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1

Studying the Language of the Female Body: Some Context

Theories and practices

What the reader will find in this book is a critical study of the language of texts taken from women's magazines in 2000. These texts are all in some direct way connected with the female body, and include texts concerning everything from fashion to plastic surgery, but exclude articles on furniture, holiday destinations and other similar texts not referring to the body. Later in the chapter we will see how the data were chosen, but here it is important to emphasize that the motivation for choosing these data was to try and avoid the 'trap' of choosing an easy target, such as pornographic texts or tabloid newspaper representations of women, which are known to continue certain representational practices that demean women and treat them as sexual and/or domestic objects (see Lanis 1995).

This study, then, had as its hypothesis the idea that although things have changed greatly since I was a small girl in the 1950s and 1960s, nevertheless, the magazines which many (most?) girls and women read at formative points in their lives may still influence the reader's perception of her body. Though the hypothesis was that some of this potential influence would still reflect patriarchal and thus, from a feminist standpoint, unacceptable, images of women's bodies, I had no specific ideas about how such ideologies would be embedded linguistically, or indeed precisely what they would turn out to be.

The impetus behind this research came from two directions. One was the desire to investigate how far feminist movements had succeeded in influencing the public construction of the female form, potentially giving women a less patriarchal view of their bodies. The other was the wish to try out and develop the methods and ideas of Critical Discourse

Analysis on a larger body of data than has recently been attempted by a qualitative study.¹ The two sets of theories, which are complementary, will be discussed in this chapter and in the conclusion, though the main business of the book is to engage with a fairly large amount of data and try to answer some basic questions about the nature of the representation of women's bodies in the early twenty-first century.

Most of the book, then, is taken up with analysis of data and interpretation of these results. These activities in themselves are not, of course, irrelevant to the development and understanding of theories of language and identity, and such impacts will be discussed as they occur. More important here, though, is to see firstly what happens when we try to apply Critical Discourse Analysis in a systematic way to a large body of texts and, secondly, what representations of the female body were being put forward in mainstream women's and girls' magazines at this time.

Critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (labelled CDA from here on) has been around for a number of years now, and like any long-lived practice, it has spawned a great many offshoots, both in terms of the theoretical background it draws on and in terms of the textual analysis that is considered to be central to its practice. A recent survey of CDA work (Wodak 2002: 3) summarizes this eclecticism of methodology:

Small qualitative case studies can be found as well as large data corpora, drawn from fieldwork and ethnographic research.

Wodak also emphasizes the theoretical and descriptive range of CDA, but stresses that 'three concepts figure indispensably in all CDA: the concept of power, the concept of history and the concept of ideology' (Wodak 2002: 3). The way in which these three concepts relate to the current work are as follows. The research reported on here takes as its premise that women and girls who read mainstream magazines are at least potentially vulnerable to influence from the representations they find there. This is because the ubiquity of these mass media and the repetitive messages that they disseminate may be read as the ideology of those who have the power to decide what is fashionable, acceptable, normal, ideal and so on. The individual reader may, indeed, be capable of resisting, to some extent, these messages, but it should not be assumed that readers are necessarily able to be fully and consistently resistant, or that they want to be. In many cases, I would argue that readers are likely to be reading from multiple viewpoints at any one time (Jeffries

2001) and thus may be both vulnerable to and also resistant to the ideologies embodied in the texts they encounter. This approach, though deriving from CDA, reflects feminist views about the constructed nature and performativity of gender:

Influenced by Foucault, Judith Butler asserts that discourse is constitutive of the phenomena that it regulates and constrains (1993: 2). Her theories elaborate Sedgwick's notion of performativity and the idea that identities do not pre-exist but are performed in a highly regulated fashion. In fact identities are constructed iteratively through what are deemed to be processes of citation – a literal copying of the performances of others with the same identity. Rather as a judge cites case law to enforce his power, a citational performance of gender asserts the authority of this text as legitimate. (Butler 1993: 225)

(Morrish 2002: 178)

The role of magazines, then, as we will see in the analysis in this book, is to provide women and girls with just the exemplars they need to cite in their own lived experiences.

As for history, the work represented here is contextualized in two ways. Firstly, it considers the representation of the female body at the turn of the millennium and in what is sometimes called a 'postfeminist' Western cultural context (see Terry and Schiappa 1999). The consideration of what effect the various forms of feminism have had on these representations is probably outside the scope of this study, though I hope that the findings reported here will contribute to that debate. Secondly, this study also occurs at a point in the development of CDA when the considerations of mediation (see Jäger 2002) and contextual definition (see van Dijk 2002) have all but erased the detailed text analytical origins of the discipline, and it proposes a particular kind of return to analysis, drawing upon the traditions of CDA, but, I hope, enhancing some of its methodological features so that others may take up and develop them

Finally, the relation of this work to ideology is probably already quite clear and reflects Fairclough's view that one of the inequities of power is reflected in an 'unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed...in particular sociocultural contexts' (Fairclough 1995: 1). We will assume, in general terms, that the reader of women's magazines will 'normally' be women themselves. The cultural imperative for women to look good remains strong and

readers will therefore often be in a relatively weak position in relation to the producers of the various ideologically-laden messages about the female body, since they offer advice about the best way to improve looks and attractiveness. Such ideologies may not be homogenous, and they may not all be obviously patriarchal, but they are clearly handed down by a powerful media and, being naturalized, some of them are very difficult or even impossible to conceive of as anything other than absolute. Some such ideologies, which seem even to this researcher to be perfectly natural and good, will be investigated in later chapters.

