

# Critical Discourse Analysis:

## How Can Awareness of CDA Influence Teaching Techniques?

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*The University of Birmingham / The Centre for English Language Studies (CELS) / February 2007*

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### Abstract

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a creative and disciplined enterprise which is based on a speech act theory that says that language is used not only to describe things but to do things as well (Brown and Yule, 1985). It is essentially an approach to language analysis, which concerns itself with issues of language, power and ideology. CDA focuses on language as it is used by real people with real intentions, emotions, and purposes. People are members of the society and their speech is a reflection of a set of experiential, relational, and expressive values (Fairclough, 1992: 110). According to this approach, there is a correlation between linguistic production and social variables. For Fairclough, CDA is an orientation towards language, which associates linguistic text analysis with a social theory of the functioning of language in political and ideological processes. Identifying these processes helps not only to identify the internal building of discourse described by Gee (2001: 92) but also to identify the connotations it implies. In this paper, an authentic text is critically analysed following the framework proposed by Fairclough (1992:110-12). To achieve this, a precise theoretical background is found necessary to signal the importance of CDA and to highlight the criteria of Fairclough's framework. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of this approach to text analysis for language teaching.

**Key Words:** *Critical Discourse Analysis, social semiotic, social power, ideational meaning, transitivity, interpersonal meaning, modality, attitudinal epithets, interdiscursivity, reiteration*

## **1. Discourse Analysis**

### **1.1 Definition and Approaches**

According to He (2003: 428), the word 'discourse' involves a big 'D' and a small 'd'. The big 'D' relates to the general ways of viewing the world and general ways of behaving (including speaking), whereas the small 'd' concerns actual language use. CDA, on the other hand, is used to clarify how sociocultural knowledge is related to the performance of what have been called speech acts. To achieve this, various approaches have been developed, some of which investigate the production and interpretation of everyday action through conversation whereas others look at texts in terms of their internal organisation. In both cases, discourse analysis is non-critical because it is concerned only with the description of discursive practices and forms of oral and written interaction (2003). Halliday (1978: 142), taking his inspiration from the work of Firth, adopts another approach in which he proposes that language is a social semiotic and that linguistic form is affected systematically by social circumstances. He points out that every cultural group has its home-based discourse and this discourse marks its identity. Hence, people may have different identities due to their different discursive practises. He argues that:

"The nature of language is closely related to the demands that we make on it, the functions it has to serve. In the most concrete terms, these functions are specific to a culture. The particular form taken by the grammatical system of language is closely related to the social and personal need that language is required to serve (Halliday, 1978: 142)."

Gee (1990:81) and Sampson (1980:62), who are in agreement with Halliday, argue that CDA is the process in which various discourse types are encoded and interpreted particularly in the context of their formations and social semiotics. Van Dijk (1996:86) claims that discourse types are influenced by social power exercised by a dominant group over the actions and minds of another group. Such power limits their freedom, and influences their knowledge, attitudes, ideologies and speech. Fowler (1996:4) argues that the goals of discourse analysts should be in general terms

defamiliarisation and consciousness-raising. They should provide a 'critique' rather than a 'criticism' in order to help the reader understand the social background and motives influencing the composition of discourse. For example, Ballaster *et al.* (1991:2) and Coulthard (2001:5) claim that femininity is misrepresented in sex narratives, which hinge on paradoxes and social asymmetries, such as a women's magazine:

"The magazine is a medium for the sale of commodities to an identifiable market group, women, and itself a commodity, a product sold in the capitalist market place for profit. It is also a text, a set of images and representations, which construct an imaginary world and an imaginary reader (Ballaster, *et al.*, 1991: 2)"

Fairclough – commonly regarded as the founding father of CDA – was one of the first linguists to assert the relationship between language and power and to claim that discourse is a social practice. His framework is critical in that it depends not only on the description of discursive practices but also on the interpretation and explanation of how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies. According to this view, critical discourse analysis demonstrates the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, none of which is normally apparent to discourse participants.

