

## **Teaching Reading with a Critical Attitude: Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Raise EFL University Students' Critical Language Awareness (CLA)**

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### **Abstract**

This study was planned to investigate the importance of raising students' critical thinking through explicit teaching of some techniques of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This study aimed to detect any change in the English BA students' abilities in revealing the hidden layers of meaning implied in the texts. There was an attempt in this study to investigate any change both in students' views toward learning English language and in their critical language awareness (CLA) before and after teaching critical reading (CR) through CDA techniques. To this end, three paired news articles were provided from different online news sources. Each pair of the first two pairs of news articles dealt with the same subject. Two articles of each pair were selected from two different news sources; online editions of Press TV and BBC. These news sources usually have different perspectives on different issues. The third pair of news reports which had similar subjects was selected from the English newspaper of New York Times. The participants were 60 BA English students studying in University of Kashan. They studied in the fifth and seventh terms. Before teaching CDA techniques, students were asked to analyze these articles critically. After teaching these techniques, they analyzed the same texts for the second time. Then they responded to a questionnaire to reveal any change in their attitudes toward English language learning or any increase in their motivation to learn it. After the examination of students' analyses and the investigation of their answers given to the questionnaire, it was revealed that CLA of about 90% of students increased. Their motivation also increased in learning English language after becoming familiar with the field of CDA.

### **1. Introduction**

In the world people try hard to materialize their wishes. Language is a very powerful tool they use as a weapon to reach their ends. Language is a tool for conveying information, ideologies and emotions. Language and discourse construct, regulate and control knowledge, social relations and institutions (Luke, 2003). The text whether written or oral is a multidimensional structure and is layered like a "sheet of plywood." Texts consist of syntax, lexicon, grammar, morphology, phonology and semantics.

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However, understanding grammar and lexicon does not lead to the understanding of text. Finding out the author's worldview, the historical, social and cultural background of the text is essential. In fact, comprehension of meaning lies not in the text itself but in the complex interaction between the author's intent and the reader's ability to decode author's intent (Dellinger, 1995).

Foreign language learners who are in contact with a new language and culture act as transmitters of foreign thoughts and beliefs to their own culture. They should become aware of the latent layers of meaning within texts since power-hungry men cannot misuse learners' ignorance and cannot cunningly impose their ideologies and thoughts on them. In the absence of students' critical thinking, dominant groups can win thoughts and hearts of the educated group of a society who have vital roles in their own country. Therefore, they have the elite's mentalities of the society under their control and can exploit and colonize the country and at the same time destroy its culture, identity and civilization.

In order to reach critical thinking, in this study students were taught critical reading (CR) by means of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to raise their critical language awareness (CLA). The purpose of an education which uses CDA is developing the learners' capacities to examine and judge the world carefully and, if necessary, to change it. This purpose, however, is not fulfilled in foreign language programs. According to Van Dijk and Pennycook (as cited in Cots, 2006), the introduction of CDA in language classes does not necessarily involve a change in teaching method or techniques. Rather, CDA offers a new perspective on language which considers that language use (a) is questionable and problematic (b) reflects social/ideological processes and (c) at the same time, affect those processes.

The aim of this study was to see the effect of teaching CDA techniques on the increase of students' CLA after the examination of their critical analyses of the newspapers before and after teaching CDA principles. The aim also was to investigate the effect of teaching CDA on students' attitudes about learning English language.

To the best of researchers' knowledge, in no previous study Van Dijk's (1998) model or any other CDA models in Iran were taught in order to raise students' CLA. These models have been used by experts for individual critical discourse analyses. It should be taken into consideration that these analyses may be contaminated by individual prejudgments and predispositions as Widdowson (1998) believes. Therefore, the objective of this study was teaching an adaptation of some of the techniques of Van Dijk's (1998) model to English students of the University of Kashan to examine its effect on raising students' CLA. The study addresses the following questions:

1. Does teaching CDA techniques help raise students' CLA?
2. Does teaching CDA techniques make reading more interesting and motivating for students?
3. How is the level of our English language students' critical thinking?

## **2. Review of literature**

### **2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Some Related Concepts**

According to Dijk (2006), manipulation as one of the crucial concepts of CDA is different from legitimate mind control as in persuasion. It is illegitimate control by means of discourse. By analyzing a discourse it is revealed if it is ideological or not. When there are us/them polarization and a systematic negative representation of others in terms of negative values and actions, that discourse is manipulative. The distinctive feature of CDA, according to Widdowson (1998), is its commitment to social justice. CDA tries to reveal how language is used and abused in the exercise of power and the suppression of human rights.

The most effective practitioners in the development of CDA are van Dijk, Wodak and Fairclough. Their views are briefly explained respectively. Van Dijk has mostly worked in the domain of critical analysis of media discourse. The main feature of Dijk's (1988) framework is considering a comprehensive analysis not only at the textual and structural level of media discourse but analysis at the production and comprehension level. Discourse sociolinguistics is one of the directions in CDA associated with Wodak and her colleagues.

According to Wodak (cited in shyholislami, 2001) in discourse sociolinguistics not only text is studied in context but both text and context have equal importance. Fairclough's (cited in shyholislami, 2001) approach to language and discourse is called critical language study. In his approach by focusing on language his aim is to raise consciousness of exploitative social relations. This approach of CDA focuses on three aspects in order to analyze any communicative event. They are text (e.g. a news report), discourse practice (e.g. the process of production and consumption), and sociocultural practice (e.g. social and cultural structures which raise the communicative event).

