

# **A Critical Discourse Analysis of News about Youth Crime in British Radio Programmes and Online Message Boards: Part 1. Introduction**

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## **Introduction**

This paper constitutes the introduction to a major new stage in my ongoing research project concerning the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the study of media discourse. The long-term aims of this project are, firstly, to investigate the ways in which CDA has attempted to uncover the ideological workings of media coverage of news and, secondly, to suggest ways in which this analysis might be improved, above all in terms of developing CDA as a resource for critical media literacy. The ultimate aim of this project is to realize CDA's potential as a practical media tool for groups and individuals engaged in social struggles against various forms of oppression such as those related to race, gender and class. Earlier stages of this project have surveyed the current status of CDA and evaluated its strengths and weaknesses in the light of the various criticisms that have been made of it (Haig 2004); assessed CDA's potential to contribute to critical media literacy in the field of environmental problems (2005a, 2006); and employed CDA to study the media representations of a number of political discourses (2002, 2005b). This new stage of my project builds on this previous work but also represents a significant new direction in terms of theme, media focus and depth of treatment.

The theme of youth crime was selected because of its recent prominence in Britain and the British media. So prominent was the problem of youth crime in the months prior to and during the period in which the data for this study was gathered that in a sense it is no exaggeration to say that this theme selected itself. Indeed, youth crime, and particularly the problems of gangs, guns and knives associated with it, was such a preoccupation of the British media during the spring and summer of 2007 that I believe it may be seen as an example of what Stanley Cohen termed a 'moral panic'

(Cohen 1972). In August, when the bulk of the data was collected, these problems were seen by many as having culminated symbolically in the tragic death of Rhys Jones, an eleven-year-old boy who was shot in the neck by another teenager whilst playing football in a local car park in Liverpool. This latest outbreak of public and media concern over the danger to society represented by young people, a group emblematically personified by the media and in the popular imagination in the form of a menacing knife-wielding 'hoodie',<sup>1</sup> shares many common features with earlier moral panics that have swept British society concerning such subcultural threats as the Mods and Rockers in the sixties, Punks in the seventies and Ravers in the eighties and nineties (Cohen 1972, Hebdige 1979, Jenkins 1992). As was the case with these earlier occurrences, the media played a significant role in amplifying the problem of youth crime into something approaching mass hysteria, with a string of newspaper headlines such as 'Anarchy in the UK', 'Too Scared to Leave our Home' and 'A Nation Under Siege'. In this way, as Hall and his coworkers argued in relation to the problem of mugging in the 1970s, far from being neutral observers and reporters of such phenomena the media's coverage is closely implicated alongside the police and the criminal justice system in the ideological work of social control (Hall et al. 1978). In this study I have attempted to build on this earlier work but also to give the analysis greater precision by applying CDA techniques to the media's discourse of youth crime, specifically as it is represented in radio news programmes and associated audience-generated online texts.

The particular media focus of this study, radio, is on one of the oldest forms of mass media. However, my ability to make use of this medium, specifically to listen to and record UK domestic radio broadcasts here in Japan, relies on developments in one of the newest media, the Internet. This is somewhat ironic given that the Internet is regarded by some commentators as a threat to the continued existence of older forms of media. Although at some point in the future the Internet may indeed drive radio as we know it to extinction, the current state of technological development of the two media, along with developments such as the iPod, means that radio broadcasting via the Internet, particularly in the form of podcasts, is a well-established and increasingly popular form of media communication, one which is arguably giving a new lease of life to radio, particularly as a medium for younger audiences.

In terms of its depth of treatment, the present study is intended to provide a far more complete picture of media discourse practice than has hitherto been attempted in this project. Acknowledging both the recent criticism concerning CDA's inad-