## **1.2 Fairclough's Framework for CDA**

Fairclough (1992: 110-12) proposes that the critical discourse analysis of a text should pass through the three stages of description, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context. In this approach, he distinguishes between three types of value that formal features of a text may have. The first is the experiential value in which the text producer's experience of the natural and social world is represented through the content in the form of personal knowledge and beliefs. The second is the relational value in which the social relationships are enacted via the text in the discourse, and the third is the expressive value in which the producer of a text evaluates an aspect of reality or social

identities. Fairclough points out that the choice of vocabulary, grammar and textual structures to make up the formal features of a text is determined by these values. Though Fairclough is not the only writer to assert the social nature of language, his key insights are that discourse is shaped primarily by power relations in society, and that discourse shapes social relations, as well as being shaped by them. He argues that language serves to construct particular political positions, which entail unequal relations of power. Fairclough (1992) states that:

"... in developed capitalist countries, we live in an age in which power is predominantly exercised through the generation of consent rather than through coercion, through ideology rather than through physical force, through the inculcation of self disciplining practices rather than through the breaking of skulls. Part of this development is an enhanced role for language in the exercise of power: it is mainly in discourse that consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and practices, meanings, values and identities are taught and learnt (ibid: 95)."

Hence, the CDA framework adopted by Fairclough goes beyond investigating the lexical and grammatical relations of a text, and acts as a possible agent of understanding the attitudinal and social interactions underlying the composition of a certain discourse and as a means of social change, especially in its use in the classroom. Gee, (2001: 92-94) and Halliday (1978), on the other hand, have dissimilar approaches to critical discourse analysis in that they give equal focus to the internal building of a text where lexical and grammatical cohesion is also scrutinised.

## **2. Text Analysis**

The text (appendix 1) is a news story from (The Daily Telegraph) newspaper, and is 434 words long. It demonstrates the current statistics of drug use, particularly cocaine, among the urban middle classes. The figures show that cocaine use has shot up within the past ten years. The text lays much blame on the government because the rigidity it maintains in reclassifying drugs participates in increasing the number of illegal drug users and traffickers. This text, however, involves different points of view, which are discussed in the sections below.

## 2.1 Text Headline and the Underlying Ideology

The headline of the text "*Home Office resists reform of drug law as cocaine use doubles*" implies a critical point of view. No wonder that the Daily Telegraph draws a gloomy picture of the precautionary measures taken by the Labour government in its war on drugs since the newspaper represents the right-wing 'Conservative' viewpoint, which could be expected to oppose and challenge the Labour government. The headline reflects the ideological background of the writer and the newspaper as well. It appears as an 'active' sentence to give prominence to the Home Office as the agent resisting reform and the main factor behind the multiplication of cocaine use accordingly. Passivising the headline such as '*Reform of drug law is resisted by the Home Office ...*' could hardly convey the same message. The use of *doubles* indicates the failure of the government in dealing with the problem. If the same story were published in 'The Guardian' or 'The Independent' newspapers, for example, I think the headline might have been less prejudiced such as '*Home Office considers reform of drug law*' showing that the government is willing to reconsider the current drug system. This headline is a clear example of the relation between language and power claimed by Fairclough (1992), since it reflects the relational values of text producer.

## 2.2 Analysing Contexts

In investigating the context of culture, the text reflects a side of British culture, which views the use of drugs, particularly alcoholic drinks, as part of people's social life. It also tries to increase pressure on the government for the reclassification of drugs, as suggested in 1971, in terms of what should be assigned for personal use and what should attract higher penalties. According to the text, the current classification system is viewed by concerned organisations in the UK as out-of-date, both in terms of new patterns of drug use and new information about their effects. The government alleges that the present system of classifying drugs has proved effective, and is unwilling to review the drug classification system as a whole; however, it has agreed to make some specific changes

like adding crystal meth to the class A (most dangerous) list. It seems that the government is willing to make changes that move towards more strictness for fighting drug use and drug trafficking.