### **2.2 Critical Language Awareness (CLA)**

CLA springs out of language awareness (LA). LA emerged as a movement in the UK in the beginning of the 1980s. Language awareness is a mental and internal capacity which learner gradually develops it by giving motivated and conscious attention to language in use to discover its patterns. It is also a pedagogic approach which helps learners to learn how languages work. A key feature of language awareness approach is that learners "discover language for themselves." It helps to develop a spirit of enquiry. Language awareness is not an explicit way of teaching. It is not taught by teacher or the book, it is developed by the learner. One of the features of LA is that because learners put their energy and attention in the learning process, a better learning happens. Another feature is learners' awareness of the difference between their own performance and native speaker's performance by paying deliberate attention to language features. This makes learners more ready to acquire language features because these features have become more salient into their eyes.

CLA refers to the same approach, but the focus is on the relationship between language and social context. In CLA the focus is on the ways in which language represents the world and reflects and constructs social relations (Clark and Ivanic 1999). CLA is defined more fully in the following paragraph.

CLA is essentially a pedagogic procedure indebted to critical discourse analysis and language awareness respectively. From CDA is derived a view of discourse as shaped by relations of power;

from LA the interest in examining language as a specific object of study. Therefore, CLA exemplifies CDA in teaching contexts while strengthening basic principles of LA (Wallace, 1999). In fact, CLA is both a pedagogical approach and an explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning. In this study, CLA refers to the internal capacity which is developed by studying CDA.

The nature of contemporary society makes CLA more necessary than ever in order to create citizens for an effective democracy. Janks and Ivanic (cited in Svalberg, 2000) see CLA as contributing to emancipatory discourse i.e. “using language, along with other aspects of social practice, in a way which moves toward greater freedom and respect for all people, including ourselves.” Putting CLA within a framework of critical pedagogy, Wallace (cited in Svalberg, 2000) calls it “the pedagogical arm of critical discourse analysis”, which, as she points out, draws on educational and social theory, and on linguistics. Referring to the “new global capitalism”, Fairclough (cited in Svalberg, 2000) believes a critical awareness of the role of discourse is required for personal success and social change in such a society, and it is the role of language education to promote such awareness. According to Fairclough (1995, p. 222), CLA is a prerequisite for effective citizenship and a democratic way of life. CLA not only highlights non-transparent aspects of the social function of language but it pays attention to linguistic dimensions of educational failure or inadequacies in foreign language learning (Fairclough 1995, p. 224).

### **2.3 Previous Studies Done on Critical Approaches**

According to Boston (2002), many teachers already deal with CDA in their classrooms. When students are asked to give their opinions about a text, to compare the text situation with their own situation a CDA analysis is performed. In a study done by Cots (2006) CDA was used in a foreign language class. Students needed to develop simultaneously three types of competence: user, analyst, and teacher (Wright & Bolitho as cited in Cots, 2006). They also should do three types of activities designed based on Fairclough analytical framework. In his study Cots (2006) wanted to show that choices of the teachers or materials developers in text selection could be critically analyzed. Teachers and learners could do such an analysis together in the classroom. Cots’s (2006) goal in his study was to present CDA as a complementary model for analyzing language use and for designing language learning activities. In a case study done by Yang (2004), seven promotional radio shows as data were analyzed by means of CDA under Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework. The findings revealed that although radio shows on women’s health were entertaining and educational they were produced to promote one product—Juice Plus. Therefore, according to Yang (2004), the shows had an ideologically biased base, and they reflected the social influence of marketization in discourse. The results demonstrated the importance of CDA in order to raise people’s critical awareness of language.

In another study done by Fredricks (2007), critical pedagogy was implemented in a reading program in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Tajik students learned in school that concepts such as God and faith did not exist while concurrently learning the values of Islam at home. Teachers, however, were also using their freedom to influence on pedagogy. Therefore, they could choose course content which mirrored their students’ interests and goals. According to Fredricks (2007), both teachers and students gained cultural awareness by discussing on texts. In this process, teachers and students could make arguments about each other’s biases and views while they acquired valuable knowledge of each other’s world views.

Mckinney (as cited in Wallace, 1999) developed a critical reading course for historically disadvantaged students, colored South African students. The aim of the course was enabling students to become critically aware of the social and political conditions in which they were caught and to use this awareness to affect on these conditions. According to Wallace (1999), one of the results of such a course was to end the apartheid status of the reading class itself.

Correia (2006) has counted a number of reasons why reading comprehension exercises should not be used as the only kind of reading activity in the classroom. Because firstly according to Davies (cited in Correia, 2006), reading comprehension exercises involves passive reading in which students merely have to locate the information in the text to answer to a question. Secondly, according to Tomitch (cited in Correia, 2006), such tasks do not encourage students to read between the lines or question the authenticity of the information. Thirdly, these tasks generally refer only to parts of the text, not to the whole text. Finally, such tasks especially for young learners are neither challenging nor fun.