Widdowson (1996, 1998) and Toolan (1997) have been among the people who have attacked CDA both for its theoretical and its methodological flaws. The fact that the previous sentence contains a presupposition embedded in the nominal group ('its theoretical and its methodological flaws') may alert the critical reader to the fact that I would tend to agree with this criticism. There are indeed problems with CDA, and yet I cannot bring myself to throw out the baby with the bathwater,² since I think that the insights which CDA brings to text analysis have helped many of us clarify the model of language that we wish to work with, and the methods that we may use.

Let us consider, first of all, the theoretical problems that CDA's critics have raised. I will use Widdowson's (1998) review article as the focal point of this discussion, because he summarises many of the important issues there. In this article, Widdowson criticizes the theory of CDA as being:

the reaffirmation of the familiar Whorfian notion of linguistic determinism, but applied not only to cognition in respect of the language code, but in respect to its use in communication as well. (Widdowson 1998: 139)

Though he doesn't say so explicitly, Widdowson implies that a strongly Whorfian take on the relationship between language and social cognition is now unacceptable (cf. the negative connotations of 'determinism'). And he goes on to suggest that CDA proponents have extended this view beyond the 'code' to include the use of language too – both *langue* and *parole* in Saussurean terms. There is an implicature³ here, for me anyway, that if it is ridiculous to suggest that the code is conceptually dominant, it's even crazier to suggest that the practice of language use, which by definition freely shrugs off the rigours of the code, could also be part of the conspiracy to trap speakers into certain ways of thinking.

Whilst the strong version of Whorf is not accepted by many linguists these days, there is also no appetite for rejecting it altogether. It is generally accepted that language can – and does – have some effect on the perceptions of the speakers of that language, both through the systematic aspects of the langue and also through parole:

The range of materials relevant to providing an adequate theoretical account of linguistic relativity is daunting. An account has to deal with both the underlying processes upon which all language and thought relations are necessarily built and with the shaping role of discourse as it is implemented in social institutions and cultural traditions. (Lucy 1997: 308)

Lucy surveys the research into linguistic relativity and concludes that more, and particularly more empirical work needs to be done. What he does not do is to contest the notion that there is some influence from language to thought, though the nature of this relationship is still not fully understood. The assumption in the current work is that the everyday repetition of ideology in discourse is indeed likely to have an effect on the perceptions of women in relation to their bodies. The question remains to what extent, under what conditions and how do the answers to those questions affect our understanding of, and theoretical model for, language.⁴

Widdowson summarizes the theory of language espoused by Kress as:

The theory of language suggested here, then, is a theory of semi-otic change in language as brought about by its use. (Widdowson 1998: 138)

He then goes on to criticize Kress for failing to demonstrate *how* such change takes place. But he doesn't mention that there are enormous difficulties in such a demonstration; that CDA, like any scientific practice, will need to take some theoretical premises for granted; and that there is a place in the process for textual analysis which will reveal a range of more-or-less 'hidden' and more-or-less politically motivated ideologies in texts or bodies of texts.

If Widdowson is overreliant on a distinction between langue and parole, then Toolan (1996) goes too far the other way, it seems to me, in rejecting the notion of code entirely. As one of a group of people calling themselves 'integrationalists', who suggest that *all* meaning is *only* contextual, he puts forward a criticism of code-based models of

language by describing the position of Lyons, who Toolan quotes as arguing that:

despite their undoubted importance, a full account of these contextual features is impossible in practice, 'and perhaps also in principle', and [he] notes that such considerations cast doubt on the possibility of ever being able to construct a complete theory of the meaning of utterances. (Toolan 1996: 6)

I have argued elsewhere (Jeffries 2000) that Lyons is right to take this view, and

that if we try in any one model to take into account the full complexity of the communicative situation, we will fail to adequately explain anything. This does not mean that models should not focus on different aspects of the context as well as the text, as indeed they do, but that it is often counter-productive, and anyway theoretically nonsensical to aim for a fully integrated or comprehensive theory. (Jeffries 2000: 5–6)

This is not only of practical, but also of theoretical significance. Like many other linguists, I take the *langue*–*parole* / competence–performance / code–inferencing distinctions to be partial models of what is going on in language, but at the same time I am conscious that there is no clear division between these somewhat idealized categories. In fact, rather than categories, it would be helpful to see them as reference points, on analogy with the cardinal vowels which have served phoneticians so well for many years. What we have, then, is not a fixed set of self-referential items and structures which are variously used and abused when real people speak and write real language. Instead, we have a slowly-evolving, but flexible, set of items and structures which vary across time, space and context, and whose evolution can indeed be affected by the kind of usage which steps outside the 'norms', especially if such variation is repeatedly reinforced in a particular body of texts.

This model, from prototype theory as developed from Katz and Postal (1964) and by Rosch (1973, 1978) has so far been used largely in relation to features of the *langue*, including semantic systems such as colour terms which were explored in a famous study by Berlin and Kay (1969). More recently, MacLaury (1991: 71) concludes that types of categorization in human language are more varied still, but include some aspects

of prototypicality, and Croft and Cruse (2004) argues that even prototype theory is too simplistic and needs to be enhanced by Barsalou's model of 'frames'. In the current context, we may conclude that the perceptions of female bodies may be both relatively stable and langue-like on the one hand and also subject to change over time, influenced by both technological and social change and by the discourse that reflects and constructs these changes.