The writer has enriched the text with claims and counterclaims that help create a context of situation implying that drugs are the most dangerous threat to community cohesion and that the Labour government is always wrong. The statements made by representatives both of the government (Vernon Coaker) and of a drugs-related charitable organisation (Martin Barnes) reflect a certain ideological and attitudinal background. Coaker points out that the current system works effectively and the government has achieved remarkable progress in its war on drugs, whereas Barnes' point of view is that the government's unjustified inflexibility to reform the drug classification system doubled the number of drug users in the past eight years. The writer's social power is expressed through the careful selection of vocabulary and statement formation; whereas enhancing the text with many claims in comparison with the few counterclaims provided only by Coaker reflects a certain satisfaction. Examples of this are analysed in the following sections.

### 2.3 Ideational Meaning and Transitivity: Process Types

A particularly marked transitivity feature of the text is the high proportion of show/report relational processes. Since the text is mainly argumentative involving claims and counterclaims, enhanced by the statistics revealed by the British Crime Survey, it is full of reporting relational processes, which make up about 50% of all verb groups like *show*, *indicate*, *reporting*, *estimated*, *confirmed*, etc. Below are some examples from the text:

The latest official figures <b>show</b> ...
The British Crime Survey <b>indicates</b> ...
The government ... <b>claimed</b> yesterday that ...

The overwhelming use of 'copula' verbs is another example of relational processes found in the text.

Cocaine use <b>is</b> on the rise among ... Drug treatment providers ... <b>are</b> under financial pressure ... I believe that the existing classification system <b>does</b> this effectively ...
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Mental processes are signalled in the text in very few examples like:

Overall drug use ... <b>appears</b> to have declined ... The door <b>seems</b> to have been left open to ... I <b>believe</b> the existing classification system ...
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The text, however, incorporates no examples of physical or material processes because the issue is of an abstract and expositional nature more than a concrete one.

#### **2.4 Ideational Meaning and Transitivity: Participants and Nominalisation**

The writer manages to assure his absence in the text. His retreat into individual invisibility is probably in order to make his authority more impersonal, and thus more difficult to question. His views are implicitly expressed, but I could feel his political orientation in sentence seven where he gives a negative evaluation of the government policy. In sentence eight, the use of *decided* and *or* shows that the government is too rigid to accept making necessary reformations and that its decision is nonnegotiable regardless of the bad consequences this strictness may create. This attitude is not true since the counterviews say that the government is working yet according to a different plan.

(7) But figures also show <b>little progress</b> on Class A substances, such as cocaine. (8) The Home Office has <b>decided not to reform</b> the drugs classification system, <b>or</b> to introduce new thresholds for possession of illicit substances.
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The writer's exposition is foregrounded by human participants like Vernon Coaker and Martin Barnes, in addition to the survey carried out by the BBC to give credibility to the source. The text also involves non-human active participants such as *cocaine use*, *drug classification system*, and *illicit substances*. The nominalisation of *cocaine* as getting the highest percentage putting it at the top of other drugs indicates how this substance has become popular, whereas the nominalisation of *cannabis* and *Methylamphetamine* or *Crystal meth* raises the alarm about the bad effects of these substances on community cohesion. Moreover, there are two other prominent nominalisations in the text in sentences one and three:

- (1) Cocaine use is on the rise among **the urban middle classes** ...
- (3) ...cocaine has shot up since **Labour** took office ...

The nominalisation of the **urban middle classes** as cocaine users could imply that:

- a. cocaine is popular among urban classes and probably not the rural ones;
- b. cocaine is popular among urban classes because they can afford it;
- c. the rural classes, if they are drug users, use other inferior substances;
- d. the poorer classes, whether urban or rural, do not use cocaine because it is costly.

The nominalisation of the **Labour Party** also implies that:

- a. the government failed to reduce the percentage of drug use within the past eight years;
- b. drugs reclassification is a necessity because the current system is not working;
- c. the government is always inflexible in the face of any threat or alleged danger.

## 2.5 Interpersonal Meaning and Modality

The interpersonal meaning of language maintains social relationships between people and includes forms of address, speech function and modality. It is one of the three functions, which Halliday (1978:35) considers as available in any language namely 'the ideational function' and 'the textual



function'. Modality, on the other hand, includes any unit of language that expresses the speaker/writer's affinity with propositional and evaluative structures. It has different types and degrees because modal verbs imply different degrees of affinity. The clearness of the issue gives predominance of unmodalised polar statements and forces the writer to obviate the extensive use of other markers of modality. In the text, there are few examples that can be said to reflect the writer's own attitude. His use of *illicit* could possibly indicate that he regards all illegal drugs with an equal degree of disapproval, regardless of the amount of damage they may or may not cause. In addition, describing the *500 joints* considered for personal use as being the *most liberal* is given as an example of a liberal proposal that would horrify the average Telegraph reader. Other modality types are found relating to Coaker and Barnes reflecting their appreciation of the problem.