In Correia's (2006) study, the students' feedback revealed that in spite of their fluency in L1 and L2, they tended to accept printed material without questioning the sincerity or bias of the text. Students also said that they considered themselves critical readers in their first language. However, when reading EFL texts, they felt they needed help to come up with reading between the lines. Correia (2006) believes although developing critical reading skills can be time-consuming and difficult for EFL students but as working with texts in EFL reading classes in this way should help EFL readers feel they have options in the way they choose to read the text and to help them feel in a more equal relationship with the writer.

In a study done by IÇMEZ (2009) critical reading (CR) practices were adapted to traditional EFL reading lessons to increase students' motivations. CLA procedures, which involve asking the students to decide on the texts for analysis and encouraging them to express their positions related to the texts analyzed, result in an increase in students' motivations. Based on these points, CR suggests relating the learning experience to the students' own realities, which affects text selection, student involvement and classroom communication.

In a study done by Zingraf (2003), methods of CDA were used by non-native speakers of English to analyze texts. In this study, university students started increasing their critical language awareness and a change in their attitude toward texts extracted from the British press. The result of this study indicates that students should be equipped with the necessary critical tools in order not to be manipulated with texts loaded with ideologies. Teachers and translators should also have a critical way of thinking about what they teach and translate in foreign language.

Zingraf (2003) believes the view of texts as "vehicles for linguistic structure" is the way texts are presented to foreign language learners. Zingraf (2003) states because of unawareness of the ideological load of certain expressions or words in authentic second language texts, and because of unawareness of their manipulative effect on the readers' beliefs, EFL university learners do not question anything of the foreign language.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

The participants of this study were selected from a group with an intermediate and advanced proficiency level of English language who were able to cope with the vocabulary and grammatical

points of news articles. The participants were 60 students of Kashan University. They are BA students who are studying English language. They were studying in the fifth and seventh terms in two different classes.

### **3.2 Instruments**

#### 3.2.1 News Reports

Three pairs of online news articles were selected as authentic texts which were biased and ideologically loaded. News is one of the genres surrounded in students' daily life. This genre has the potential of being manipulated. News sources are in the hands of dominant groups or are related with them and the news articles disseminate their ideologies. A genre like story is not very public as news is and it is not also in the hands of groups with power. The authentic texts reflect real-life situations. These kinds of texts are more practical while they reflect the events which happen in daily life. Another important aspect of authenticity is that it makes students more motivated because learning a text which is related to what happens around them than an unauthentic text which is distant from real life situations is more effective on the students' motivations. In fact the texts amenable to CDA were selected. The researchers' aim of selecting pairs of articles is that the differences of perspectives in depicting the same subject or ideological nuances of representation of two similar situations from the same perspective become evident for students. Two pairs of news reports, each pair dealing with the same subject, are selected from two different newspapers; Iranian newspaper of Press TV and English newspaper of BBC which their views are mostly in conflict. The third pair of news reports dealing with the similar but not the same subject is selected from the English newspaper of New York Times. These newspapers are famous ones used mostly by the public. The view point of these newspapers is in conflict about political issues.

The subjects of news reports are selected from controversial ones. Controversial issues have a higher possibility of being biased.

Duzer and Florez (1999) suggest teachers who want to make critical thinking and critical analysis a regular part of all classroom work they should change the emphasis from finding a right answer to eliciting ranges of interpretation. Following their suggestions in this study students could analyze the texts based on the techniques they have learned. They were not limited by a range of questions.

In this study, there has been an attempt to take all of these factors into consideration i.e. selecting the shorter texts and teaching a limited number of CDA techniques, the selected texts are also taken from newspapers which are among community texts. The subject of one pair of the newspaper articles is about Iran's nuclear issue, that of other pair is about the arrest of UK yacht crew in Iran's waters and the subjects of the last pair of news stories are about the killing of a Palestinian baby girl by Israelis and killing of an Israeli baby by Palestinians.

#### 3.2.2 Questionnaire

Following the collection of the students' analyses, students were also given a questionnaire provided by the researchers to elicit students' feedback after the treatment. The questionnaire contained six questions in which students should have expressed whether after learning CDA techniques their opinion had changed toward English language or the phenomenon of the language itself. The

questionnaire also provided information about both the effect of teaching CDA techniques on students' opinions about the necessity of learning CDA in life and any increase in their motivation to learn English language. The aim of giving questionnaires was to see if the students' feedbacks confirmed the researchers' findings gained by comparing the students' first and second analyses of the news articles. The aim of comparing the students' pre- and post-treatment was to see if students' CLA increased or not. The questionnaire is available in the Appendix B.

### **3.3 Procedures**

To find out their initial level of CLA, students were asked to analyze the news reports. They should analyze the texts as their class assignment for which they would get marks. In fact, the researchers aimed not to let students know that they were the subjects of the study. As a result, the students would work seriously and so the results would be more reliable. Introducing the project as the class assignment led students to work harder and more seriously in order to get the mark. At the beginning, they were asked to write in which side the writers of the articles wrote for or against. They also were supposed to justify their claims by providing linguistic evidence from the texts. They should analyze the texts at home because there was not any time limitation and they could analyze the texts with more care without any pressure. There were a number of reasons for lack of explanations about the purpose of the assignment and lack of critical questions on the texts. Firstly, the teacher tried not to draw attention to the critical points of the texts. He also aimed to examine the students' level of CLA before teaching CDA techniques. Learners were not explicitly informed of what was expected of them or what the aim of the study was, so that they would not be biased in their interpretations of the texts. In this way, all different views were welcome and each student could express and support their own claims. In fact, providing critical questions would limit students' way of thinking and lead them to think in a particular direction. The teacher also did not want to impose his own views on the students.