These ideas are not new. And to that extent Widdowson is right to suggest that the CDA adherents have been guilty of ignoring some of the debates in other sub-disciplines of linguistics such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, discourse analysis, literary theory and, one might add to Widdowson's list, pragmatics. I am drawing most here on the uses which sociolinguistics has made of variation theory, though the insights of pragmatics and Conversation Analysis into the patterning of what was once thought unpatterned, is another analogy. Despite these *de facto* omissions by CDA in communicating with other areas of the discipline, it seems to me that one could hold an entirely coherent theory of language based on a flexible code and its use, even though modelling it is somewhat more difficult than modelling the two-category theories (for example langue and parole or competence and performance) we were accustomed to rely upon throughout the twentieth century.

Levinson (1983) demonstrates this view of the mutability of the langue/parole boundary in discussing conversational implicature:

the notion of conversational implicature offers a way out, for it allows one to claim that natural language expressions do tend to have simple, stable, and unitary senses . . . but that this stable semantic core often has an unstable, context-specific pragmatic overlay – namely a set of implicatures. (Levinson 1983: 99)

Another criticism of CDA rests on the notion that there is a methodological circularity in its search for 'ideology', which is rooted in the pre-existing socio-political motivation for CDA's very existence. Widdowson, rightly, points out that even with the contextualized usage of language included, there is a tendency for CDA to read meanings from texts as though they were embedded in the linguistic material itself, despite many assertions to the contrary. He continues:

If these discursive practices have not been adequately taken into account, the textual analyses are correspondingly inadequate,

precisely because they are dissociated from the contextual conditions which lend them pragmatic significance. This admission would seem to invalidate the whole critical operation. (142–3)

I would disagree that concentrating on the texts themselves necessarily invalidates the analysis of those texts. The reason for this is that I take seriously the axiom that all discourse is ideologically saturated, as does Kress (1996). It is also worth reiterating Schulz's (1990) argument that though further empirical work may be needed to prove the effect on readers, we can nevertheless conclude something about the attitudes of society by what that society has encoded in its discourses.

We may, nevertheless, accept Widdowson's criticisms of the CDA exponents as wanting to 'have their cake and eat it' in that they wish to both espouse the 'all discourse is ideological' view and at the same time to suggest that their task and aim in their work is to 'expose' ideologies which in some sense pervert the meanings that would be carried by a more 'neutral' version of the same text. Widdowson is right to point out that the techniques developed by CDA to expose right wing ideological infiltration:

can, of course, be taken up to further *any* cause, right wing as well as left, evil as well as good. They are the familiar tactics of polemic and propaganda, and they have a long history in human affairs. (Widdowson 1998: 150)

He is not so neutral in describing what those techniques are as I would like to be ('the procedures of ideological exposure by expedient analysis which characterise the practices of CDA' Widdowson 1998: 150), but nevertheless it does seem to be vital that we start to acknowledge that the Left is not the only group with 'truth' in its sights, and that indeed, there may be an infinite range of ideologies, some of which we may not want to evaluate on these lines at all, which can be exposed by textual analysis. In this connection, literary stylistic analysis can be enriched by the same techniques and procedures used by CDA, to demonstrate the text's ideologies, with no (evaluative) criticism, except possibly evaluations of aesthetics and literary worth, intended at all. This approach underlies, among other works, Simpson (1993), and, in my opinion, greatly strengthens the credibility of the techniques of CDA and the stylistics that is influenced by it.

As well as criticizing the theory of CDA, Widdowson also attacks the methods and practices represented in the key texts of the sub-discipline.

He correctly points out the circularity that is evident in the rather small pieces of 'analysis' which are included to illustrate the CDA 'manifestoes' of Fairclough, Fowler and Kress. He picks on Fairclough, for example, in the following way:

What strikes a particular reader, even one as astute as Fairclough, is hardly conclusive evidence of how ideological significance is written covertly into texts.

He is right, of course, to criticise the evident interpretative positivism (see Simpson 1993: 111ff), in such examples though wrong in his conclusions, that the whole enterprise is thereby doomed. Very many such examples are the kinds of illustrative examples included in textbooks which are not expected to be anything other than convenient for making one's point.⁵ However, the main protagonists of CDA, and Fairclough in particular, have not spent much time discussing or exploring the methodological principles of CDA. The only attempt to set out a methodology that I am aware of is in Fowler's (1991) investigation of news reporting, and this appears to be a simple set of tools for the non-specialist to use. The methodological problems of CDA could be seen as analogous to those explored by early sociolinguists, such as the apparently insurmountable problem of the observer's paradox and the problem of acquiring recordings of casual speech when the tape recorder created an inevitable formality. Such problems could have led to the whole development of sociolinguistics being abandoned, if it had not been for Labov and others like him who used their ingenuity to step around the difficulties and develop methods that were rigorous and replicable. However, the focus on objectivity and methodological principles has not been the overriding concern of CDA practitioners.

But here, perhaps, is where we come up against the real difficulty that Widdowson sees with the CDA enterprise; it does not claim to be objective, though like other stylisticians, CDA practitioners in fact often demonstrate their independence from the data, or at least show that whilst they may have a political impetus for doing the research, it is nevertheless plain to all that their findings are accurate. Having a general hypothesis that the data in this study is likely to reproduce certain culturally dominant views of the female body and then testing this hypothesis against the data is no less objective than hypothesizing about the nature of Shakespeare's style and then testing this against his plays. The relative objectivity of stylistics of this latter sort has also been

questioned in the recent past (see Mackay 1996 and 1999; Short *et al.* 1998), but there is a consensus that it is possible to build rigour and replicability into such studies, so that while scientific levels of objectivity (which are also not absolute) are not achievable, we can demonstrate a reasonable level of independence in literary stylistics. I would add that CDA is very similar to stylistics in that it uses textual evidence to support certain interpretative conclusions. The difference is that the interpretations will normally be ideological in one and literary or affective in another, though it would be possible, of course, to look at ideology in literature too.