(11) There is a **coherent system** in place to categorise ... (Coaker)

(13) We are **extremely disappointed** that the government has reversed... (Barnes)

The above sentences reflect Coaker's contention that the current drug system is effective and strict penalties are determined for drugs' manufactures, possession and supply. Barnes argues that the increase in drug use and in drug-related problems within the past few years is due to the ineffective current system, which was produced 35 years ago, and this explains his disappointment. This text is rich in attitudinal epithets and adverbs that are considered necessary for the enhancement of either point of view such as:

(12) I believe that the existing classification system does this **effectively**.

(14) ... we have **significant** increase in levels of drug use and **drug-related** harms.

## 2.6 Interdiscursivity

The writer draws upon a variety of discourse types in the composition of the text. Though the whole text is designed in a form that maintains a semi-formal style, which is expected, in this genre, he

switches freely between informal spoken style and language that might be considered academic. Using *spliffs* in sentence nine to refer to young drug users is informal the same like using *crystal meth* in sentence 15 instead of *methylamphetamine* which is an academic term. The writer's neutral language keeps him out of interrogation and offers a release from expectations of rigour and precision that a formal style may evoke in the readership. This gives the topic more popularity.

## 2.7 Reiteration

According to Winter (2001:46), reiteration is the repetition of certain lexical items used either for the confirmation of the discussed idea or because they relate to the same lexical set of the discussed topic. It can be carried out explicitly using the identical item in many sentences or implicitly using synonymy, near-synonymy or antonymy of the original items. Fairclough lays much interest on the ideologically significant meaning relations in a text. In the text, there are several examples of reiteration. The writer resorts to 'overwording' to give prominence to the issue and to indicate that it is a focus of ideological struggle, whereas synonyms and antonyms are other means of implicit 'rewording'. This clearly appears in the table below.

Table (1) Implicit reiteration in the text

<b>Implicit reiteration in the text</b>					
No.	Reiteration	Type	No.	Reiteration	Type
1	show, indicate	synonymy	8	illegal, illicit	synonymy
2	appear, seem	synonymy	9	strategy , plan	synonymy
3	rise, increase	synonymy	10	categorise, classify	synonymy
4	figures, numbers	synonymy	11	rejected, reversed	near- synonymy
5	previous, earlier	synonymy	12	doubled, shot up	near-synonymy
6	supply, provide	synonymy	13	report, claim, said	near- synonymy
7	existing, current	synonymy	14	shot up # declined	antonymy

The text has three examples of explicit reiteration where some items are used as verbs and in other sentences as nouns, but it has no examples of echoic emphatic items.

(1) The latest official figures <b>show</b>	(7) Figures also <b>show</b> little progress on Class A
(9) A <b>significant</b> tightening where	(14) We have seen a <b>significant</b> increase in ...
(13) ... <b>review</b> the system of drug	(17) Others are under <b>review (N)</b> and beds are ...

## 2.8 Other Constructive Features in the Text

Fairclough concentrates on the relation between the choice of language and the social power underlying it (Fairclough, 1992: 120). In the text, the writer's choice of words and tenses reflects a certain ideology and a social background. Here are other relevant points:

- Most of the sentences are active and the agents are clear. The nominalisation of *cocaine use*, *use of cocaine*, *overall drug use* sets these up as processes with no clear human agent – though linked by implication with Government mismanagement by tying the figures to the period since Labour took office. The absence of non-human agents probably arises from the writer's contention that not only is the government the responsible agent behind the complication of the drug problem, but that people are also true participants in creating it.
- The text contains both positive and negative sentences. The positive sentences refer to the latest figures besides the government's advocacy of the current system; whereas the negative ones display the counterviews. Negation in the text is expressed explicitly through the negative article 'not', and implicitly through items that imply negative meaning such as disappointed, rejected, reversed, and refused. In addition, words of contrast (but, however, etc.) are the most common clause relations to cope with the claims and counterclaims.
- The writer used two main tenses in composing the text that may help convey his message. He used the 'present simple' to express a permanent fact – the increasing number of drug users – and the 'present perfect' to indicate recent events which could have some effect on the situation as a whole, e.g. the government's refusal to undertake an overall reclassification exercise.

