CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FROM A POST-PERSPECTIVE: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF A ‘PEDAGOGY OF CHANGE’

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As a result of a critique of the moral and political agenda of de-mystification in critical discourse analysis, I write within a theoretical framework which sets out the limits of a problematising, critical approach according to which there is no possibility of an unproblematic access to the object under investigation and an unmediated knowledge of truth (Foucault, 1980; Pennycook, 2001). Such an approach means disavowing the belief in transparent language, enlightenment or emancipation, and rejecting the idea that the vicissitude of language can be transgressed towards a state in which we can see reality independent from our historical enculturation and modes of categorisation.

Critiques of postmodernist and post-structural approaches to critical discourse analysis within the Left have expressed strong scepticism towards the claim that anything politically progressive can come of its premises. Instead of a ‘real’ pedagogy of change, writing from a post-perspective is sometimes misunderstood as the desire to play with language. This is because analysis may remain tentative, context-related and ambiguous, but I argue that it gains in depth when the critical goal is to keep the process of disagreement open (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, O'Regan and MacDonald, 2007).

The possibilities of taking such an approach to critical discourse analysis are based on the attempt to avert homogenisation and totalisation through emphasising difference, incommensurability and discontinuity. The approach is based on the desire to rethink the possible and problematise the discursive constraints of hegemony and consensus. This means that a pedagogy of change and the progressive potential of critical discourse analysis from a post-perspective are based on the way in which they expand discourse and debate through ‘making facile gestures difficult’ (Foucault, 1988), offering a ‘problematisation of the given’ (Dean, 1994) and through that an alternative optic on the real.

In this symposium I discuss the possibilities and challenges of a pedagogy of change which is not based on a notion of emancipation that presupposes the elimination of power and the abolition of the subject/object distinction. The consequence is not the nihilistic result that emancipation is impossible, but that a radical politics require the acceptance of the ineradicability of antagonism. I argue that the objective of a pedagogy of change must therefore be to restore the centrality of the political in an attempt to create spaces for new discourses of emancipation and political discourses of the Left.