equate theorization of context (van Dijk 2006) and earlier criticisms concerning the position of the analyst in CDA, which I discuss below, the project seeks to attain a ‘thick description’ of the socioeconomic and cultural context in which the issue of youth crime developed in the UK, including an analysis of the media texts related to this issue and the ways in which these texts were consumed by a particular community of audience members. In order to achieve this level of description, a very large quantity of primary data (chiefly consisting of 8,000 hours of radio broadcasts) and secondary data such as newspapers and magazines was collected.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a synopsis of the key theoretical and methodological issues which underpin the overall research project for which this paper forms no more than a short introduction. Accordingly, I begin in the next section by providing a brief overview of CDA as a whole. This is followed by a more detailed description of the particular version of CDA upon which my own work is chiefly based, including a discussion of its programmatic focus on the role of language in contemporary capitalism. I then consider how CDA has been applied to the analysis of media texts, paying particular attention to the use of CDA in critical media literacy education, the further development of which is a major long-term aim of this project. Following on from this discussion of the relationship between CDA and media texts I raise some reflexive questions about CDA itself regarding the academic texts and genres in which its results are usually presented. Here I consider which types of voices have privileged access to these genres and what other forms of writing or voice might be more appropriate, concluding that autoethnography may well offer a useful alternative. Continuing in a somewhat autoethnographic mode, in the next section I discuss my reasons for choosing the problem of youth crime, the language of English, specifically British English, and the medium of radio as three fundamental dimensions of my research data. Many of the radio programmes broadcast in Britain by the BBC have associated online message boards on which listeners can post comments and engage in discussions. Using CDA in combination with the techniques of cyberethnography, I propose to analyse these written comments by listeners as the fourth dimension of my data because of the interesting range of differences which they show to the spoken language of professional radio broadcasters. I consider in particular these two types of text in relationship to the concepts of lifeworld and the public sphere. Finally, as an example of the kinds of differences that are evident in the data between the spoken broadcasts and the written comments, I conclude with a discussion of humour and irony. Although

these forms of language use undoubtedly play a number of ideological roles in discourse they have received almost no attention by CDA researchers, in contrast to the related topic of metaphor which has received a great deal of scholarly attention. Therefore, I hope that this project may shed some light on this interesting but as yet under-researched topic.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

CDA is not a monolithic method or field of study but rather a loose agglomeration of approaches to the study of discourse, all of which are located broadly within the tradition of critical social research that has its roots in the work of the Frankfurt School (Wodak and Meyer 2001). Though having developed, at least initially, largely independently of each other, these approaches are united by a concern to understand how social power, its use and abuse, is related to spoken and written language.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, critical discourse analysts are concerned with elucidating the dialectical relationship in which the discursive aspect of social structures and social practices both constitutes and is constituted by those structures and practices (van Dijk 2001). Thus for example a typical focus of CDA research is on the nature and usage of racist language and how this usage both reflects and reinforces racist institutional policies and individual racist attitudes. Given this kind of focus, it is not surprising that, in contrast to most mainstream discourse analysis, CDA practitioners do not see their work as value-neutral scholarship. Rather, they aim to transcend the academic/activist divide, seeing their work as not merely *describing* the inequitable discourse practices pertaining to problems of race, gender, class and so on, but also contributing to the *contestation* and even *transformation* of those practices. This aim, however, has been the target of criticism by several opponents of CDA.

On the one hand, some conventional discourse analysts who take a politically conservative position, such as Widdowson, have argued that scholarship and activism should not be mixed in this way (Widdowson, 2004). On the other hand, some more radical critics have suggested that while this aim is indeed worthwhile and valid, in practice CDA has not yet lived up to its radical ambitions. Others critics display a deep skepticism towards CDA's modernist emancipatory goals. Such critics argue that not only has CDA failed to go beyond 'mere' academicism, but that it is wedded to what they see as a number of untenable notions (such as objectivity and truth) and betrays a debilitating ignorance of the politics of knowledge underlying its own discursive practices (Pennycook 2001). My own position on this debate is that, while

agreeing with these latter critics that up till now CDA scholars have largely failed to go beyond the (relatively) comfortable limits of academic research, I believe that in principle there is no reason why CDA should not henceforth develop in ways that will allow it to become a more useful – and more widely used – resource for social activism. Accordingly, I reject equally Widdowson's conservative positivism and the postmodern slide into nihilistic relativity and rhetorical opacity that seems to be the end towards which critics such as Pennycook are tending. Against these two extreme positions I see much potential in Fairclough's more balanced approach. This attempts to ground CDA in the tradition of critical realist philosophy, which argues for the emancipatory potential of rational enquiry (Fairclough 2003: 209-10, Bhaskar 1986). Unfortunately, as far as I am aware no such CDA studies have yet been published.

Clearly, there are undoubtedly numerous difficulties still to be overcome in developing CDA, theoretically, methodologically and practically, into a useful form of applied discourse analysis, but there are some encouraging signs that this may be possible. Above all, I am encouraged by the growing popularity of CDA amongst students across the whole range of human sciences and beyond, a fact that is reflected by the large number of citations of CDA authors in non-linguistically oriented journals. Meanwhile, within CDA itself the number of new journals<sup>3</sup> that have been launched in the last few years attests to the popularity of this hitherto rather marginalized branch of applied linguistics although, as Billig points out, the mainstreaming of CDA may bring its own problems (Billig 2000).