In the next session, the teacher introduced the field of CDA to the students and explained some of the CDA techniques to students. There are many CDA tools to be used for text analysis and analysts differ among themselves in the choice of these tools. Huckin (1997) points out that not every CDA concept is equally useful when analyzing texts and the reader should choose only those which are most interesting from a critical perspective and reveal writer's purposes. Van Dijk's (1998) model is well-established for news studying but is very detailed. Therefore, the techniques the teacher selected were an adaptation of Van Dijk's (1998) model introduced by Shams (2005).

## **4. Results**

For the first two pairs of articles, in the first version students could mostly recognize in what side the writer was interested. For the first two pairs that were about the nuclear situation of Iran and the arrest of English boatmen in Iranian waters respectively, the news writers provided mostly quotes from the side they were in favor of them. This way of presenting an event, which is called "bias of selection," helped students to realize the side the writer was interested in. In fact, the articles were selected from those articles which the writers' biased ideologies were nearly easily recognizable. The students might have the ability of realizing the biased nature of the texts in general but they were not aware of the lexical, grammatical or rhetorical roles in making writers' biased expressions. The aim of this study was to make students consciously aware of the roles of linguistic features in transforming knowledge or in presenting ideologies. The teacher's aimed to unveil the power of language which could be used by

people as a weapon in seizing or maintaining power.

In fact, students did not have a clear framework in their mind to pave the way for them to analyze the texts in an organized way. In their first versions, some students classified the sentences as the evidence to identify the writer's biased stance. However, they could not refer to the connotations of the words carried, to the part of syntactic categories or word order in portraying the writers' ideologies. They were not aware of the role of rhetorical elements like simile or metaphor in presenting the writers' beliefs. In fact, before becoming familiar with the CDA, students knew these linguistic elements just as innocent vehicles of communication. In their first analyses, sometimes students paraphrase the story to justify their claims. After becoming familiar with CDA, they could refer to those specific critical elements representing the writer's ideological stance.

After comparing the first and the second versions of analyses, it was revealed that about 90 % of students' CLA was raised. Students' attentions were drawn to linguistic elements and their roles they played in presenting writers' thoughts and beliefs. By comparing and contrasting pairs of news articles, they were able to find out the writers' mental directions.

What is considerable about the students' analyses of the last pair of the articles was that most students could not guess of which side each article is in favor. They guessed the article with the title "Palestinians Kill Baby Girl in West Bank" was against Palestinians and the article with the title "Littlest Victim in the Mideast: Israeli Guns Kill 4-Month-Old" was in favor of them. What is interesting is that after teaching CDA techniques, most of these students could judge correctly that both of the articles were written in favor of Israelis and against Palestinians. This matter again revealed the significant impact of teaching CDA on students' way of thinking and judgment.

Another considerable point is that in the second version, most students could not analyze the texts based on the CDA techniques. Almost all of them, however, believed that their abilities to analyze the texts increased. They could understand the negative or positive loads of special clues in the texts. However, most of them did not reach the mastery to name the technical terms in their analyses. This can be attributed to the limited time they practiced CDA techniques. CDA techniques were taught to them just for one session.

About 10% of students did not analyze the text based on the linguistic elements. They analyzed the texts by paraphrasing the articles in the second version. However, all of them in their questionnaires pointed out that their abilities of analysis increased. It seems their understandings of the texts increased but their capabilities of critical analyses did not increase. In fact, not only they but all students need more practice in CDA techniques to do a more detailed analysis. The first and second versions of one of the students' analyses are as follows:

"The first article is in favor of Iran, because it is about detaining of British nationals on Iran's water and it states that there had been an espionage device confiscated from them. These facts convey no negative meaning toward Iran."

"It is in favor of Iran, because 1) confronting foreign forces was among the IRGC's duties. 2) Two more times that naval forces were arrested espionage devices were confiscated from them. 3) Also the crews have extensive experiences and it was not their first time. "



It is obvious that for both versions of analysis, the student did not analyze the text based on the functions of linguistic elements.

Based on the examination of both students' analyses and their answers to questionnaires, it can be concluded that about 90% of students' CLA rose after becoming familiar with CDA techniques. Although they could not analyze the articles based on the linguistic elements in detail and their analyses were weak, their beliefs about discourse and language elements changed. Students were not ignorant readers of the texts any more. As they pointed out, their opinions changed about the phenomenon of language and particularly learning English language. In order to have better analyses, students need to work on the CDA field for a longer term.