- The issue of drug use is an area of ideological contest (Fairclough, 1992: 117) especially when it is linked to young people indicating the possible corruption of the young, and a future vision of British society as one in which drug use would be acceptable.

- Excessive evaluative words are used only in Barnes' counterclaims, and are attributed to him, not to the writer. In the text, no titles or addresses are used before Vernon Coaker or Martin Barnes. I think this is just in keeping with current usage in British journalism.

- The text is not a florid piece of writing because the seriousness of the topic does not give much space for obvious rhetorical and metaphorical strategies but the overwhelming use of figures gives the writer's argument clarity and credibility.

- Finally, the main information is placed at the beginning of the text. The first three sentences show the horrifying figures of cocaine use among the urban middle classes with reference to the British Crime Survey to enhance these figures and to give authority and prominence to the issue. The writer attributes this catastrophe to the Labour government.

### **3. Patterning in the Text**

According to Francis (2001:83) and Hoey (2001:26), textual patterning is the ability gained by the writer to organise the text into meaningful paragraphs and cohesive clauses. Structuring a text using one pattern; however, does not preclude other forms of patterning. It is perfectly possible to find a general-specific structure embedded in a problem-solution pattern, or following on from it in the same text. This text represents an example of a multiple-pattern text. It is organised according to the claim-counterclaim textual patterning, which is very common in political journalism and in letters-to-the-editor pages, and the stock-in-trade of many 'Compare and Contrast' academic essays. It can also be noticed as signalling a problem-solution pattern because the issue is so controversial. In the

next section, I try to schematise these two patterns in the text to show how the textual structure asserted by Fairclough reflects the writer's ideational background.

### **3.1 The Claim – Counterclaim Pattern**

According to McCarthy (1991:81), the claim-counterclaim pattern is used to show two contrasting points of view. Uncovering the figures and statistics that show the rise in drug use in the UK within the past eight years with implicit reference to Labour government has paved the way for a set of claims and counterclaims. Moreover, the huge number of claims signalled by the writer in comparison with the counterclaims expressed by the current government members not only does reflect his ideational background, but is also intended to satisfy 'The Daily Telegraph' readership. Below is a diagrammatic representation of the text from a claim-counterclaim point of view.

**Common Ground:** Sentences one and two show that cocaine use has doubled since 1998. This common ground is lexically signalled in: **latest official figures, trends, survey.**