### **Faircloughian CDA and Language in the New Capitalism**

Currently, the most widely-known version of CDA, and the one which arguably offers the greatest prospect of leading to practically applicable tools for activists, is probably that of Norman Fairclough. In a series of influential publications over that last two decades (see for example Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995a, 2003, 2006), Fairclough has developed a distinctive, though still evolving, methodology and set out a clear and compelling research programme for CDA. This programme, or 'manifesto' as he has also described it (2003: 202) concerns what has come to be known as 'Language in the New Capitalism' or simply LNC (2002). This programme seeks to examine how the contemporary transformations of capitalism, the neo-liberal, globalizing spread and development of a particular form of capitalist economic organization in the post-Cold War era, and the social and cultural changes

that these transformations entail, is closely linked to contemporary changes at the level of language and discourse. This programme has so far produced CDA studies into a variety of discursive phenomena related to LNC. For example, analysts have investigated the new varieties or blends of genres which have emerged under the new capitalism, such as the staff appraisal interview and the language of call centre operatives. Other studies have focused on how the identities of workers in the new capitalism are constructed, inculcated and enacted discursively (Gee et al. 1996). Above all, there has been much attention paid to the representational strategies, or discourses, of new capitalism, such as those of Britain's 'new' Labour Party (Fairclough 2000), which seek to 'talk into being' particular versions of globalization and establish them as universal or hegemonic in relation to other, alternative versions so that they lose their particularity and become legitimized as mere 'common-sense'. It is the LNC aspect of CDA which I believe is the most fundamentally important in terms of its political focus and its potential for helping activists resist the numerous inequitable and unsustainable tendencies within the new capitalism. Unfortunately, it is also the aspect where the discussion tends to be most theoretical and abstract.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the area where Faircloughian CDA and the LNC project have come closest to fulfilling its interventionist potential is, in my view, in the area of media discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995a) and it is this aspect of CDA that I would now like to discuss.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis, Media Discourse and Critical Media Literacy**

Drawing on a number of influences, including the long British tradition of critical studies of media texts (Leavis and Thompson 1933, Fowler et al. 1979) and the more recent French discourse theory (Pecheux 1982, Foucault 1984), Fairclough and others have examined the ideological work done by a range of media texts such as advertisements (Bloor and Bloor 2007) and women's magazines (Caldas-Coulthard 1996). However, the type of media text that has received by far the most attention, by Faircloughian and by all other varieties of CDA, has been, and will probably continue to be, news (van Dijk 1988). This emphasis on news, particularly 'hard' news reports in the press, is due to its social value and salience, its close links to political and economic power, its 'dailiness' – in Scannell's (1996) terms – and its widespread availability, both to consumers and analysts. Accordingly, texts such as newspaper articles (Fowler, 1991, Richardson 2007), television news programmes

and documentaries (Fairclough 1995b: 167-182) and, more recently, online news (Scollon and Scollon 2004, Mautner 2005) have figured heavily in CDA studies. While not all of these studies are explicitly oriented towards intervention or activism, many of them do at least have a pedagogical orientation and therefore I believe that, taken together they can provide an extremely valuable resource for creating a truly *critical* media literacy (Cross 2001, Kress 2003).

Critical media literacy has been defined in a number of not always compatible ways. For some the critical component refers mainly to acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for ordinary people to produce their own media texts. For others, it refers more to the critique of mainstream media texts, practices and structures. However, the common element linking most of these definitions is the notion that young people require educating about the ideological nature of the media. This is seen as an essential prerequisite for full and free participation as members of an increasingly mediatized society. In the Faircloughian variant of CDA such emancipatory pedagogic goals have been most thoroughly explored by the contributors to the edited collection *Critical Language Awareness* (Fairclough 1992). In particular, Janks and Ivanič (1992) in their contribution draw on Althusser's concept of interpellation to refer to the ways in which media and other discourses create subject positions for readers and viewers of which they are frequently not consciously aware. However, as they argue, the emancipatory goal of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) pedagogy needs to go beyond mere 'consciousness raising'. Rather, the goal is to empower people to take control of their own language practices, including their reception of and resistance to the output of the mass media. Although the theory and practice of media literacy education have continued to develop (McLaren et al. 1995, Kress 2003), and although CDA in general has continued to evolve and expand into new areas, during the fifteen years since the above collection appeared there has been surprisingly little work published which applies and develops the emancipatory practice of CLA with respect to critical media literacy pedagogy. Therefore, the research project of which this paper forms a preliminary stage is intended to review the recent developments in CDA and apply them to the task of updating and implementing CLA in relation to the requirements of media education. However, before embarking on a discussion of these points I would like to digress briefly here and approach the topic tangentially via some observations on the one kind of media which no CDA practitioner can do without, namely, academic journals.