If we were to make explicit what Widdowson calls ‘the essential instability of language and the necessary indeterminacy of all meaning’, and to build it into our model of language more clearly, perhaps the practice of critical discourse analysis would not be seen as so far in rigour from any other branch of linguistics. Indeed, in Wodak (2002: 16), Meyer points out this inevitable circularity in the hermeneutic model of interpretation that underlies almost all linguistic analysis, and yet is accepted, with all its difficulties, as a reasonable methodology:

As for the methods and procedures used for the analysis of discourses, CDA generally sees its procedure as a hermeneutic process, although this characteristic is not completely evident in the position taken by the various authors. Compared to the (causal) explanations of the natural sciences, hermeneutics can be understood as the method of grasping and producing meaning relations. The hermeneutic circle – which implies that the meaning of one part can only be understood in the context of the whole, but that this in turn is only accessible from its component parts – indicates the problem of intelligibility of hermeneutic interpretation. Therefore hermeneutic interpretation in particular urgently requires detailed documentation.

Where this work stands, then, in relation to CDA and its detractors, is as an example of how one might bring as much rigour into the process of qualitative textual analysis as possible, whilst not abandoning the motivated impetus behind CDA, and whilst acknowledging the presence of an inevitable circularity in the hermeneutic approach.

Hallidayan functionalism

This inevitable circularity of the process of analysing texts is also evident in the Hallidayan processes that are normally favoured by CDA practitioners. The descriptive tools, in the form of categories and

labels that arise from a Hallidayan approach, tend to be intermediate categories, based on formal features, but only interpretable in context and not tied purely to their form, nor indeed to the kinds of meaning that are susceptible to testing. These features, and some which are proposed in this book, will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Here, I would like to consider the more general nature of the tools adopted by CDA, to try and see how they fit with other aspects of a linguistic approach to textual meaning. The popular tools that CDA practitioners have used over the years include analysis of nominalization, transitivity, modality and to some extent the creation of semantic presuppositions. This list does not amount to a comprehensive account of meaning, nor is it made clear by those using these techniques why they have been chosen specifically or what has been ignored as less helpful to the project in hand. It is also interesting to note that although these seem to be Hallidayan categories on the whole, there is some influence from transformational grammar evident in analyses by CDA practitioners (see Fowler 1991: 76–80).

In relation to Halliday's metafunctions, transitivity and nominalization have often been seen as ideational in effect, since they are particular ways of presenting certain information textually. Modality and presuppositional meaning is often characterized more as interpersonal in its function, as it introduces authorial opinion and this can be seen as personal intervention in the message of the text in a fairly straightforward way.

However, I would like to suggest that what CDA is doing with texts questions the division between ideational and interpersonal, since the thrust of its claim is that the construction of texts in particular ways by an author (or authors) may influence the reader in specific ways, by the manipulation, either consciously or unconsciously, of texts to produce naturalized ideologies. This looks as much like something happening between the people involved (author, narrator, reader, audience, etc.) as something that is to do with the presentation of ideas by subterfuge. Fairclough (1995: 6) expresses this view as follows:

Texts are social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction. A multifunctional view of text is therefore essential. I have followed systemic linguistics [Halliday 1978] in assuming that language in texts always simultaneously functions ideationally in the representation of experience and the

world, interpersonally in constituting social interaction between participants in discourse and textually in tying parts of a text together into a coherent whole (a text, precisely) and tying texts to situational contexts.

When a research project, like the one reported here, focuses largely on a body of textual data, it may simply be investigating more thoroughly the ideational process, though some of the interpretation of the analysis will question the interpersonal context, and consider the effects suggested by the context of production and reception of these magazines. As Fairclough (1995: 9) says:

But there is a danger here of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, by abandoning textual analysis in favour of analysis of audience reception . . . Textual analysis is therefore an important part, if only a part, of the picture, and must be defended against its critics.

'Traditional' tools of analysis in CDA

This section heading is potentially misleading, because there is no single 'tradition' of CDA, and certainly no agreed set of analytical tools that 'should' be used in this practice. There is a tendency to draw upon a systemic-functional approach in most cases, because of the inbuilt social or contextual aspects of this theory of language. However, there are certain systems that are more favoured by CDA researchers than others, and these almost always include nominalization, transitivity and modality.

One of only a few attempts to list some of the tools that might be used by critical linguists is in Chapter 5 of Fowler (1991), which is entitled 'Analytical Tools: Critical Linguistics'. Here, Fowler explains and illustrates the use of transitivity, syntactic transformations, in particular the agentless passive, lexical structure, modality and speech acts. Fowler (1991: 89) does not claim that this list is comprehensive:

This chapter has provided *some explanatory notes*, and illustrations, of *some aspects* of linguistic structure which *my experience has shown* to be quite often involved in the construction of representations, in signifying beliefs and values when writers are reporting or commenting on the world. (My italics)

This reluctance to claim that the list is complete, coupled with the rather shaky grounds given for choosing the structures (from 'experience') have

helped to give CDA its critics and, unfortunately, with the possible exception of Simpson (1993) who is using CDA in a new, stylistic way, there is no real attempt elsewhere to construct a rationale for the tools to be used, nor a comprehensive set of such tools.