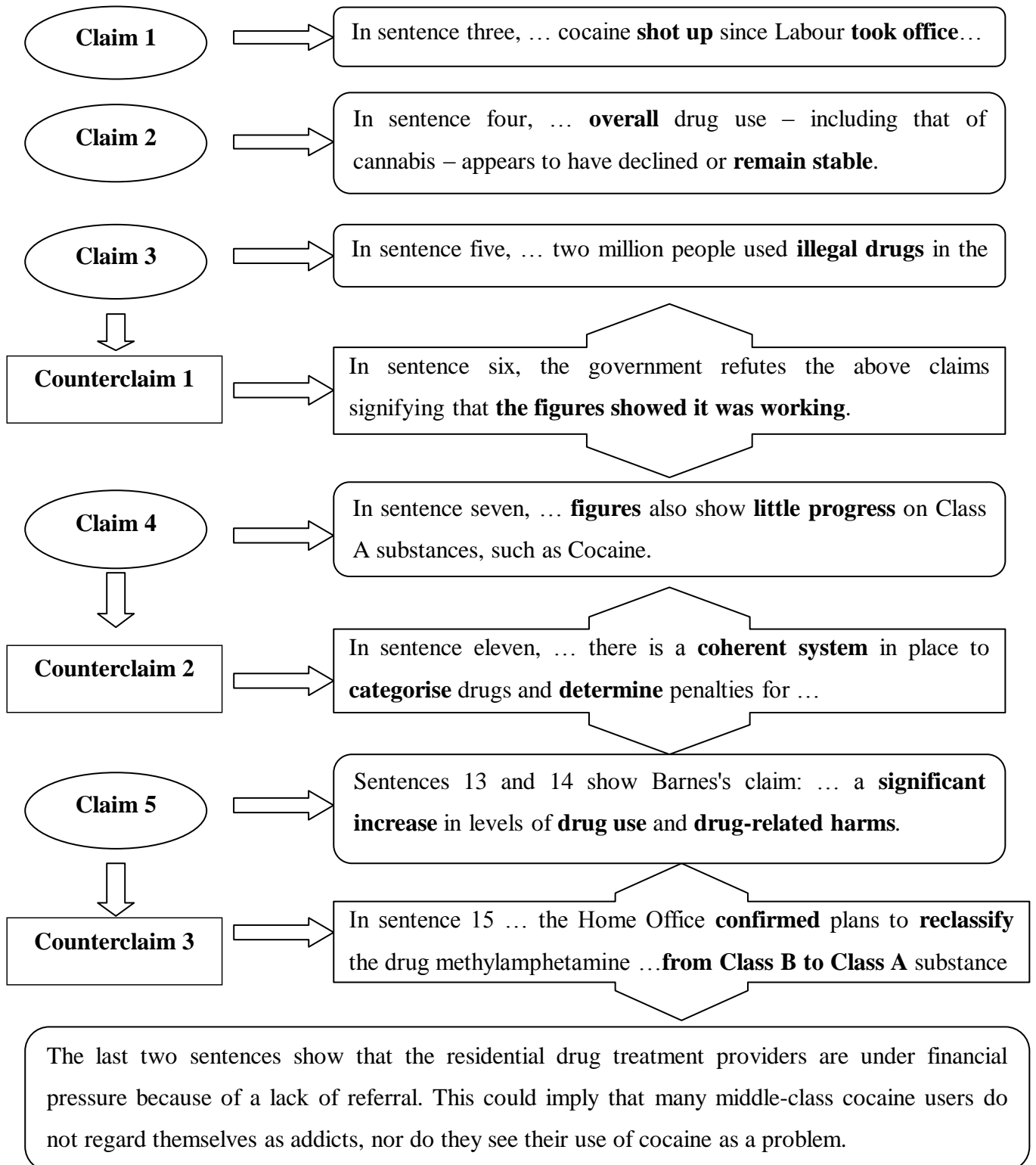


Figure (1) The claim-counterclaim textual patterning of the text

### 3.2 The Problem – Solution Pattern

According to Hoey (1996:150), the problem-solution structure consists of four categories: situation, problem, solution, and evaluation. The increasing number of drug users is a serious problem, which gives space for these categories to be found in clear organisation in the text.