## Academic Genres and Authorial Voices

Norman Fairclough has stated that one of the ways in which CDA differs from mainstream discourse analysis is that rather than starting with a conventional academically-motivated research question, CDA studies should start from the awareness of a social problem and the desire to overcome it or at least mitigate its effects in some way. The goal of CDA is then to find ways of tackling the problem through a detailed analysis of its semiotic aspect (Fairclough 2003: 209).<sup>5</sup> Given the overall emancipatory goals of CDA this difference is not surprising. However, Fairclough's normative assertion that CDA should start from the identification of a social problem seems to take for granted that practitioners of CDA can in fact identify such a problem as a suitable topic for their research. While this is not perhaps an unreasonable assumption, I feel it is one which needs to be examined, particularly in relation to the question of academic genres and authorial voice.

It may well be that it is precisely the experience of having been on the receiving end, so to speak, of a social problem such as sexism or racism that leads people to make use of CDA in the first place. Indeed, given CDA's stated ambition to be a resource for people engaged in emancipatory struggles, this would seem to be the preferred order of events. However, I suspect that this is seldom the case in practice. A review of the literature suggests, unsurprisingly, that most CDA-based work is conducted by academics 'with an interest' in a particular social problem. However, the precise personal, experiential nature of that interest is seldom made very clear. It is a sad fact of contemporary life that all too many people, academics included, are exposed to more or less racist, sexist or unsustainably anthropocentric forms of language more or less regularly in the course of their daily lives. This would seem to qualify just about any scholar to conduct CDA research. But of course the contemporary institutional order of discourse surrounding scholarly research in every field imposes severe restrictions on the range of voices that are heard and CDA is no exception to this rule. The editorial policies and submission guidelines for journals which publish CDA work, such as *Discourse & Society*, are essentially no different from those of mainstream humanities journals. In addition to the more fundamental generic rules concerning orthography, layout, the formatting of references and so on, which in themselves are daunting enough to non-academics, there are more specific requirements. Here, for example, are some extracts from the submission guidelines for *Discourse & Society*, taken from the journal's website.<sup>6</sup>

*Discourse & Society* is primarily a discourse analytical journal. That is, articles should provide a detailed, systematic and theoretically based analysis of text and talk. ... Articles should focus on specific structures or strategies of discourse that are not self-evident to the casual reader.

*Discourse & Society* does not publish exclusively theoretical papers, but each paper should feature a prominent theoretical section and a critical review of the relevant literature as a foundation for empirical research.

Articles are preferred that are based on a sizeable corpus of interesting texts or talk collected by the author(s) themselves ... Authors are expected to have a thorough knowledge of, and experience with, the corpus, domain or genre of discourse being analysed, for instance as a result of an extended research project ...

The first of these guidelines clearly casts the CDA analyst somewhat contentiously as a person who is set apart from 'the casual reader' by virtue of his or her specialist knowledge. There also seems to be an implied bias here in favour of written texts, which may be related to the current stand-off between CDA and Conversation Analysis. As if in some way intended to justify the presupposition entailed by the first guideline, the second guideline demands, in effect, that authors demonstrate their scholarly competence and membership of the discourse community. The 'for instance' of the third guideline leaves open the possibility that other routes to the kind of knowledge and experience required may be possible, but the impression given is that the balance for the journal is firmly on the side of research rather than activism as the royal road to knowledge.

Through gate-keeping discourses such as those arguably reflected in these guidelines, the borders of what kinds of contributions are acceptable in journals like *Discourse & Society* are closely guarded. However, as if acknowledging that there is some tension here between the norms of scholarship and CDA's commitment to emancipation and equality, the journal's final guideline states that:

The study of the relations between discourse and society takes place in several disciplines, in many countries and by women and men from many different cultural backgrounds. *Discourse & Society* highly values this diversity and particularly invites contributions which reflect such diversity in their authorship, theories, methods, data and the use of scholarly literature.

Even here though, the emphasis is on diversity between members of different academic disciplines who ‘study’ discourse rather than between academics and non-academics. Moreover one even senses a globalizing impulse at work here, drawing scholars from around the world into the orbit of Anglo-European discourse practice, rather than expanding those practices outwards to embrace those of others. One wonders for example how the editors would view submissions from cultures whose ‘use of the scholarly literature’ placed less of a taboo on plagiarism than their own.

Notwithstanding the foregoing remarks, it has not been my intention here to single out *Discourse & Society* for special censure. On the contrary, this journal has been for many years the most important forum for CDA scholarship and within the confines of the prevailing norms and practices it has fulfilled its role with great success. Rather, my purpose is to illustrate the problems associated with academic discourse practices and to draw attention to another of CDA’s problems, namely the position of the analyst, a problem which is in turn related to the issue of ‘voice’.

