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**RETHINKING MODERN HIGH SCHOOL EFL
CURRICULUM DISCOURSE: MOVING TOWARDS
A NEW MODEL**

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SUMMARY

KEY WORDS:

Dicourse analysis, critical disocurse anlysis, English subject curriculum, didactic discourse, English as a foreign language teaching, curriculum, communication, classroom interraction.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis provides an examination of Romanian high-school English subject curricula (ESC) using the instruments and methodologies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It starts from the observation that CDA's focus does not rest on researching language as a static semantic substance, but rather on examining the social and discursive mechanisms and processes that shape language as well as their results. One of its main tenets is that language should not be seen as a reified item of study, but considered as a bounded and limited entity, which is, in fact, nothing but an ideological/social construct. This means that the examination should hone in upon how language, as constantly changing systems of semiotic resources, amongst various other semiotic systems of resources (such as multimodalities, for example), are selected and used for building racial, cultural, gender and other social categories that legitimate and maintain inequalities within policies or institutions.

The general assumptions that CDA makes about language is that language is to be seen as social practice and that both discourse and language shape and are molded/established by social structures (such as gender, ethnic identities, etc.) on the one hand and that language is essentially ideological, playing a key, yet frequently imperceptible, role in naturalizing, normalizing, and thus hiding, generating and replicating social disparities. CDA has also proved instrumental in carefully assessing the working of power through language and discourse by providing a set of analytical tools emerging from and working in conjunction with theories of linguistics, semiosis (meaning-making processes) and systemic functional linguistics.

This thesis draws on this theoretical background and approaches the high school English subject curricula (ESC) using the instruments and methodologies of CDA in the field of applied

linguistics. The outcomes emerging from the mixed qualitative and quantitative examination focus on framing, foregrounding as well as on the modes in which the curriculum discourse/text positions its authority as a source of national guidance with reference to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum and with particular issues related to it such as: Englishness, identity, nationhood, nation, ideology and diversity.

STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The thesis contains five chapters, preceded by an Introduction and followed by a Conclusions section.

CHAPTER 1 is a background setting section which discusses several ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON DISCOURSE ANALYSIS and reviews the main theories and approaches to Discourse and Text. At this point, I discuss how the development of DA has allowed for a wide range of applications and foci on the intra-, cross-, and trans-disciplinary boundaries, objects of study and methodologies of a discipline that sets out to establish how language becomes meaningful when it is viewed in its full social and psychological contexts. Within this section, a wide array of text, discourse and context types that have been advanced throughout time by a diversity of approaches to discourse and language use will be presented and clarified. As DA has developed progressively with each and every new form of analysis or conceptualization that has broadened the previous approaches and analysis modes, the final subsection of this Chapter reviews some of the main schools, traditions and practices that have been recently identified within the discipline. A clarifying presentation of the nexus between Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis informs the last subsection of this Chapter. Here, several points of convergence and departure between these two overlapping approaches, both theory and method-wise, are addressed.

The second Chapter, CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN EDUCATION, elaborates upon the Role of CDA in education and outlines several approaches to CDA in education. Several major anthropological, classroom-based, narrative and critical approaches that have shaped the progressively complex, dynamic and interdisciplinary development of CDA in education are presented as grounding perspectives for the introduction of the didactic discourse (DD) in Section 2.3. The didactic discourse is defined by means of several taxonomic approaches and denominations being presented as a construction that allows operating with a number of concepts integral to the rigours of DA and CDA, albeit it is generally viewed in

specialized research mostly in terms of performance and from a pedagogical perspective. Sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 review the multiplicity of forms and definitions of the didactic *discourse* along with the multiple and complex intellectual approaches of the term that have compelled educational researchers to more critically address issues pertaining to context, contextualization, power ideologies, spatiality, discursive ecologies shaping discourse in educational contexts. With the focus shifting to ideologies in curriculum discourse, this Chapter narrows down an approach that forms the core content and serves as the main driver in my examination of the present thesis. Premised on the idea that ideologies are shaped and characterized by a set of social and cognitive functions, an assortment of critical discussions regarding the functions and structures of ideology and curriculum ideologies makes way to the more specific Romanian curriculum environment of both lower and upper secondary education.

