9. A Pedagogic Approach to Critical Media Literacy

Jong-Hee Lee

(Kangwon National University)

The purpose of this presentation is to sketch out a pedagogic approach to critical media literacy based on the practices of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enterprise. In formulating four-dimensional instructional procedures applicable to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom settings, elicitation is used as an analytical tool through a critical review of contradictory (positive vs. negative) arguments on the approaches, objectives and validity of CDA. To encourage students to recognize the needs and values of critical language awareness, a detailed description and explication have been provided by analyzing an actual persuasive media text, which is in line with the CDA-based instructional procedures.

Keywords: critical literacy instruction, critical discourse analysis, argumentative/persuasive discourse

1. Introduction

My purpose in this inquiry is to sketch out a conceptual framework for critical literacy instruction using an analytical model of argumentative discourse applicable to Korea’s collegiate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education. To enhance the students’ critical media literacy in classroom settings, the instructor is initially required to help them to better understand the interactive processes between argumentative discourse and its social effects. In doing this, the student needs an adequate knowledge of and abilities for the ways in which an argumentative media text should be analyzed with due weight on linguistic features and its rhetorical constructions as main elements having effects on attaining the intended purpose of the text.

So it would be, as crucial steps, useful to investigate key approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and to formulate a well-integrated method of Critical Literacy Instruction (CLI) in an effort to map out directions suitable for this enquiry. As CDA-based classroom instruction available to the nation’s EFL educational context, I would propose a set of four-dimensional procedures for students’ heuristic learning – (1) identifying the surface features of the text, (2) exploring the multiple interpretations of the text, (3) examining the rhetorical constructions of the text, and (4) elucidating the ultimate goals of the CLI procedures above – in order to guide them to enhance their critical literacy relating to the analysis of argumentative media discourse.

To map out accessible instructional procedures, I intend to critically review some conventions of CDA with an emphasis on the extent to which its practices can be applied to argumentative discourse analysis in the formulation of an EFL teaching tool for critical literacy development. Then, it is expected that a further enquiry into the applicability to Korea’s educational contexts at a subsequent research stage will shed light on a constructive path for a well-designed instructional model for critical media literacy targeted to the nation’s college students.

2. Approach to CDA-based Critical Literacy

Given the benefits of CDA-based critical literacy education, such an approach to discourse analysis serves as a proper analytical method designed to work out the instructional goal of this research work – to foster the student’s mental and emotional capacity for explaining the ideological implications that discourse represents and underlies in relation to the power structures
of society (Shor, 1999; Van Dijk, 2003). With this purpose in mind, the research study aims to develop a practical model for analyzing argumentative media discourse applicable to college classroom settings. The instructional model will guide the student to figure out and put into practice the fundamental principles of critical literacy as described in the following:

(a) challenging common assumptions and value systems;
(b) exploring multiple perspectives, and imaging those that are absent or silenced;
(c) examining relationships, particularly those involving differences in power; and
(d) reflecting on and using literacy practices to take action for social justice (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

With regard to goals and approaches, to formulate a teaching instrument for analyzing textual features and rhetorical constructions involved in persuasive media texts are basically in line with CDA advocates’ academic endeavors to promote critical language awareness through their purpose-driven discourse analysis for social change. (Fairclough, 2000). The educational instrument puts a major focus not merely on a matter of instructing how to do something specific, but also on a matter of enlightening what to know about something special. Accordingly it is useful for this research study to take into account conventional practices of CDA designed for critical examination of textual features and discursive practices as a way of exploring the ideology-loaded interdependency between discourse and power relations in society.

To sketch out CDA-based CLI procedures conceptually, there are four discrete, but interrelated, levels at which on the part of students, I intend to address the primary domains of this research study as follows:

(1) identifying the surface features of the text, which aims to describe a range of particular wordings (e.g., lexical, syntactic, grammatical, metaphorical, genre-based) and other linguistic devices employed in an argumentative media text together with its target audience to form a semantic representation of the text;
(2) exploring the multiple interpretations of the text, which aims to investigate a range of possible pragmatic meanings of the text within their generic scope and limits by analyzing ideological implications in the text and the interactive processes between the text’s production and consumption (e.g., the negotiation of meaning between the writer and the reader) on the basis of textual facts and contextual factors;
(3) examining the rhetorical constructions of the text, which aims to investigate the ways in which frames and topoi/loci are established as underlying tools used to work out specific rhetorical purposes in argumentative/persuasive discourse, and to instantiate the appealing principles and the power of persuasion generated by such rhetorical topoi/loci (e.g., content-related warrants, conclusion rules, logical structures, argument mechanisms) in critical literacy perspective; and
(4) elucidating the ultimate goals of the CLI procedures above, which aims to grasp social issues underpinned by the linguistic features of the text and to enhance moral obligation and sociocultural value systems towards social justice in the central tenets of critical pedagogy by instantiating the normative extent to which the constructive effects of the text supported by the writer’ ideologically motivated techniques with regard to sociopolitical problems (e.g., dominance, power abuse, unequal power relations and other forms of social inequities) can be manipulated and transmitted to the reader.