To begin with the position of the analyst first, in a crucial passage from his seminal work *Language and Power*, Fairclough asks ‘How is the analyst to gain access to the discourse processes of production and interpretation? (1989: 167). His answer is that:

The only access that the analyst has to them is in fact through her capacity to herself engage in the discourse processes she is investigating. In other words, the analyst must draw upon her own MR (interpretative procedures) in order to explain how participants draw on theirs. The analysis of discourse processes is necessarily an “insider’s” or a “member’s” task – which is why I have called the resources drawn upon by both participant and analyst members “members’ resources” (MR). (1989: 167)

Although the notion of “members’ resources” or MR has largely been dropped by the more recent versions of Faircloughian CDA, even where not explicitly discussed or acknowledged the more recent accounts still tend to see the position of the analyst in essentially the same terms. That is, the analyst needs to be simultaneously an outsider and an insider to the discourse processes under investigation. She is an outsider by virtue of her very status as researcher, but she must also be an insider to the extent that without a shared set of attitudes, beliefs, experiences and knowledges she will not be able to understand and interpret the discourse processes in the same

meaningful terms as the other participants. Clearly there is a tension here and the question is whether or not it can, in practice, be resolved. In *Language and Power* Fairclough himself appears to be aware of this tension, commenting on the above remarks in the following oft-quoted passage:<sup>7</sup>

But if analysts are drawing upon their own MR to explicate how those of participants operate in discourse, then it is important that they be sensitive to what resources they are themselves relying upon to do analysis. At this stage of the procedure, it is only really self-consciousness that distinguishes the analyst from the participants she is analysing. The analyst is doing the same as the participant interpreter, but unlike the participant interpreter the analyst is concerned to explicate *what* she is doing. For the critical analyst, moreover, the aim is to eliminate even that difference: to develop self-consciousness about the rootedness of discourse in common-sense assumptions of MR. (1989: 167)

Two closely-related conclusions may, I think, be drawn from this. Firstly, and I hope uncontroversially, I believe that since Fairclough's prescription for the role of analyst clearly places a high premium on the analyst's sensitivity and 'self-consciousness' regarding her own MR, this ought to be reflected prominently in the sorts of scholarship, specifically in the sorts of writing, that CDA analysts produce. Secondly, in order to achieve this, and thus to break down the analyst/activist/participant divide, I believe – and here I suspect I am being rather more controversial – that analysts ought to develop new forms of writing or voice or at least make use of existing alternative forms which can provide richer, more credible accounts of what it actually feels like to be a participant in the discourse processes under investigation. This would involve paying attention not only to the analyst's intellectual responses *as analyst* but also to the affective element *as participant*, that is, to what Barthes called in his memorable phrase, 'the pleasure of the text'. For I think that it is only by writing in this way that analysts can really communicate with those on behalf of whom they are, ostensibly, writing, as opposed to just their fellow analysts.

Of the currently existing forms of writing and vocalization employed by qualitative researchers, I feel that autoethnography could provide a particularly valuable model on which CDA might profitably draw. Although still very much an emerging and contested domain, as an extension of conventional ethnographic theory and practice autoethnography is becoming increasingly popular in a range of disciplines including

performance studies, communication studies and media sociology (Marcus 2000). In autoethnography, the researcher aims to not only understand the cultural milieu under investigation, as in more conventional ethnography, but also to understand, reflexively, her own experiences as a participant/observer in that milieu (Reed-Danahay 1997). Thus the researcher must attend equally to the cultural contexts, the practices of the community *and* to her own scholarly and non-scholarly practices as an embodied participant, as a subject engaged in the performance of research. Clearly, this is a very demanding undertaking. Nevertheless, those scholars who have embraced this new approach have found it an extremely useful means of, as Souto-Manning puts it in relation to her own autoethnographic study of bilingual education, ‘representing the interdependence and blurry boundaries of self and other’ and as a tool with which to ‘trouble objectivity’ (Souto-Manning 2006: 562). For a combination of these reasons and others of a more specifically personal nature concerning my feelings about the problem of youth crime, I have been trying to incorporate such an approach into my own research project, and it is to an account of the genesis of this project that I wish now – autoethnographically – to turn.