The third Chapter sets out to examine CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA. Starting from the idea that the curriculum is the 'what' of teaching, curriculum development (CD) will be approached both as product and process. Following two introductory sections (3.2 and 3.3) which set the CD background and discuss emerging issues pertaining to the National Curriculum (NC), a more focused section (3.4) will look into several documents and projects that have been developed with significant influence on curriculum scope and conception and have been on the agenda of the Institute of Education Sciences (ISE) ever since its inception. Several curricular documents in what concerns English teaching as a First Foreign Language (EFFL) are to be reviewed with reference to their decisive impact on both the teaching-learning processes and activities as well as students' long-term interest in the area.

Chapter 4 sets out to clarify the RESEARCH METHODOLOGY and states the aim of this research. If the first three Chapters explore the ways in which the CDA approach enables the researcher to inspect the complexity of the relations of power established in both the texts and discursive practices of social and cultural structures and to reveal how these unclear features support hegemony existence and power alignment, this Chapter sets out to reveal the ideological assumptions that govern, explicitly and implicitly, the Romanian high school curriculum discourse as well as to unveil the authorities' subjectification of certain forms of ideology, power and control in the production and reproduction of identified discourses and discursive practices. The theoretical framework of the thesis is reevaluated as Strategic Options and Methodologies in Section 4.3 and a detailed technical presentation of the Corpus and of the TROPES Semantic extractor explains the qualitative and quantitative examination of the English Subject Curriculum (ESC).

Chapter 5 is the most analytical chapter of the thesis, foregrounding, in the light of the research outcomes, the conclusions emerging from the examination of the ESC. The aims of the present thesis are achieved by a qualitative and quantitative analysis of text organizational features and its distinctive linguistic elements. Special consideration is allotted to the experiential, relational as well as expressive values factored into the text. Emerging from this examination, several compelling arguments and themes concerning the representation of 'Englishness' will be identified, interpreted and discussed, particularly in what regards their implications for both pedagogy and opportunity for a new high school curriculum model in Romania. The latter will be considered against a background provided by the increasing significance of political literacy, critical thought and modernization of the education agenda.

The concluding Chapter of the thesis comes full circle in showing that language in the ESC is essentially ideological and is apt to play a key role in hiding, generating and replicating stereotypical assumptions with particular regard to issues such as: Englishness, identity, nationhood, nation, ideology and diversity. The chapter reviews the modes in which the curriculum discourse/text positions its authority as a source of national guidance with reference to EFL and suggests several directions to be considered for a new, modernized high school curriculum ideological model (HSCI).

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The NC, which ESC is part of, has been for the past few years generally aligned to the European standards of a new quality of education and training and to the main European benchmarks for the foundation, organization, functioning and regulation of the school curriculum. In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I have shown that one of these European benchmarks is *Competences* - as vector of European curricular reforms. While the benchmark is claimed by the knowledge-based society, competency-centered learning has gone through several stages and have more recently started to be placed on transversal competences which facilitate the transfer of knowledge, transdisciplinarity being adopted as a principle of knowledge organization. The competences provides the advantage of transferability and will facilitate the socio-economic integration of graduates. Amongst the eight key competences, defined "as a specific combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context that each individual needs for personal fulfilment and development, for active citizenship, for social inclusion and for employment in the labour market" (Gorun 2012:5) which are: "communication in the mother tongue;

communication in foreign languages; mathematical skills in science and technology; digital skills; the competence of learning to learn; civic and social competences; initiative taking and entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and cultural expression" (OECD Report 2017:49), the last represents the goal of multicultural education that all Romanian students are to be provided with. Such education, fostering the reflection of the concerns of various cultural groups, is to take place in the high school educational environment and is to be aimed at changing society rather than at excising undesired elements from it. Against this background, since schools serve as powerful locations where society's knowledge and culture are (re)produced (Apple 2004), they are also responsible for the transformation of the society's attendant discursive practices. Such transformation is mainly effective, as shown in this thesis, through the official documents and curricula in which standards, guidelines, objectives and benchmarks will become effective on their disseminating trajectory from a bureaucratic, often political institution governing educational policies and its ancillary bodies, all the way to the Romanian high schools that form the national high school system. And albeit standardized NC is a relatively new document in what concerns the history of Romanian state education, such an approach has become dominant in prescribing not only the knowledge type that is worth learning but also in suggesting who the recipients of this knowledge are. Much in this key, Freire (2006) examines the smoothness with which a site of education may well operate as an instrument of oppression through his description of the "Banking Model of Education". In this model that he uses, Freire distinguishes between the Subject, "those who know and act", and the Object, "those who are known and acted upon" (36). Such a characteristic of education is manifest on a larger scale, if one considers the discourse as the authority figure and its targeted audience as its very subordinate unit. In more specific terms, it's about teaching teachers how to follow the ESC closely, in this case the teachers being merely the information/knowledge recipients. The text, through its discourse, is the Subject which knows and acts while the teachers are those who are being acted upon. This has been deconstructively revealed to me while analyzing the ways in which the text and its discourse established their authority by way of CD, guidelines to understanding identity and Englishness, nationhood, nation, and Anglophone culture. Throughout Chapter 5, I have interpreted the typical modes as per which the ESC establishes a relationship with the reader and is capable of maintaining an authority position. The ideological implications conveyed via discourse in terms of linguistic characteristics, language features and structure including the practices and mechanisms connected with its generation and delivery to