## 5. Conclusion

According to Brown (2004), teachers are responsible for giving students opportunities to learn about important social and moral issues and to analyze all sides of an issue. A language class is an ideal place for offering information on different topics. The objectives of a curriculum should not be limited to linguistic factors alone, but also include developing the art of critical thinking. To this end, in this study there was an attempt to make students familiar with the critical domain and encourage them to use CDA principles in analyzing texts. Students were asked to analyze a number of news articles before becoming familiar with critical field. Three paired on-line news articles were distributed among 60 students of University of Kashan. They were BA students studying English language in the fifth and seventh terms. They possessed a level of language proficiency to read English texts by themselves. The articles were ideologically biased, clearly enough to give students a sufficient number of clues as to the ideological position of the news writers. The students were supposed to read the articles and express their opinions about the side the writer of each article was biased for or against. They should provide linguistic clues to justify their claims. After analyzing the texts in the following session, their teacher made them familiar with the field of CDA and taught them a number of CDA techniques for analyzing texts. Then they should analyze the same texts based on CDA techniques derived from Van Dijk's (1998) framework which was taught by their teacher. The students learned that critical reading required going beyond textual meaning to search, explain, and evaluate the hidden meanings, including the author's purpose, values, and attitudes. The techniques introduced by Shams (2005) were an adaptation from Van Dijk's (1998) model. For the second time, students analyzed critically the same texts on their own using CDA techniques to identify ideological manipulations exercised in texts. After comparing the two versions of students' analyses, it was revealed that after teaching CDA techniques students' CLA increased and students got more positive attitudes toward English language learning and the phenomenon of language. The first version of their analyses revealed that they possessed a low level of critical language awareness. It was observed after learning CDA principles, students analyzed the texts in a more organized way. In the first version of their analyses, they rewrote the same sentences of the texts or paraphrased the story to provide evidence to justify their claims or they referred to a limited number of words which had ideological load. In the second version, after learning the techniques, however, they could provide more tangible clues such as the words with negative or positive loads of meaning or passive or active voice of verbs and the relation of these linguistic elements with the ideology of the writer. In fact, based on the gathered data, the CLA of about 90% of students rose after learning CDA principles. They also answered a questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to see if students' answers confirmed the researchers' assessment about the increase of students' CLA. It was observed that almost all of them confirmed the researchers' findings. The students believed that their

abilities to analyze texts critically increased. All of the students provided positive answers to all questions except the fourth question in which students were asked if they were interested in analyzing texts. Some of them gave negative answers which can be attributed to the boring nature of news articles and political subjects. The students also believed that possessing critical thinking was important in their lives. They also believed that their opinions changed about English language. Language was no more a shallow phenomenon for students, which a number of its words or grammatical points just should be memorized, but it turned into a deep means of communication which helped them challenge their minds.

According to Wallace (2005), “English language carries too much baggage both from its colonial history as well as through its current global dominance” (p.46). It calls the need to learn CDA to gain not only greater awareness of discriminatory forms of language but ultimately greater control over a wider range of language uses in daily life. Students became aware that language has the potentiality to distort the face of truth while the reader is unaware. CDA can be illuminative of the ways ideologies work within the texts which surround us in daily life. According to Fairclough (1995), the motivation of critical analysis is not only critique but emancipation. CDA should be a way to democracy.

It should be mentioned that students’ judgments as the social agents with a constructive role in their society can be decisive in the destiny of their country. Therefore, teaching CDA techniques to all of people is more urgent than ever since in modern society hungry-power men try to misuse people’s ignorance for their own interests. Language has the capability of winning people’s hearts and mastering their thoughts. Such potentialities in language requires the need to give language and language related issues more attention especially in educational systems and this plays a very significant role in language learning and teaching.

Teaching CDA is the opposite of parrot learning, blind memorization and superficial comprehension. This way of teaching turns passive students to critical and creative ones. Learning CDA techniques is essential for EFL learners to avoid being manipulated by foreign writers and publishers. Learning these skills leads to the development of both linguistic and intellectual capabilities. Critical field increases students’ awareness of social, cultural and political situations of the society the text comes from. The knowledge of CDA skills also helps students to feel more confident in expressing their views and to be critical of writers and speakers especially dominant groups.

Teachers most often choose safe texts. While in reading, tasks are just limited to the analysis of linguistic structures or new vocabulary items and readers have a rather passive position. In academic settings, critical thinking has received little attention. In this study, there was an attempt to change this situation. The advantage of performing such a method in the class was providing an opportunity for students to improve their writing abilities as well as gaining a deeper understanding of the language surrounding them in everyday life.

## **6. Discussion and Implications**

In this part the three research questions provided in chapter one are answered and implications of the study are presented. In the following part based on the findings, the three research questions provided in chapter one are answered to.

### **6.1. Does teaching critical discourse analysis techniques help raise students' critical language awareness?**

After the comparison of students' analyses of news reports before and after learning CDA techniques, changes can be observed in the second version of analyses. In the first version of analyses, students referred often to quotes or a very limited number of words with connotations in order to justify their assumptions about the author's direction of thought in each text. They mostly repeated the same sentences of news reports, paraphrased the stories, or rewrote the quotations again. In fact, they could not go beyond the surface of the text to prove their claims. After teaching CDA techniques, it could be observed in the second version of students' analyses they became able to argue for their claims by referring to the critical linguistic clues. They could move into depth of texts to uncover the hidden layers of meanings of the words or the special forms of grammatical structures. Based on the results gathered and the students' remarks elicited from the questionnaires, teaching CDA techniques increased students' CLA. Gary (2007) states many people possess some kind of "natural" CLA from a young age. Therefore, students possessed a limited CLA as their natural CLA that after learning CDA techniques increased.