In some senses this is understandable, since CDA, like stylistics more generally, is dependent on the developments in theory and practice from linguistics and has not so far developed its own general theory of language, though this has been mooted by some as one of its ultimate aims (Fairclough 1995: 10, referring to Kress 1993). The tools of analysis are also problematic for CDA analysts in some ways, as van Leeuwen (1996) points out:

There is no neat fit between sociological and linguistic categories, and if Critical Discourse Analysis... ties itself in too closely to specific linguistic operations or categories, many relevant instances of agency might be overlooked. One cannot, it seems, have it both ways with language. Either theory and method are formally neat and semantically messy, or they are semantically neat but formally messy. Linguists tend toward preserving the unity of formal categories. I shall here attempt the opposite approach, hoping to provide a set of relevant categories for investigating the representation of social actors in discourse. (van Leeuwen 1996: 33)

In this project, one of the aims has been to identify systems which are similar to transitivity and modality, but are not as well-recognized as them. What these other systems have in common with the 'traditional' tools of CDA is that they reflect van Leeuwen's comments and are simultaneously formal and functional at the level at which the naturalization of ideology and hegemony may work. They each seem to depend on a standard form-function relationship (such as modal verbs for modality) but also have other manners of delivery so that the style of the text performs certain meaningful functions. We will see more of these functions later in the chapter (pp. 16-17), but here I will explain a little more what is meant by this particular level of functionality in texts.

If we take modality as a classic case of this kind of textual function, we can note that there is a typical, or core, form, which delivers certain kinds of modality in English; the modal auxiliary. Thus, the epistemic uncertainty of a speaker might be introduced by a modal verb as in *Susan might come to the party*, and the speaker's view or opinions as to what is desirable may equally well be delivered by a modal verb as in *Susan*

should come to the party. Note that with the right context (including intonation), these meanings can be reassigned in reverse:

Susan might come to the ↘↗ party, if only to please her ↘ mother.
Susan ↘ should come to the party, all things being ↘↗ equal.⁶

Although the range of meaning of modals, and their assignment to the different modal verbs, is quite complex, nevertheless, if we restrict ourselves to this formal indicator of modality, the picture looks quite straightforward, with certain forms delivering particular meanings. However, the full range of modal meaning, in itself very difficult to define, can in fact be delivered by an open-ended range of forms, including modal adverbs (*probably, hopefully*), modal adjectives (*possible, likely*) and lexical verbs (*imagine, think*) and at the other extreme, modal intonation (rising tone on statements) and body language (shrug, eyebrow lift).

The result of this vagueness of the boundaries of a formal category in relation to a meaning that is so significant in relation to power and ideology is that we are obliged to analyse texts using the provisional set of categories, without ever arriving at a discovery procedure that will ensure that we can capture all modal forms. The lack of straightforward mapping of meaning onto form, then, is one of the factors that militate against any *purely* objective analysis, since a case may have to be made for the analysis offered, rather than being an automated procedure.

A slightly different situation is found when we consider transitivity. It is probably fair to say that transitivity is tied closely to the choice of verb in a clause, and this choice has consequences for the number and type of participants. It might seem, therefore, that the formal basis of transitivity is assured and clear. The lack of form-meaning match in this case, however, is a result of the mismatch between the number of possible syntactic positions in the clause (five in total: SPOCA) and the number of identifiably different participant roles which may cluster around the verbal element. Thus, the grammatical subject may be an agent, an actor, an instrument, or even a goal, as we can see from the examples below:

John used the hammer to knock in the nail.

John knocked the nail in.

The hammer knocked the nail in.

The nail was knocked in.

It is therefore not possible on purely formal grounds to identify the semantic roles of all noun phrases associated with the main verb in a clause. This means that analysis on the basis of transitivity relations relies on the analyst's understanding of the verbal meaning as well as the surface structure, leading to the kind of circularity that hampers much linguistic analysis when it attempts to be completely formal in nature.

We have seen two examples here of how the form and meaning of English sentences are not mapped onto each other in a simple one-to-one manner. This is not a sign of inadequacy but one of the necessary complexities in human language that make it possible to be creative, as well as being manipulative. The other tools of analysis used in this study are equally complex and just as rich in meaning as these examples (see pp. 16–17).

Critical stylistics

The approach taken here is to set aside for now the question of the influence (or otherwise) of texts on readers, and to take it for granted first of all that all texts present ideologies (as propositions, assumptions or implications) and secondly that, as a result of this, the analysis of meanings as created by texts in particular ways (that is, stylistics) is fundamental to CDA. The fact that some ideologies are more manipulative and/or undesirable than others should not blind us to the fact that the technical means of achieving meaning are similar, whether we wish to criticise that meaning or simply wish to analyse that way of achieving a particular effect.

The remainder of this section will discuss and exemplify the main analytical tools that are used in discussing the texts analysed in this book. As explained above, they are Hallidayan in the sense that they take a basically functional approach, so that the meanings and the way that they are delivered textually are both incorporated into the analysis throughout. The potential problem with this, of course, occurs if you try to demonstrate a complete lack of circularity in the investigation, and yet I hope to have argued convincingly above (and elsewhere – Jeffries 2000) that this aim is neither realistic nor necessary as long as certain key principles are in place.