its targeted audience, serve as an operator that diminishes the presence of ideology and hides the processes of consent manufacture.

In what regards another benchmark, that of *orientation to cross-curricular approaches and integration of disciplines*, the focus shifts to the personal training path of the student, to the building of knowledge in particular by each person. In this respect, there is a resizing of the role of knowledge and an integrated approach to the curriculum under different forms: structuring disciplines in curricular areas (starting from the premise that there are a number of general competences common to a group of disciplines), introducing (in addition to traditional study disciplines) in the school curriculum of transversal topics (organized in different ways): integrated activities such as projects, interdisciplinary relationships (between different fields of study); new dimensions of education ('new education types': Education for sustainable development, Education for multiculturalism, etc.). The Education for multiculturalism brings benefits to the educational system and allows the exploration of critical real-world issues that are relevant to the student's life experience. In particular, I believe that the changing nature of a multicultural approach to education can be enhanced by a more focused approach to ELT, exponentially dimensioned as per years of study and grades. As "multicultural education tries to create equal opportunities for all students by ensuring that the total school environment reflects the diversity of groups in classrooms, schools, and the society as a whole" (Banks 2014:4), a more consistent approach of my examination concerned the extent to which multiculturalism was being mobilized within the ESC discourse. I found that a multicultural approach to ELT was positioned in an unmediated relation to identity and Englishness, as a quality of these, yet never as an an approach in which Englishness was established. The outcomes indicate that if utilized in such a way, the potential of multiculturalism as a tenet in ELT, and in education in general, is substantially weakened, having no actual transformative effect. In line with the present study, it would be challenging to assess more critical ways in which educational actors, students, teachers, curriculum developers and stakeholders alike can give voice to alternative discourses in education nowadays. Since learning materials can embrace numerous forms (texts, manuals, class interaction, dialogue, etc.) their contents may be examined from different points of view. There is a lot of ideology weight conveyed through both educational written and/or oral texts that shapes the process of learning. Likewise, the socio-cultural influence on the process of learning-teaching-evaluation is equally relevant and worth exploring alongside an examination of ideologies that may impact classroom interaction and/or teaching discourse.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, my examination in this thesis is hardly intended to be taken as an authoritative approach of the document if there ever is such a realistic claim that one can make. Rather, the descriptions, interpretations and explanations emerging from this analysis may serve as reference yardsticks establishing a framework that is intended to contribute meaning making wherever an optimization of the English subject national curriculum is in operational view. Nonetheless, I believe that through a more conscious and improved joint effort in examining the discursive practices preserved within the Romanian institution of education, it is possible to transcend boundaries and provide a wide array of avenues leading to a better orientation to cultural diversity, self, community, identity and nation.

CONCLUSIONS: Towards A New HSCI Vision/Model

The present paper was aimed at providing an examination of the high school English subject curricula (ESC) using the instruments and methodologies of CDA. The outcomes emerging from the mixed qualitative and quantitative examination focus on framing, foregrounding as well as on the modes in which the curriculum discourse/text positions its authority as a source of national guidance with reference to EFL and with particular issues related of it such as: Englishness, identity, nationhood, nation, ideology and diversity.

The text analysis rests on the basis of the ten-question methodology proposed by Fairclough (2001) in support of the identification of the relational, experiential and expressive (REE) characteristics of the ESC text discourse. As an integral corpus document, the ESC under examination is represented by the framework curricular plans for the 9-12 Grades, the lower and upper cycles of the high school, the theoretical and vocational tracks, and consists of 51,298 words over 144 pages including introductory material, guidance content and listed items. This corpus has undergone a qualitative examination performed with the help TROPES, a high performance text analysis software used to facilitate semantic classification, linguistic examination and keyword extraction. The semantic examination performed with the help of this software tool has allowed me to identify the main actors, the relations established between each other as well as the hierarchy and evolution of these relations.