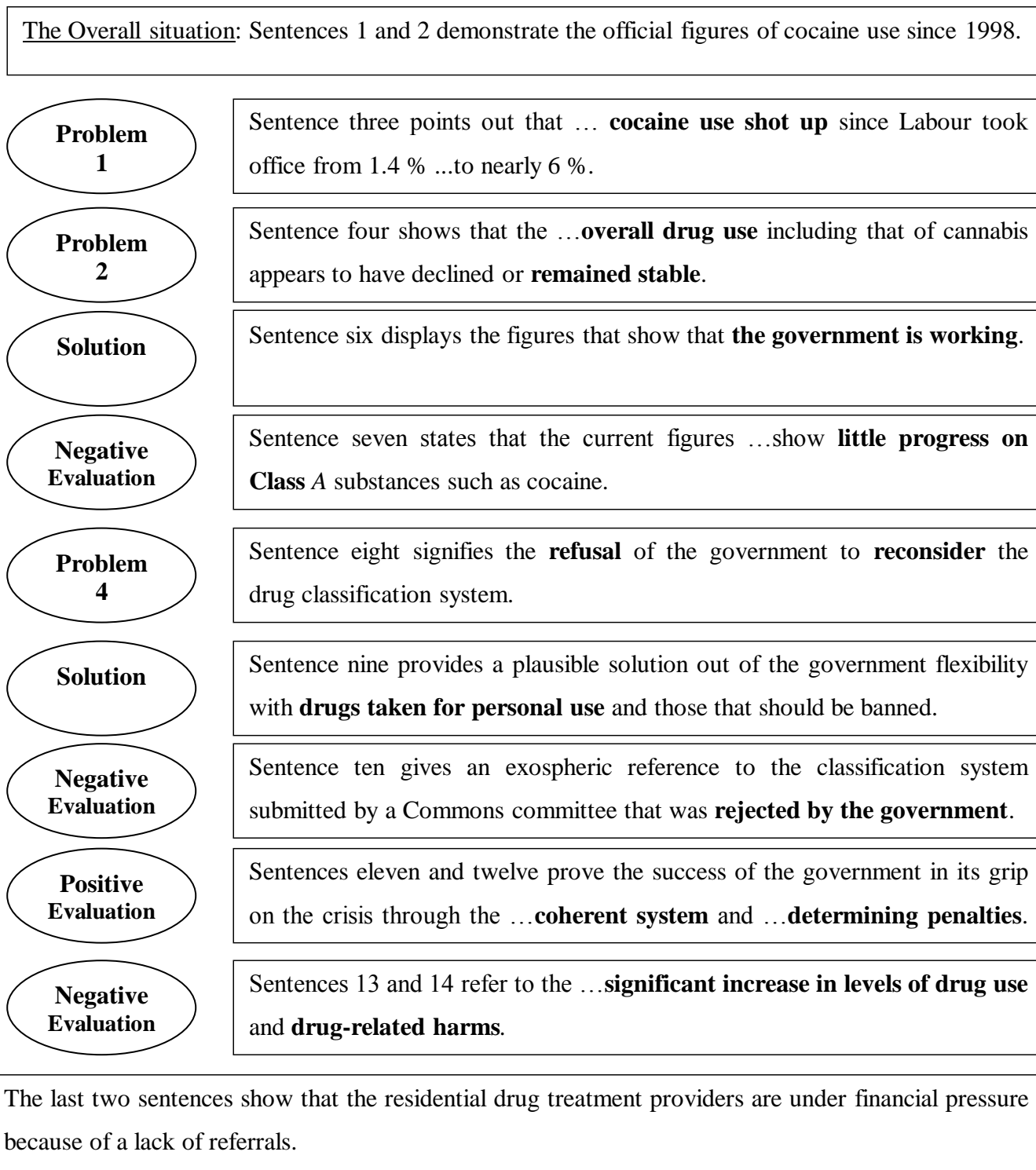


Figure (2) The problem-solution textual patterning of the text

#### **4. The Implications of CDA in ELT Classrooms**

Teaching CDA in the classroom goes beyond raising students' awareness of purely linguistic issues. It necessitates highlighting the effect of social power(s) on text composition accordingly. According to Richards, *et al.* (1993: 343), CDA helps students develop an ability to interpret speech acts that goes beyond understanding the propositional meaning of utterances to the illocutionary meaning, through the effect a written text may have on them as listeners or readers. Acquiring the skill of CDA enables students to answer inferential questions whose answers are guessed because they often correlate with the writer's beliefs and ideologies. Gaining awareness of CDA, moreover, helps students build a shield against extreme ideological opinions imposed – intentionally or incidentally – by teachers or other friends.

A language teacher can take some of Fairclough's insights for the consciousness-raising of students of the relation between language and power along with more general methods of discourse analysis to achieve a modified approach to CDA for use in ELT. This would give strategic guidance for the improvement of discourse production through identification of discourse patterns, clause relations and genres (Dudley-Evans, 2001:220). The acquisition of such a skill promotes the logical organisation of ideas and reinforces communication. However, the level of analysis depends on the level of the students. Wallace (1992: 61), for example, points out that CDA can be used to develop a reading methodology, which addresses ideological assumptions as well as developing general reading comprehension. This definitely includes (i) the encouragement of reflective critical reading and (ii) the extension of a 'pre-reading' / 'while-reading' / 'post-reading' procedure. This approach encourages students to move away from focusing on form for its own sake to use language to explore and provide evidence of the text's ideological positioning.