### **6.2. Does teaching critical discourse analysis (CDA) techniques make reading more interesting and motivating for students?**

The students' answers to the second, the third and the sixth questions of the questionnaires indicated that about 99% of students were more motivated and more interested in reading the texts after becoming familiar with the CDA field. Students became more interested in the phenomenon of language and learning English language after familiarity with CDA. Students' answers given to the second question indicated that some of the students did not like to analyze texts very much. This can be attributed to the political nature of the articles which is very dull and devoid of fun and excitement.

### **6.3. What is the level of our English language students' critical thinking?**

Based on the first versions of students' analyses and comparing them with their second analyses and also based on the students' answers to the questionnaires, it can be reckoned that students' CLA before learning the CDA principles is not very satisfying. It can be observed in the students' first analyses that they had a limited ability of criticizing the texts without sufficient text's critical clues as the supporting details of their arguments. Their analyses revealed that their abilities of critical thinking were very limited.

In the first analyses, except for a few cases, all the students' analyses were unsatisfactory. However, it should not be ignored that students had two news articles on the same or similar topics approached from two different perspectives since approaching the texts in this way made the differences of pairs of articles more apparent. It helped students to identify the differences between two versions more easily and to criticize the texts better than a time when they were supposed to analyze only one version of each article. As one of the students admitted in the questionnaire, after learning CDA principles she reached the ability to support her position or to argue against her opposite ideas. In fact, without explicit teaching of CDA principles our students were not able to criticize texts.

Some students did not provide satisfactory analyses even after learning CDA principles. This matter can be partly attributed to their laziness. Because in the present educational systems students are

not accustomed to challenge their minds in language learning and they are used to learning language in a passive way. Therefore, they might escape from challenging issues. Students should frequently answer a range of reading comprehension questions which do not require to use reason or to interpret or discover hidden and new levels of meaning. In fact, this situation requires a revision in our educational systems to raise critical students who would not be satisfied to become mental slaves to others' thoughts and ideologies.

Students could compare each subject from two perspectives. In the articles, mostly just one side was given voice and there was a very limited number of quotes from the opposite side. These matters helped students to find out the side each writer was interested in and also the differences of each article in comparison with its counterpart. The students, however, in the first version of their analyses could not provide the linguistic elements which were critically significant and ideologically loaded. After teaching CDA, students could provide these elements better.

Before becoming familiar with critical field, students considered texts as facts or unquestionable truths because they were printed. Lack of students' critical thinking may be the reason of their inability to analyze critically the contents of the foreign language they were learning. As their answers to questions indicated, students thought any information of foreign language was in black and white before becoming familiar with CDA. They were unaware of both the ideological load of certain expressions or words in authentic second language texts and their manipulative effect on beliefs. EFL university learners had an increase in their critical awareness of language after becoming familiar with critical field since they reached an awareness of the complexity of texts.

Teaching CDA had a positive influence on students' attitudes about English language and English language learning issues. They also became more motivated to learn English language. CDA helped them to build a link between the classroom and their own world. The increase of students' competence in reading skills and CLA which can be applicable in all areas of learners' lives increased their motivations. Asking students to decide on the texts for analysis and encouraging them to express their positions related to the texts, resulted in an increase in students' motivations.

## **7. Implications of the Study**

This study has some significant points in addition to a number of theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, the significant points of this study and then the implications are presented. In most of studies using CDA, merely the experts' points of view are presented. It was believed that analyzer and reader had the same interpretations and; therefore, there was no need to ask for the reader's opinions. In this study, there was a shift in the perspective. The attempt was to see the nature of reader's analysis. This study required both teaching CDA to students and considering their opinions. Another significant point of this study is that the teacher did not limit the students in their analyses by making them answer a particular number of critical questions since questions somehow limit students' mentalities or guide them to think in a special way. The teacher let students analyze the texts critically in any way they liked. He himself did not express his opinion to affect students' mentalities. The attempt was to observe the pure effect of teaching CDA principles on the students' power of analysis.

A problem with CDA, according to O'regan (2002), is that it imposes final reading instead of releasing readings of texts. According to O'regan (2002), the first principle in any educational context should be the act of releasing readings. In fact, in text analysis there should be a range of interpretations for a single text instead of focusing to uncover a special fact. Duzer and Florez (1999) in introducing

some guidelines for those who want to teach critical analysis also suggested that teachers should not expect students to give a right answer but let them give a range of interpretations. Another significant point of this study is that the students were allowed to interpret the texts as they liked and they were not obliged to offer any particular interpretation. This study can be helpful to put emphasis on the teaching of the complexities of language to the students. The findings call attention to this fact that the explicit instruction of techniques not only made students aware of the flexibility of language in embracing thoughts, beliefs and ideologies of people but as the results of questionnaires revealed, it also increased their motivations to learn English language and changed their attitudes about language and language learning. Language is not considered a taken-for-granted and shallow phenomenon any more. As it was mentioned before, language in human communities is the main vehicle of communication and has a vital part in human life and; therefore, familiarity with its intricacies helps language users to be more successful in their communications.