In the first two Chapters of this thesis I have explored the ways in which the CDA approach enables the researcher to inspect the complexity of the relations of power established in both the texts and discursive practices of social and cultural structures and to reveal how

these unclear features support hegemony existence and power alignment (Fairclough 1995). The choice of CDA over other perspectives in this thesis has been determined by its distinctive capacity to mobilize a critical perspective that is apt to clarify ideologies embedded in social structures as well as the discursive practices exerted therein.

This thesis has taken an approach that defines discourse "as a form of social practice that represents and calibrates one's orientation to reality, being [...] a complex of three elements: social practice, discursive practice, and text" (Fairclough 1995:74). According to Fairclough, one of the chief scope of CDA is to de-naturalize ideologies and "denaturalization involves showing how social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures" (27). In my study, the discursive formation term has pointed to modes of "talking and seeing that is ideologically imposed, organized, and maintained" (Fairclough 1995:40) in which text and discourse generate "patterns of regularity in terms of order, correlation, position, and function" (Macey 2001:101).

These perspectives have provided a vantage point taken by the CDA position within the theoretical landscape wherein it resides and the very philosophical orientation of this study. The general aim of this research is to reveal the ideological assumptions that govern, explicitly and implicitly, the Romanian high school curriculum discourse and to unveil the authorities' subjectification of certain forms of ideology, power and control in the production and reproduction of discourses and discursive practices. This perspective has also allowed me to examine the interplay between identity and curriculum and has provided me with essential tools that serve me to observe the modes in which ideological language operates towards disguising power relations in the curriculum discourse/text.

A second, but equally important aim of this research has been to analyze the ways in which ideology is used in the construction of consent in regard to the representation(s) of Englishness as well as to 'denaturalize' commonsensical assumptions embedded within these representations. These aims have been achieved by a qualitative and quantitative analysis of text organizational features and its distinctive linguistic elements. Special consideration has been allotted to the REE (experiential, relational as well as expressive values) factored into the text. Emerging from this examination, several compelling arguments and themes concerning the representation of Englishness have been identified, interpreted and discussed, particularly in what regards their implications for critical pedagogy and opportunity for a new high school curriculum model. The key summarized results I have achieved indicate that:

- There are ideologies inherent in the ways terms such as 'cultural diversity' and 'Englishness' embrace significances across a non-homogeneous spectrum of ESC statements;
- The ESC fails to mobilize a robust conception concerning the plurality of meanings of diversity and its situatedness at practical EFL levels;
- Neither the language/identity dichotomy within the British Empire territory nor the dynamic, progressive and at once multicultural view of identity is clear throughout the ESC;
- In ELT and beyond, in what concerns the teaching of British and American culture and civilisation, the curriculum contents suggest hegemonic-based, nation-building historical events that hardly reflect, by choice or by default, the presence (or multiplicity) of cultural and ethnic variation within the geographical settings of the USA and UK;
- Englishness is situated as the cultural identity standard for Great Britain leaving no room for the incorporation of non-English identities in the overall picture of the United Kingdom and its representation in the Romanian EFLT National Curriculum;
- The identified *reference fields* and *references* have proved to be ideology carriers in the ESC which focus more on prescriptive, static guidelines in EFLT and less on judgment, cultural values and critical thinking.
- The ESC reflects the traditional stereotypical association and misleading identification of England with the whole UK island.

These results have been critically considered and interpreted against a background provided by the increasing significance of critical thought and modernization of both the NC and the education agenda. I hope to have managed to demonstrate in my thesis that it is possible for NC designers and administrators not only to dismiss the current discursive practices that are inclusive of certain ideological and stereotypical assumptions but also to consider a more dynamic and contemporary approach of CD. This means that besides the three-layered structure of the NC (the *structural dimension*: objectives, contents, learning time, training strategies and evaluation strategies), the *procedural dimension*: design, implementation and evaluation and the *product dimension*: framework plan, program, manual, curricular aids), a fourth dimension, that of *discourse*, could facilitate a line of enquiry that national NC designers and administrators may use to elucidate any unwanted ideological trace across the NC. That way, the didactic

discourse will show that education goes well beyond schooling and training, being a process of human and social experience.

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