This research was carried out in the context of an expectation that certain key perceptions of women's bodies are likely to be ubiquitous in texts that clearly denigrate or demean women's bodies (such as the 'page 3' type text in tabloid newspapers, or the new male magazines that are proliferating at the moment). I can also make an educated guess

that texts ostensibly written *for* women, such as women's magazines, will do a little 'better' ideologically, but perhaps not so well as we might expect. This does not, however, give even a linguist with a fair amount of linguistic experience a clue as to what kinds of features will carry ideologies – nor to what extent they will be politically correct or otherwise. There may also be ideologies naturalized in the data which are unexpected, or hard to critique, so not all of the analysis is expected to produce shock or horror.

The kind of study that I embarked upon here, then, is analogous to many respectable linguistic enterprises, including for example the sociolinguistics of the 1970s and 1980s, where there is a hypothesis, a set of data and a set of analytical tools based on a theory of language which can be (and will be) disputed by others, and which inevitably will take for granted some basic premises about the nature of language. I hope to show that the socio-political underpinnings of this study are no more dangerous or biased (nor less so) than those in the great sociolinguistics studies of, for example, class dialects in Norwich (Trudgill, 1974) or youth dialects in New York (Labov 2006) or Belfast (Milroy 1980).

I often make the case to students that whilst researchers have every right to try and establish what differences (presupposing there are some) there are between males' and females' (or different racial groups') brain processes, that, nevertheless, we need to be aware that people do research because they feel that it will get to some important 'truth' (sociologically and/or politically), or are paid by people with these views. I would not necessarily disagree with the findings of such research, though I may find it offensive, suspecting as I do that there is a right-wing agenda which is either behind such studies, or would anyway be well-served by convenient biological differences between genders or races. It is important to make clear the fundamental assumptions underlying a piece of research, to make the methodology and results as clear as possible, and to make the basis of any interpretation of those results. Other researchers are then free to take issue with any (or all) of these factors, but at least the debate – and resulting human knowledge – will make progress. Objectivity, as real scientists know, is relative. What we need instead is clarity – of goals, of methods and of conclusions.

Analytical categories

The last section gave a sense of what the collected tools of analysis in this study were attempting to bring to the practice of CDA, which is a rationale for the kind of feature that is being analysed. With the

exception of the first two categories below (genre and rhetoric), which are more global in their reach, the tools of analysis used here are aimed at finding out what the text is *doing* ideationally – and thus ideologically – in certain key ways. I have therefore analysed the data in terms of the ‘textual-ideational’ features listed below. Their main formal realizations are listed beside the function label:

- **Naming:** choice of nominals, nominalization, construction of noun phrases.
- **Describing:** choice of adjectives, positioning of adjectives (pre- and postposed).
- **Equating:** apposition, intensive predicator, lexical choice (sense relations).
- **Contrasting:** negation, lexical choices (sense relations).
- **Enumerating and exemplifying:** lists, intensive predicator.
- **Assuming:** presupposition
- **Implying:** implicature
- **Creating time and space:** tense, time adverbials, deixis, metaphor.
- **Presenting processes and states:** transitivity.
- **Presenting opinions:** modality, presentation of speech and thought.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all that texts can do, but it attempts to draw together some familiar and some less familiar operations which might be considered in some sense independent of particular languages and in principle independent of text-type, though it is likely that some genres are more prone to some of these functions than others.

Feminism, theory and the body

Constructing the female body

The title of this book, as will be evident to some readers, takes a particular theoretical viewpoint. This has already been previewed in the earlier sections of this chapter which introduced the particular critical discourse analytic approach that is taken here. The material world is assumed to be at least partially experienced through the way it is described and thus ‘constructed’ for us. Thus, it is assumed that there is likely to be some effect on the reader’s perceptions if it turns out that the data portrays the female body in particular, ideologically significant, ways. However, it is worth considering this assumption not only as part of a generalized CDA approach to texts, but in the context of feminist theory, and particularly

feminist linguistic theory relating to the body. This section will attempt to contextualize the work in such a way.

The motivation for the research reported here, apart from a personal one, was that women have to deal with their material bodies on a daily basis,⁷ and in the face of whatever construction the culture currently puts on their bodies. I wanted to see what some of the apparently helpful texts in women's magazines were actually doing to perceptions. At first sight, the texts studied all appear to be aimed at helping the contemporary female cope with the 'problematic' body. This construction of the body as a problem is one of the overwhelming impressions one gets, even just flicking through the pages of women's magazines. Though this is not a comparative study, the same impression is not given by the increasing number of men's magazines on the market. In the women's magazines, even the texts which aim to celebrate the body's normal functioning, such as pregnancy texts, operate within the mainstream ideology of the problematic body.⁸

Cameron (1998: 11) makes the point that it is not only the way that a language names the world that might be seen as sexist:

In my own view, sexist language is not best thought of as the naming of reality from a single, male perspective. It is a multifaceted phenomenon, taking different forms in different representational practices, which have their own particular histories and characteristics.

This book contributes in a small way to the analysis of this complex picture of how representations of the female body may have contributed to the perceptions of the female form at a point in the early twenty-first century, in the context of mainstream periodical publications for women.