### **Why youth crime? Why English? Why radio?**

My research project on youth crime in UK radio news was begun in the spring of 2007 following, it must be admitted, an extremely prolonged period of gestation. Since early in 2002 I had been looking for some concrete thematic focus for a study which would allow me to test out a range of options for improving the way in which CDA can investigate media discourse and contribute positively to social change through its use in critical media literacy education. As this admission already suggests, my fundamental motivation did not spring from a deep personal involvement in a particular social problem. Rather, it was based on my intellectual interest in, and general political commitment to, the theories, methods and goals of CDA itself. This in itself I regarded as something of a dilemma: an ethical version of the old joke about the reply of a countryman when asked for directions by a passing traveller: ‘Well, if you want to go to [such-and-such a place] I wouldn’t start from here’. Unless I could find the right place from which to start, that is to say unless I genuinely felt myself to be the victim of some exploitative discursual practice, or at the least had a strong personal attachment to some person or group who had, then I felt unqualified to proceed with my study. A small number of issues presented themselves as possible topics, in particular environmental issues, in which I have

long been interested (Haig, 1990, 2001, 2006), and the problems encountered by foreign English language teachers in Japan, such as myself, in attempting to uphold the values of professionalism in an increasingly market-driven higher educational setting, which was the subject of my Master's dissertation (Haig, 1999). However, I felt that on the one hand continuing my studies in environmental problems would not allow me sufficient opportunity to explore new areas of discourse while, on the other, that the problems of English language teachers in Japan were not sufficiently connected to media discourse which, given my current employment in a Department of Media Studies, I regarded as an essential element of my project. In addition, from the point of view of my research project's aim to evaluate the success or otherwise of CDA in uncovering the ideological working of the media coverage of news, neither of these topics would have yielded a sufficiently sizeable sample of published CDA studies to enable meaningful generalizations to be made. Another dilemma concerned the language of my research: whether to study English or Japanese media texts. Given the need to bridge the analyst/ordinary participant divide, I felt that my no-more-than moderate ability in Japanese would not allow me to share adequately in the consumption and reception of Japanese media texts. This was somewhat to be regretted since I had recently spent a considerable amount of time working on a proposal for an ethnographic study on the use made of media texts such as women's magazines and television by the customers in a Japanese ladies hairdresser's. On the other hand, because I live in Japan I felt that it would be difficult to find members of an English language discourse community other than my fellow language teachers on which to carry out ethnographic work. This was for me an important consideration because my strong belief that the position of the analyst and the gap between analyst and other participants were crucial problems to be addressed by CDA had led me to see ethnography as an essential element of any CDA study that I should decide to undertake. Leading practitioners of CDA frequently make the same point. For example, Fairclough states that CDA should incorporate (critical) ethnography (2003: 210) and Wodak goes so far as to claim that CDA always *does* incorporate ethnography (2001: 6). However, most studies carried out under the CDA banner do not in fact do so. I regard this as a considerable weakness of such work since, without a thorough account of the discursive and social practices of participants, it would seem impossible for analysts to know whether their own interpretations of texts, based on their own MR, coincided with those of the other participants or not.

As noted earlier, the research project that I finally settled on involved making some difficult choices about both of the above dilemmas. As for the one regarding the language medium of my study, after much deliberation I decided that in order make the most of my native-speaker ability and background knowledge I should focus on English language, and specifically British, media texts. This led to a consideration of which English language medium to select. The choice of radio rather than other more frequently studied media such as newspapers or television was motivated by a combination of theoretical and methodological considerations. Theoretically, I wanted to focus on a medium where the language formed the major semiotic mode. Much highly valuable work has been published on multimodal discourse analysis in recent years (for example Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; O'Halloran 2004). This work extends the systemic functional model of language viewed as a social semiotic that is associated with Michael Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). This work is closely related to CDA because it is the model of language most frequently drawn on by CDA and the one to which Faircloughian CDA in particular is heavily indebted. However, due to the historical orientation of my particular research question I wanted to, as it were, get back to the basics of CDA by stripping away the other forms of semiosis and focusing exclusively on language.<sup>8</sup>

I also wanted to focus on a body of media texts in which dialogue formed a significant component. Following Bakhtin and Habermas, Fairclough has suggested that a research focus on dialogicality and the public sphere should be one of the themes of CDA research into Language in the New Capitalism (2003: 78). In terms of dialogicality not only is radio news composed largely of interviews – with public figures, experts and members of the public – but also ‘talk’ radio in particular makes great use of the phone-in format. These forms of ‘broadcast talk’ have previously been the subject of a considerable body of discourse and conversation analysis (Scanell 1991; Hutchby 1996; O’Keefe 2006). On the whole though, this work has not been undertaken from a CDA perspective, and therefore the study of such dialogic texts would appear to be a suitably novel focus for my own research. Regarding the media’s role as a public sphere, the question of whether or not any currently existing form of media, the internet included, actually fulfills the requirements of a fully-functioning and democratic public sphere is highly moot. However, I feel that the potential for radio to fulfill a public sphere role, under appropriate conditions of production and consumption, is greater than most other forms of media. For a start, radio is a far cheaper medium than television and thus a more suitable medium for

activists and groups working with limited resources. Moreover, radio is much more amenable to interactivity and shared participation than newspapers, again due to its relative cheapness and far greater degree of dialogicality. While the Internet shares some of radio's advantages, it also has a number of disadvantages such as the cost of access, its susceptibility to political surveillance and control, particularly of users, and the higher level of infrastructure required to support it.<sup>9</sup>