## 5. Conclusion

Fairclough's approach to CDA asserts that the production of discourse is not isolated from the existing social power, but affects and is affected by it. Competence in CDA deepens students' understanding of the topics they read and promotes an ability to investigate the manoeuvring many writers often employ in composing texts. This ability adds to understanding the mentality of writers whether they are capitalists, socialists, or religiously committed persons (Gee, 2001).

My choice of the text from 'The Daily Telegraph' is not random. The Telegraph is a right-wing paper and tends to support the Conservative Party in most political decisions. It is expected to oppose and challenge the Labour government as well. The writer, making use of the authority of the newspaper, managed to promote the view that drug use is bad and the government is to blame regardless of the efforts exerted to overcome the crisis. I think if the Conservative party were in power, the policy on drugs might be similar to that of the current Labour administration. The text clearly reflects the writer's commitment to the attitude of the newspaper; whereas his exaggeration matches the psychology of the newspaper's readership as well as the Conservative views.

The CDA framework adopted by Fairclough helps to identify that the production of discourse underlies certain ideologies, beliefs and attitudes. However, Fairclough's insights need to be supported with ideas from other linguists, in order to arrive at a complete analysis. Halliday (1978), for example, adopts a theory for CDA in which he enhances the relationship between form, function and context. That is, the relationship between language and its social context can be further examined by analysing how texts are structured and shaped in order to achieve the goals and purposes laid on them. In my opinion, having a distinguished competence in CDA is an ability mostly found in skilful linguists; however, can a linguist be a good teacher and vice versa? This is a point that could be discussed in a further essay.

## Appendix (1) / The Text

### Home Office Resists Reform of Drug Law as Cocaine Use Doubles

By Philip Johnston: Home Office Editor (The Daily Telegraph', Saturday, October 14, 2006)

(1) COCAINE use is on the rise among the urban middle classes, the latest official figures show. (2) Trends uncovered by the British Crime Survey indicate the numbers using the drug since 1998 have doubled. (3) Among young people, use of cocaine has shot up since Labour took office, from 1.4 per cent of 16- to 24-year olds reporting that they used the drug in the past 12 months to nearly six per cent. (4) At the same time, however, overall drug use – including that of cannabis – appears to have declined or remained stable. (5) It is estimated that some two million people used illegal drugs in the past month and 11 million have indulged at some stage in their lifetime. (6) The Government, which is eight years into a 10-year drug strategy, claimed yesterday that the figures showed it was working. (7) But figures also show little progress on Class A substances, such as cocaine. (8) The Home Office has decided not to reform the drugs classification system, or to introduce new thresholds for possession of illicit substances. (9) Officials have consulted over the past year on options ranging from the most liberal; where up to 500 joints could be considered for 'personal use' to a significant tightening where only 10 'spliffs' were allowed.

(10) The government has rejected criticism of the classification system, introduced in 1971, from a Commons committee earlier this year. (11) Vernon Coaker, the Home Office minister, said: 'It is important that there is a coherent system in place to categorise drugs and determine the penalties for their manufacture, possession and supply. (12) I believe that the existing classification system does this effectively, allowing clear and meaningful distinctions to be made between drugs.' (13) However, Martin Barnes, the chief executive of the charity Drug-Scope, said: 'We are extremely disappointed that the government has reversed the previous Home Secretary's decision to review the system of drug classification, although the door seems to have been left open to return to the issue in the future. (14) The current system was introduced 35 years ago and during that time we have seen a significant increase in levels of drug use and drug-related harms.' (15) The Home Office also confirmed plans yesterday to reclassify the drug methylamphetamine, more commonly known as crystal meth, from a Class B to a Class A substance, attracting heavier penalties for possession and trafficking. (16) It was also reported yesterday that at least half of the more expensive residential drug treatment providers in England are under financial pressure because of a lack of referrals. (17) According to the BBC some centres have been closed, others are under review and beds are not fully occupied.

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