Price and Shildrick (1999: 2) note that early feminism concentrated its efforts on challenging the dominant view that women were in some way less than fully human, partly because they were tied in to bodily functions (menstruation, pregnancy) which were associated with 'gross, unthinking physicality'. They add that feminism was partly responsible for making the connection between the way that women were treated as driven by bodily function and similar views of black people, working-class people, animals, and slaves. They add:

Whilst all such marginalized bodies are potentially unsettling, what is at issue for women specifically is that, supposedly, the female body is

intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive. Price and Shildrick (1999: 2)

The apparently unstable female material body, viewed negatively from a patriarchal viewpoint, has been one of the ideologies that feminism has sought to question and/or celebrate. It is also one of the great challenges to women in the twenty-first century, presented, as they are, with ever more technological ways of making their bodies 'perfect', so that there is less excuse for imperfection, and thus more potential 'blame' attached to the imperfect female. If some of the 'imperfections' are associated with those bodily functions that attach to the specific biology of being female, then controls on menstruation (e.g. through the pill) childbirth (e.g. through elective caesarean for convenience) and menopause (e.g. through HRT) are clearly two-edged swords. On the one hand these technologies clearly help women to live fuller and less biologically-determined lives, on the other they bring side-effects which are sometimes physical (high blood pressure, higher risk of breast cancer, and so on) and sometimes emotional or mental (expectations of control over our bodies that are convenient to a male-created society).

An increasing technologization of the body, also, has changed the way that plastic surgery and other similar interventions are viewed socially. Though the texts in this data are still a little ambivalent about these things, there is a definite sign that the development of an acceptance of changing our bodies to suit the prevailing view of perfection is under way, and that texts such as these are part of the process of that change. Of course, this acceptance is partly a product not only of patriarchy, but also of first-wave feminism, as Price and Shildrick (1999: 4) describe it:

The way forward was not to reclaim and revalorise the body, but to argue that the ideal standard of disembodied subjecthood was as appropriate to, and attainable by, women as it was to men.

What may seem strange at first is that the first wave of feminism has had such success, whereas the second wave of radical feminism, which attempted to put bodily difference at the centre of its politics, has had less apparent effect on mainstream portrayals (constructions) of the female body. Thus, the 'revaluing' of the specifically female – and maternal – body as a site of empowerment, seems to have had less impact on the mainstream magazines investigated here, except perhaps

in the more perverse and general of ways; the legitimizing of focus on the specifically female. This danger of radical feminism is pointed out by Price and Shildrick (1999: 4–5):

The stress given to the embodied nature of sexual difference has been, then, a powerful advance for feminism, but nonetheless in its unproblematised form it runs two related risks: one the one hand it may uncritically universalise the male and female body, while on the other it appears to reiterate the biological essentialism that historically has grounded women's subordination.

What first, second and more especially third-wave feminism have offered to the powerful patriarchal producers of mass-circulation magazines is a rationalization of whatever position it suits them to take. If selling diets or plastic surgery is the aim, then the control of the body by technology and mediated willpower can be framed within a first-wave, rationalist perspective, where women, just as much as men, can 'rise above' the dictates of their bodies. It is a challenge that many readers would be reluctant to avoid taking up, since succumbing is weak, and being weak is not acceptable. However, and without any sense that it is contradictory, these texts simultaneously use the second-wave argument that the female is different, and should be valued as such, to underpin the selling of sexual technique, the rationale for the search for perfection (to attract a mate) and the excuse for women being at times 'at the mercy of' their bodies.

The rise of 'third-wave feminism', first as a reaction against the dominance of white women's experience and later as younger generation's reaction against second-wave feminism (see Henry 2004), provides the media with the opportunity to serve both their commercial interests and also pay lip-service to feminist concerns. As Price and Shildrick (1999: 7) point out, there is now a postmodern feminism that asks a different kind of question, rather than 'Can we change our bodies to become more acceptable?':

To say that the body is a discursive construction is not to deny a substantial corpus, but to insist that our apprehension of it, is necessarily mediated by the contexts in which we speak... It is then the forms of materialisation of the body, rather than the body itself, which is the concern of a feminism that must ask always what purpose and whose interests do particular constructions serve?

This 'different kind of question' is 'can we change the way that discourse shapes our bodies?' They argue that what is needed to avoid the traps of both first and second wave feminism is 'the constant reinterpretation of the body, textually constructed'. The advantage of this approach, from a practical point of view is that instead of trying to deny the material physicality of bodily experience, the emphasis is on denying its stability. We will see some examples in the textual analysis later, which demonstrate the problems with the stable materiality of the body, and the pressures it puts on women to preserve a particular (young, slim, pre-maternal) version of their body throughout life.

Theorists such as Susan Bordo (1993) and Sandra Barky (1988) have been in the forefront in analysing how the processes of surveillance and self-surveillance are deeply implicated in constituting a set of normativities towards which bodies intend. The practices of diet, keep-fit, fertility control, fashion, health care procedures and so on are all examples of disciplinary controls which literally produce the bodies that are their concern. (Price and Shildrick 1999: 8)

This understanding, that what is theoretically constructive in affecting the ways that women perceive their bodies, may also have a material effect on the shape and functioning of their bodies, is one that many theorists mention. If we are to have control over the shape, size and function of our bodies, it is, as Gatens (1999) points out, vital to know what power relations are superimposed on top of this apparent control:

If discourses cannot be deemed as 'outside', or apart from, power relations then their analysis becomes crucial to an analysis of power. This is why language, signifying practices and discourses have become central stakes in feminist struggles. (Gatens 1999: 231)

Gatens argues that it does not make sense to simply decide that women should have access to power, since the cultural formation of their bodies does not fit the shape of the power.

Butler (1999: 240) makes clear that it is not that discourse actually creates the body, but that the body cannot be accessed or referred to without discourse. This means that every reference to the body will construct the body *in some way*. The ideological effects of this are unavoidable:

To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it

is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. In this sense, the linguistic capacity to refer to sexed bodies is not denied, but the very meaning of 'referentiality' is altered. In philosophical terms, the constative claim is always to some degree performative.