The main practical reason for my choosing radio, and in particular UK-based radio, is that in the last few years the great majority of UK radio stations have begun broadcasting their programmes over the Internet. This has made access from places outside the UK such as Japan, particularly for those with broadband access, far easier than in the days of recent memory when those who wished to listen to the BBC had to strain their ears (and their patience) to hear the underpowered and intermittent World Service signal on short-wave radios. Currently the BBC broadcasts almost all of its domestic output on the Internet twenty-four hours a day. Comprising the output from its eight national and over fifty regional and local stations, this represents a huge amount of programming, much of which is news or news-related. For listeners based outside the UK there are a few restrictions on what is broadcast due to copyright and other contractual reasons. For example, BBC Radio 5 Live's broadcasts of Premiership football matches are not available internationally, although its broadcasts of lower league matches are. However, in terms of news and news-related programmes listeners overseas are at no disadvantage apart, perhaps, from the time difference between the UK and other parts of the world.<sup>10</sup> The situation with respect to receiving the broadcasts of UK commercial radio stations overseas is more mixed. Commercial broadcasters, most of whom rely heavily on pop music to fill up their schedules, have effectively been prevented from broadcasting their signals internationally over the Internet by the music industry organization PPL, which collects and distributes royalties on behalf of recording companies and performers. Since March 2006 PPL has demanded higher fees from stations that choose to broadcast internationally<sup>11</sup> and, rather than pay these fees, many stations have chosen to block access to their broadcasts from overseas IP addresses. However, at the time of my data collection for this study not all commercial stations had yet complied with the PPL regulations, including some that stated on their websites that they had, and so it was possible to record a limited amount of their output. The situation is very much in a state of flux however, with changes happening almost daily. It is likely that in the near future no UK commercial stations will be available to overseas listeners, unless perhaps the

stations decide to charge for access.

### Online Message Boards

One further reason for my decision to focus my research on radio is that many of the BBC's radio channels<sup>12</sup>, and indeed individual programmes, have Internet-based message boards.<sup>13</sup> These are pages on their websites where listeners can post comments about the programmes, ask questions and discuss the issues raised with each other and (less frequently) the programme's producers. Not only do these message boards allow for a considerable amount of audience interactivity and participation, greatly enhancing radio's public sphere role, but they also represent a highly useful resource for CDA analysts. This is because by studying the listeners' messages the analyst can gain valuable insights into how audience members interpret the contents of the programmes and the social problems with which they deal. This in turn gives rise to the possibility of conducting a form of ethnographic research on the (admittedly small and unrepresentative) discourse community composed of those members of the audience who participate in message board discussions. The application of ethnography to such online communities is known as cyberethnography and I believe that this is a very promising new sub-discipline for incorporation into CDA research.

The concept of cyberethnography, and indeed the term itself, is still a relatively new one and as such has not yet acquired a settled meaning (Teli et al. 2007). However, there appears to be general agreement that it refers to the application of ethnographic techniques to the study of social practices, sometimes referred to as cybersociality, that occur in computer-mediated contexts. A further distinctive element of cyberethnographic work is that online and offline spaces, and the performativity associated with them, are seen as being essentially interrelated in complex ways and that these interrelations should themselves be studied. For example, cyberethnographers have compared how communities of learners (such as trainee London taxi drivers) interact online and in real face-to-face situations (Ross 2007). Ross's work is particularly relevant for the present study because he used qualitative discourse analysis techniques to analyse transcripts of message boards discussions. He showed that, in Goffman's terms, the online community represented a 'back-region' in which the participants could take advantage of their pseudonymity to engage in franker interactions than in the 'front-region' of face-to-face interactions (Goffman 1957).

