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CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A METHOD OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Discourse analysis has been in the focus of social sciences for more than half a century, during which, it has seemingly institutionalized as a method of social research: there are various sociological approaches to the study of discourse, as well as research schools, conferences, journals; iconic representatives of social science devote their research to discourse analysis. However, the sociological community still often considers discourse analysis as not sociological and sometimes even not a scientific method. At the same time, it seems that discourse analysts themselves doubt the sociological nature of their work and continue to get published in linguistic journals and speak at linguistic conferences. Therefore, a need to study discourse as a social phenomenon and discourse analysis as a method of sociological research still remains.

The study of language in the social sciences is based on the idea that language is not an objective reflection of social reality, identity and social interactions, but, on the contrary, is one of the ways of constructing and changing the world around us. The most general definition of discourse is reduced to considering it as a language taken together with its social context [1]. The idea of discourse is also not based on the traditional contradiction of thought and action, language and practice, but on the contrary: discourse is recognized as the production of knowledge through certain practices (practices of meaning production). Based on the assumption that all practices include meaning, they all thus include a discursive aspect. Thus, discourse is not limited to semantics or pragmatic aspects of action – it includes both. «Discourses are ways of talking, thinking, or representing a particular subject or topic. They produce meaningful knowledge about that subject. This knowledge influences social practices, and so has real consequences and effects» [2, c. 205].

Any study of discourse and its characteristics is based on the initial assumption that social reality is constructed; all further differences in the theoretical analysis are a consequence of the fact that the authors see the degree of construction differently and, especially, the possibilities of discourse to construct social reality. Thus, we can imagine a continuum, where the extreme positions are taken by theories that see discourse as a creative

phenomenon, able to produce and influence social reality, and theories that see discourse as a product of social relations and only a reflection of social reality, and between them – theories that indicate the dialectical and bilateral relationship between discourse and reality [3, p. 18–20]. The latter can be called synthetic theories. In our opinion, they have the greatest potential, because they remove the contradictions of the two extremes and emphasize the dialectical relationship between language and social reality. One of the most developed synthetic theories is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the prominent representatives of which are Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun Van Dijk and Lilie Chouliaraki.

According to Fairclough, currently, there is a special relevance in the study of discourse and its interactions with social reality, as there has been a significant shift in the social functioning of language. One of the main indicators of the growing importance of language in social and cultural practices is the attempt to artificially influence the direction of these changes, including changes in language practices. These changes Fairclough connects with the mass transition to the neoliberal stage of capitalism and, as a consequence, the transformation of language into a technological tool [4, p. 6]. Although, of course, the author does not deny the importance of language in pre-modern times, he makes it clear that today the language framed as discourse plays a more important role in constructing and reproducing power relations and social identities that they include [5, p. 97].

Developing his theory of discourse and methodology of its analysis, Fairclough relies mainly on previous linguistic developments in this field along with works written in social sciences, in particular on the ideas of Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, Bakhtin, Foucault, Habermas and Giddens [4, p. 1]. In addition to specific theorists of discourse, Fairclough also pays some attention to ethnomethodological conversational analysis, which in combination with the above-mentioned approaches creates the basis for critical discourse analysis.

The critical discourse analysis is certainly not an independently existing theory. It is placed in a certain coordinate system relative to other sociological theories, and discourse theories in particular. First of all, CDA is an approach that considers social relations, rather than some static formations or individuals, as an object of research. In this sense, CDA is a theory that focuses on relationships. Based on this, it is important to understand that CDA does not focus so much on discourse as such, but on the relationship between discourses or the relationship between discourse and various non-discursive objects of social reality. Thus, discourse is not just a formation that we can define independently. We can achieve an understanding of discourse only by analyzing it in a set of relations [5, p. 302].

Second, the relations in which a certain discourse is involved, from the perspective of CDA, are considered as dialectical relations, which means that they are dependent on their objects, but not reduced to them. For example, there is an inseparable link between discourse and power, however, neither discourse nor power can be reduced to each other: discourse and power are different elements of the social process, although any discourse is partially authoritative, and any power partially discursive. Fairclough borrows the idea of dialectic discourse from the works of Marx, who considered language as an element of the material social process, which is dialectically interconnected with other elements and is able to produce social life [5, p. 303].

Third, since CDA is a method of analyzing not the discourse itself, but the analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, it is impossible to place it within the framework of only one science or discipline. Therefore, critical discourse analysis is a transdisciplinary approach that not only addresses the achievements of linguistics, political and social sciences, economics, etc. but also tries to synthesize them.

All this places a critical discourse analysis in the domain of critical realism and social constructivism. This means that, according to the first approach, the world around us actually exists and, although it includes the social world, it exists regardless of how we know and understand it. However, the critical nature of this approach indicates that there is a difference between the natural and social worlds: the latter depends on human action and is socially constructed. The social constructivist effect possessed by discourse automatically places the CDA in the domain of social constructivist theories. However, in this case, it must be clear that the constructivist relationship of discourse and social reality is twofold: on the one hand, discourse affects the form taken by the social world, on the other, discourse has the ability to change its form and substance under the influence of social phenomena and processes.

Although CDA emphasizes the social nature of discourse, it does not abandon the linguistic component. On the contrary, discourse in this context is a unity of three levels: text, discursive practice and social practice. Naturally, for the analysis of the textual component, it is necessary to turn to linguistic methods (for example, Fairclough suggests using M. Halliday's approach). Similarly, for a full-fledged analysis of discourse, which always exists in a certain context, the methods of related sciences will be needed.

Summing up, we can say that although discourse analysis uses linguistic categories to study the linguistic aspect of discourse and the methods of other sciences too, these are only part of an extensive study. An equally important role in the study of discourse is played by the analysis of the interaction of discourse with other social phenomena and processes, as well as the analysis of the social context and historical situation. Thus, discourse analysis is an

interdisciplinary research method. At the same time, sociological analysis plays a key role in such a study due to the social nature of discourse and language. Therefore, discourse analysis cannot be appropriated by a single scientific discipline, but it would also be wrong to deny the role of social sciences in its analysis.

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