This claim might make the well-intentioned writer of women's magazines want to give up, since there is clearly no neutral way in which s/he can write supportive articles, problem-page answers or hints and tips pages. But this, in a sense, is the point; that since neutrality is impossible, then the ideology of the text should be acknowledged, and all pretence that there is anything essential about femininity or womanhood should be abandoned explicitly.

Some of the writers in Price and Shidrick's collection make points that are not immediately applicable to the current research, but on closer inspection have some contribution to make to the theoretical background behind it. Thus, Bakare-Yusuf (1999: 314) discusses torture and silence, bringing into relief the connection between body and mind which is highlighted by this bodily practice aimed at making people speak. The connection between suffering and silencing, which is the experience of many oppressed people, not just women, is one that is important in looking at the data collected in the current research. Not only the absence of women's own voices in some of the articles themselves, but the absence of different kinds of women's voices, including black women, lesbian women and others, is an absence, like all absences, which is hard to trace, and easy to ignore. I will return to the question of the marginalised female and female body in the final section of this chapter and in the conclusions.

Battersby (1999) relates the experience of encountering the Cognitive Semantics proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) which proposes a universal bodily experience as the basis of the many entrenched metaphors that suffuse our everyday experience. Battersby argues that their conception of the bodily lived experience does not reflect the experience of many, including women, black people, people (mainly women) with anorexia and so on:

For feminist theorists who have long complained of the neglect of the body by western philosophers, the development of cognitive semantics might seem a promising move. However, as I read Johnson's and Lakoff's accounts of embodiment, I register a shock

of strangeness: of wondering what it would be like to inhabit a body *like that*. Battersby (1999: 342)

Her argument rests on the notion that unlike the 'universal', that is male, body, the female experience is one of permeable boundaries, where another being may grow inside one's own body and then separate itself (through labour), where the constructed experience of (heterosexual) sex is one of penetration and intrusion into the female body, and as a result of both the lived experience and its lack of match to the discursive 'norms' of the body Battersby (1999: 346) explains her 'failure to register my body as a container with a self safe "within" and the dangerous other on the outside' as partly due to the fact that this permeability and penetrability is 'typical of women'. In other words, the normalizing of the female form as aberrantly unsafe and 'leaky', in opposition to the sealed and 'clean' masculine form, is one of the sources of the female anxiety in relation to the body, including its extreme forms such as anorexia and bulimia.

A woman's life – the data

The data for this research were collected in the month of February 2000. In order to reflect the publications that would be available to teenagers and women at that time, the data were collected from all the women's magazines available in the main newsagents (W.H. Smith) in the centre of Leeds (West Yorkshire, UK) in that month. Some of these were dated March, some Feb/March and some February, but they were all available on the same day.

The only specialist magazines included in the data were those which concerned the body in particular ways. These included slimming, pregnancy and plastic-surgery magazines. All other magazines were generic. I did not include magazines which concerned the house and garden or cooking alone. A quick glance at them confirmed the assumption that there would be no data of interest in them as there were very few references to the female body. This choice, however, does explain one of the features of the data in this study, which is that it tends to assume that the reader is relatively young. There are a small number of magazines (for example, *Woman*) which address more mature women as well as including articles about the bodily experience of that age group. A very large number of other magazines, however, seem to assume that the life of middle-aged and older women is almost entirely taken up with the concerns of creating a beautiful home, garden or dinner party.

Another factor in the choice of data that has influenced the direction of this book is that I have had to leave out the early stages of a girl's life, since it is in books, rather than magazines, that early perceptions may be founded and they are not comparable with the data analysed here both because of this fact and also because they do not constitute comparable entertainment for children as for women and teenage girls. Children will rarely freely choose such reading matter and the range of genres and topics tends to differ considerably.

One slight dissatisfaction with the data, which turned out to be beyond my control, was the fact that having decided to choose data that would be readily available to all women, I discovered that there were no specialist magazines for lesbian women, and only two for black women in the shop at that time, though it is probably the largest outlet of magazines in a large northern English city. These latter were published in the USA and in some ways, therefore, are not comparable to the other magazines, all of which are either UK-based or have UK editions. Specialist magazines for lesbian women do exist, as my students have pointed out, but as they are not readily available in the usual outlets, readers would have to make a concerted effort to acquire them. The result is that the market is dominated by magazines which assume a heterosexual, mainly white and probably middle-class readership.

Once I had acquired the magazines, I extracted all articles, advertisements and other texts which had references to the female body. In the end, some of the more culinary articles had too little in the way of bodily references to include, though those which dealt with dieting or pregnancy were included. The final total of texts was 86, though some of these were compilations of short texts on the same topic or from the same publication.

The next stage was to write a comprehensive commentary on each text, using the textual functions listed in the first section of Chapter 1 as the analytical categories, keeping in mind that these functions do not have one-to-one relationship between form and meaning, and the analysis is therefore not an automatic process. Each text, therefore, was analysed a number of times, using each function as a 'filter' through which to see what kinds of structure and strategy were being employed. The potential effects of foregrounded features were noted in the commentary, but repetitive features of relevance were also noted for their potential in naturalising ideology.

Originally, the plan for this research was to divide up the data according to the stage of life that the texts related to; puberty, sexually active, pregnancy, menopause and so on. However, I soon found that

the analysis done that way would be excessively repetitive, since the same strategies and features kept appearing across the data. The result is that instead of organizing this book according to the stages in life of women, I have organized it according to linguistic and rhetorical features. This has resulted in less repetition, though, as we shall see; there is a certain amount of overlap in the effect of some of the features included here.

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