I believe that a broadly similar relationship exists between the speech of profes-

sional broadcasters talking on radio news programmes and the written comments which audience members contribute to the message boards. In this case though, we may perhaps view the relationship more ideologically in terms of Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984). That is to say, in the case of news broadcaster's talk, the language used and the ideologies reflected in the speech are limited in various ways to a small number of officially sanctioned discourses which reflect an instrumental rationality, whereas the comments posed on the message boards are far less constrained and thus much closer to the informal language of the lifeworld of the audience. If this difference develops in line with Habermas' theory, then over time one might expect to observe a gradual colonization of the lifeworld discourse by that of the bureaucratic broadcasting 'system'. That is, one might expect for example that the humour and irony, which is a prominent feature of message board postings, would be gradually eliminated from the message board comments and replaced by more formal language. Indeed, the fact that the message boards are constantly subject to 'moderation' by the BBC's staff suggests that the system has considerable control over the voices from the lifeworld that get represented. There is evidence that this is the case such as, for example, when a listener sometimes posts a message complaining about the deletion or blocking of one of his or her previous posts. Although this study does not have a diachronic dimension and thus cannot provide a definitive answer regarding the colonization process, my impression is that if anything, conversely, the colonization is happening in the reverse direction, with broadcasters slowly beginning to allow more humorous or ironic comments into their speech. Whether this tendency, which I would regard as being in the direction of what Fairclough calls the 'conversationalisation' or 'informalisation' of media discourse, represents a colonization of the system by the lifeworld or an appropriation of the latter by the former is another interesting question and one which I would like to address in this project.

The use of humour and irony referred to above is another noticeable aspect of the difference between the language used by the news broadcasters and that used by the message board contributors. In short, whereas professional broadcasters and others who are interviewed on radio news programmes seldom use humorous or ironic language, except at certain predictable moments such as when one newsreader may make an ironic comment to a weather forecaster at the conclusion of a (mildly) bad weather forecast, these rhetorical devices are a pervasive feature of the postings on message boards. One of the discourse analytic aims of this project is to examine

precisely when, how and why humour and irony are employed and what ideological significance their use may have.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have been able to do no more than offer a sketch of some of the key theoretical and methodological issues underlying my research project. I have discussed the role that CDA may be able to play in furthering critical media literacy education, while being reflexively aware of its own literacy practices, and suggested that autoethnography might offer a useful alternative mode for reporting on CDA research. I have also described my reasons for choosing the topic of youth crime and the medium of British radio broadcasts as the focus for my research data, and pointed out some of the features of this data, in particular the online message boards associated with the radio programmes in which the lifeworld of the audience is seen to emerge within the systems discourse of the broadcasting organization, taking in particular the forms of humour and irony. Clearly, as this work is at a very early stage there is much more to be reported. Accordingly, in the second part of this series of papers I intend to continue this work by giving a detailed account of the data-collection process and the textual analysis methodology.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See for example G. Maclean, 'In the hood' *The Guardian Unlimited* (13/5/2005) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,1482816,00.html> (accessed 11/11/07)
- <sup>2</sup> Another important common feature is a methodological commitment to interdisciplinarity (Weiss and Wodak 2003).
- <sup>3</sup> These include the *Journal of Language and Politics* (from 2002), *Critical Discourse Studies* (from 2004), *Studies in Language and Capitalism* (from 2006), *Journal for Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* (from 2006) and *Discourse and Communication* (from 2007). In comparison, the erstwhile 'house journal' for CDA, *Discourse & Society* seems positively ancient having been first published in 1990. The new book series *Critical Studies in Discourse* recently launched by Routledge should also be mentioned here.
- <sup>4</sup> See for example Jessop (2004). But for a recent highly lucid introduction see Richardson (2007).
- <sup>5</sup> This is based on the 'explanatory critique' approach of the critical realist Roy Bhaskar (1986). However, as far as I am aware, and Fairclough's statement notwithstanding, no

- published CDA study has yet made use of this approach, though see Corson (1997).
- <sup>6</sup> *Discourse & Society* <http://das.sagepub.com/> (accessed 11/11/2007)
  - <sup>7</sup> See for example Versheuren (2001: 68); Slembrouk (2001: 38-9).
  - <sup>8</sup> Of course as well as the spoken word sound and music also form a significant meaning potential for radio broadcasts.
  - <sup>9</sup> There are clockwork radios but as far as I know not, yet, clockwork Internet-connected computers.
  - <sup>10</sup> Japan is eight hours ahead of GMT, nine hours ahead of BST. For midnight-oil burning scholars such as myself this is more of an advantage than not.
  - <sup>11</sup> See <http://www.radiofeeds.co.uk/> (accessed 11/11/2007)
  - <sup>12</sup> Unlike the BBC, none of the commercial stations from which recordings were made for this project had message boards on their websites, though usually they did have a page for listeners to submit email messages to the station. The reason why commercial stations do not have message boards is unclear but may simply be due to the expense of paying staff to moderate them.
  - <sup>13</sup> These are sometimes referred to by other names, such as Internet forums, bulletin boards or discussion groups, but on the BBC websites they are usually called message boards, though sometimes the pages or links to them from other pages are labelled 'Have your say'.

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