The increase of people's CLA as a result of learning CDA techniques and becoming aware of the functions of language in life helps them to possess a critical mind. As a result, they not only reach the ability to analyze the discourses around them to realize the traces of ideologies or biases, to find what is right or wrong, but they can also gain the ability of argumentation to defend their beliefs and ideologies. Having a critical mind helps every man to avoid being the follower of every thought or belief blindly. Having critical mind is essential for the modern man to cope with mental slavery and being a passive creature. It helps people to make a world where the poor and the oppressed are not subject to discrimination and exploitation any more. Empowerment is the outcome of critical approaches to language education. Language learning cannot be reduced to code-breaking. Having critical mind empowers students to explore the possibilities of contesting the discourses that marginalize them.

Among implications of this study is that the texts selected for teaching or publication should not be just informational, they also should have the flexibility of analysis since the teacher can use them to teach layers of language. In teaching language, there should be not only factual questions but also inferential ones. The texts should have the potentiality to invite the students' attentions not only to their surface but to their depths. For instance, if English language teachers want to explain passive voice to the students they should not merely give the definition of passive voice and rely on some mechanical exercises. They should also explicate the functions of passive voice. According to Van Dijk (1998), passive voice has semantic, cognitive, interactional and socio-political functions. It is used to maintain topic continuity or to regulate the description of agency and responsibility for action for instance de-emphasizing the agent's role. Passivization is used to focus on the object or target of an action, or hide (or expressing ignorance about) the identity of the agent. Its cognitive function manipulates minds by decreasing the focus on responsible agents, increasing focus on objects. It naturalizes intentional actions as events. In its socio-political function, which is face-keeping, passive voice de-emphasizes the responsible agency for negative actions or their failure. It de-emphasizes or obscures in-group responsibility for negative action. The teacher should elaborate on such functions of linguistic elements in life.

The implication of this study for teachers is that they can integrate critical activities into the teaching and learning process and in this way they can assist their students in their critical thinking activities. By doing so, they can pave the way for the ultimate goal of educational system which is students' "self actualization." Self-actualization refers to the motive to realize all of one's potentialities. It is the only real motive a person has, all others being merely manifestations of it. In teaching reading

strategies, teachers should not limit themselves to teaching scanning or skimming but they should also teach inferencing, evaluating, explaining and these higher-order thinking processes in critical reading. It is also significant to instruct critical principles to teachers in order to prepare them to interrogate harmful ideologies and practices.

Another implication of this study is the increase of students' sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life and the relationship between language and social context. CLA as a mental and internal capacity develops a spirit of enquiry because learners put their energy and attention in the learning process and therefore better learning happens. People tend to consider the text as the true reflections of realities and facts and have a tendency to see only what meets the eyes. Another implication of a CDA of this type is attempting to create a sensitivity and consciousness about the invisible fabricated and manipulative nature of texts. By learning critical approach students attempt to take a closer than indifferent look at what is usually taken for granted. They read between the lines or question the authenticity of the information and they deal with challenging rather than passive tasks. Using CDA in our teaching environment can prevent mental sluggishness and carelessness as a disease prevalent among people and especially students. An implication of this study is helping students enhance different competencies such as thoughtfulness, insightfulness, argumentation and critical thinking.

Another implication of this study is that teaching critical ways of thinking can make independent students. By learning critical techniques students learn to rely on their mental capacities and as its result they become more assertive and more confident. Teaching cannot cause or force learning. Teaching can encourage and guide learning. CLA is a way to autonomy. Van Lier (as cited in Soons, 2008) writes "the autonomous learner must be able to make significant decisions about what is to be learned, as well as how and when to do it. Further, the autonomous learner is responsible for learning as well as lack of learning..." Learner engagement in language learning is essential to have CLA which leads to have more mentally active students. It is also evident that learners should take the responsibility of their learning to be autonomous learners. Having a critical mind leads to the learners' destruction of dependency on their teachers or other authorities. It widens students' perspective toward life. Becoming critically aware of one's world and in creative control of it help learners to become more fully human since the thinking ability is what differentiates humans from animals.

CDA helps students to develop their foreign language skills to become more assertive and intellectually independent readers. Its aim is to help students become more aware of socio-cultural and political influences on the interpretation of texts while feel more confident in expressing their critical response to what writers present. Role of teaching CDA and raising CLA in EFL is helping learners use their reason and rationality rather than emotionality. This way of teaching helps students to become agents of their society. Having a critical mind leads learners, according to Freire (1973), to act as "subjects" in the making of a democratic society. Critical consciousness is an educative tool for learners to question their historical and social situation. Having the ability of criticizing helps learners to find confidence to analyze reality and do not avoid creative discussion.

Although the focus of this study was English language and the role of linguistic features of this language in depicting ideologies and beliefs, the students can apply their CDA knowledge to their own native language. Since languages have universal commonalities. Therefore CDA field is not limited to a specific language and knowledge of functions of linguistic elements in English can be applied in the students' first languages. The strategies like passivization, hyperbole, statistics, etc. which are used in English language have the same functions in other languages. Consequently, they also can be used as to

realize the speakers' or writers' bias in Persian language. This matter leads to the increase of students' CLA not only in English but in their mother tongue, Farsi. According to Wallace (2005) the goal of language learning is making powerful users of language whether a first, second or other languages. Critical reading is a means to make learners more empowered language users.

