, power relations...etc.
- 4. It is also advisable that teachers combine CDA with other approaches like semiotics, feminism, cognitive linguistics, and corpus linguistics to diminish the degree of subjectivity.
- 5. Teachers are encouraged to leave space for discussion and interpretation. The process of doing CDA is inherently unscientific, and thus, it should be highlighted that any text is open for diverse interpretations.
- 6. Teachers ought to diversify the materials discussed in classes of literature to tackle different types of power relations like racism, sexism, classism...etc.

Conclusion:

Due to the various language-related challenges that EFL learners face in classes of literature and due to the excessive use of content-based approaches when teaching literature, scholars have recommended the integration of some language-based paradigms to teach this subject. CDA is an approach that examines the relationship between language, power and ideology. Implementing this approach in literature classes allows learners to explore the ideologies that stand behind the lexicogrammatical choices of the writer. However, the teacher needs to be selective when deciding to use a given activity in their classes, for the chosen activities ought to be linguistically and ideologically diverse to appeal to the learners' interests and satisfy their needs.

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