Students by analyzing texts become aware of the sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias and the connections between discourse and social practices which might be opaque to the non-critical mind. Rogers (2004) believes that CDA can help to an understanding of learning in two ways. First, it helps one to understand the processes of learning in ways that are more complex. Second in the process of doing CDA researchers' and participants' learning is shaped. The beliefs to language learning are changed from a decontextualized, explicit grammar oriented approach to an approach including the political and social dimensions in which the language is used. Students become aware of the socio-political factors embedded in language. CLA seeks the social change and emancipation that leads to greater equality and democracy.

Another implication of this study is based on Wallace's (1999) remark about the aim of critical pedagogy which is preparation of students for the longer term and wider struggle in their social life and not as an immediate and direct response to events. The implication of this study in the general scope can be the enhancement of critical thinking for making a society with justice and equality and a fair distribution of power among the citizens. In fact, students learn to stand against injustice and become sensitive to the prejudiced discourse.

Knowledge of CDA gives more control to the students in classroom practices. In other words, the students in critical reading classes are expected to contribute with their own experiences, opinions and criticisms, while in traditional reading classes student contribution is limited to language practice (IÇMEZ, 2009). This awareness helps them in their future jobs and the role they would play in other people's lives. The understandings learners gained through CLA help them to recognize, challenge and contribute to changing social inequalities represented in discourse, and in fact to be more responsible citizens.

CDA can have many implications in many fields of applied linguistics (Rahimi, 2007). The results of this study can be used to the field of applied linguistics including pedagogy, teaching methodology, curriculum and materials development as well as testing. The findings of this study also may call the attention to language proficiency. Proficiency is considered more comprehensively by including critical thinking.

In pedagogy, the modification of teaching techniques is an implication of this study. This modification can just be done by providing some novelties in teaching strategies. In curriculum and material development this study improves a learner based, cognitively stimulating approach. According to Rahimi (2007), CDA can also have effects on translation studies. Considering both the writer's ideology and cultural points in the process of translation has effects on the translation of texts. CDA can also have implications for alternative assessments. In this field, introspection; retrospection and think-aloud are the main criteria. These practices lead to critical thinking. According to Kabilan (as cited in Luke, 2003), to become proficient in a language, the learners need to use creative and critical thinking through the target language. These considerations are essential in promoting language proficiency and solving the problems of validity of language proficiency tests.

Rahimi (2007) points out Asian students are mostly passive non-critical rote-learning students who do not participate in deep learning. As a consequence, teaching methods and materials must take

into account these inadequacies and add the dimensions of critical thinking and creativity within them. This is considered the most distinguishing factor separating university academic standards from secondary schools. According to Rahimi (2007), there has been increasing emphasis in recent years on the overt acquisition or teaching of critical thinking skills. There is a need for including the role of critique, critical reflection, creativity and argumentation or critical analysis in training programs. Critical thinking and related areas such as problem-solving skills, argumentation and text analysis are considered such fundamental skills that foreign universities claim their students will acquire them after graduation as a part of their degree. Our universities likewise need to follow the same plans to keep up with the international standards. This research can be a step toward this significant goal.

### **8. Suggestions for Further Research**

There are a number of limitations in this study. One of the limitations of this study is related to the matter of practicality. Students should analyze news articles as their class assignment. Other studies can be done by teaching CDA techniques as an independent course for not only students of foreign languages but other fields of study. Although critical language studies should be given more attention in the fields of foreign languages, since language is the main medium of communication used by every person, its power and latent capabilities should be revealed to all people.

Because of the matter of practicality the CDA techniques were taught only during one session and its influence was examined in a short term. Students could not practice these techniques for a longer time in the class. Therefore, students can forget them easily. A further study may examine the effect of learning these techniques in a longer term. This field could be worked on for a longer term during the class time or as the main course of the study since as their main course, the students would work on CDA more seriously and for a longer term.

Brown (2004) refers to teachers' responsibility for creating an atmosphere of respect for each other's opinions and ethnic and cultural diversity. He believes the classroom should be a context for tolerance and for the appreciation of diversity. Teachers should explicitly teach discourse structures such as "I see your point, but ..." to be used by students in classroom discussions and debates. Students must learn how to disagree without imposing one's own beliefs or opinions on others. Therefore, this important aspect can be taken into account in the future studies. Students can discuss their opinions in groups and can analyze texts collectively. In future studies, teachers can provide opportunities for students to take benefits of group discussions.

In this study, the texts were selected from news articles. In future studies, teachers can choose those texts in which the students are interested, in addition to considering learners' reading purposes. If the students are interested in the selected texts they analyze them with care and attention and the results would be more satisfying. In other studies not only news reports but magazine articles, advertisements, political speeches, even some novels and short stories can be selected for analyses which include ideological assumptions and their interpretation depends on a sociocultural context.

Future studies can be done in which students decide on course materials and projects. The involvement of the students in the process of text selection increases student control in the EFL classroom. In further research, the focus can be more on political, cultural, historical and cultural implications.



## **Appendix**

### **Questionnaire**

Please answer the following questions extensively:

- 1) By learning these critical principles do you think your opinion has changed toward English language?
- 2) By learning these critical principles do you think language is a more interesting phenomenon?
- 3) By learning these critical principles do you think you have reached an ability to criticize texts not only English but your own language, Farsi?
- 4) By learning these critical principles have you become more interested in analyzing texts?
- 5) Do you think learning the critical principles are essential in your life? Why do you think so?
- 6) After learning these principles are you motivated more than before to learn English language?  
Please add any extra point you like to write about it.

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