



Critical Discourse Analysis in Translation Studies

An Introductory Textbook

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CDA in translation studies

The three different approaches

1. M.A.K. Halliday's SFL- informed discourse analysis and appraisal framework- informed discourse analysis in translation studies

- Halliday (1992) defines translation as a “guided creation of meaning”.
- Translation is a meaning-making activity, not merely message transfer.

SFL stems from:

- Malinowski → text, situation, culture.
- Firth → context of situation.

Language is viewed as inherently contextual within SFL.



- SFL → Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).
- CDA emphasizes the relationship between language and social life.
- Unlike Chomsky's formal grammar, SFL and CDA focus on function and context.
- SFL provides a linguistic foundation for analyzing ideology and power in discourse.
- SFL = the interconnection between text, situation, and culture.



- Encourages translation researchers to study why specific linguistic choices are made.
- Promotes context-sensitive and pragmatic approaches over “faithfulness” or “invisibility.”
- Views form and meaning as interdependent.
- Helps scholars analyze translation products and processes systematically.



Meaning as a Multidimensional System

- Translation = recreating meaning through interpretive + generative choices (Kim & Matthiessen 2017).
- Meaning operates across three metafunctions:
 1. Ideational – logical and experiential meaning.
 2. Interpersonal – social and attitudinal meaning
 3. Textual – organizational and cohesive meaning.
- Each metafunction depends on distinct linguistic systems in each language.



- SFL is both an analytical and pedagogical framework (Kim 2016a).
- It → formative assessment tool for translators.
- meaning = multidimensional – experiential, logical, interpersonal, textual.
- language = system of choices realized through lexis and grammar.



SFL in Translation Studies

Foundational Applications

Mona Baker (1992) — In Other Words integrates pragmatics and SFL.

- Demonstrates how equivalence of meaning functions in translation.
- Uses numerous examples to illustrate linguistic and contextual variation.
- Core contribution: links linguistic theory to practical translation analysis.



Hatim & Mason's Contributions

- Discourse and the Translator (1990) and The Translator as Communicator (1997).

Apply Halliday's three components:

- Field → experiential meaning
 - Tenor → interpersonal meaning
 - Mode → textual meaning
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- Emphasize the interconnection between text and society
 - Highlight context as decisive in meaning-making.
 - Employ SFL concepts: register, intertextuality, field, tenor, and mode.



Juliane House's Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) Model

- Developed an SFL-based model for evaluating translation quality.
- Initial version: 1977, refined in 1997, and expanded in 2015.
- Incorporates Halliday's register variables (field, mode, tenor).
- 2015 revision adds corpus-based methods for empirical genre analysis.
- Allows systematic comparison of ST and TT for equivalence.



Integration of Additional Concepts into SFL-Based Translation Studies

- SFL-based research often combines other linguistic and analytical frameworks to deepen analysis.

Othman (2020):

- Developed a model for explicitation in English–Arabic translation.
- Focused on motion verbs to study how translators make implicit meanings explicit.

Li (2020):

- Applied SFL tools—voice, theme, modality, and transitivity.
- Explored how these features reveal ideology, characterisation, and agency in translation.



Appraisal Theory within the SFL Framework

- Appraisal Theory, developed by Martin & White (2005), expands SFL to include evaluation and stance.
- Widely applied in translation studies, especially by Jeremy Munday and Mei Zhang.

Both scholars highlight that:

- All translational interventions are evaluative (Munday 2012a, p.20).
- Translators mediate values and attitudes expressed in texts (Munday 2012a, p.101).

Munday's contribution:

- Demonstrated how the Appraisal System reveals translators' subjective evaluations and ideological interventions.



Core Components of Appraisal Theory

The system comprises three main domains:

1. Attitude – expression of feelings, judgments, and appreciation.
 2. Engagement – management of voices and dialogic positioning.
 3. Graduation – scaling of intensity or focus of attitudes.
- Munday → most translation studies focus on “attitude”, calling it the “central pillar” of appraisal (2012b, 102).



Applications of Appraisal Theory in Media Translation

Zhang (2013):

- Investigated translated news headlines to reveal cultural and institutional values.
- Showed that attitudinal meanings embedded in original news texts are reshaped during translation and trans-editing.
- Highlights how translation choices influence ideological framing and reader perception



Appraisal Framework in Political Discourse Translation

Pan and Huang (2021): Xi Jinping's Speeches

- Examined English translations of Xi Jinping's international speeches.
- Focus: Political metaphors and stance mediation.

Key finding:

- Even when metaphors are translated faithfully, contextual re-evaluation in headlines or surrounding text alters ideological positioning.
- Reveals subtle shifts in stance through contextual framing



Pan and Liao (2021): Integrating CDA and Appraisal

- Combined Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Appraisal Theory.
- Demonstrated how translators' ideological mediation and (re)positioning occur through evaluative and intensity-related language choices.

Thus, Appraisal Theory:

- Reveals how values, emotions, and ideologies are reconstructed across languages and cultures.
- Provides translators and researchers with systematic tools to detect ideological stance shifts in translation.



Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Model in Translation Studies

- Components → Textual analysis+ discourse practice+ sociocultural practice.
- Purpose → how translation mediates ideology, power, discourse across languages and cultures.
- Early Application:
- Valdeón (2007): Analyzed BBC Mundo and CNN en Español translations.
- Findings: CDA reveals how translated media texts reproduce, reshape, or challenge ideological narratives.



- Integrated CDA concepts—recontextualisation, strategy, and ideology—into translation studies.

Key idea:

- Translation = recontextualising the source text within new social and cultural settings, not just linguistic transfer.
- Translators /readers interpret meaning based on ideology, worldview, and background knowledge.
- Translation is never neutral—it reflects the translator’s political or ideological positioning.
- Example: A translator may intentionally turn a text into an act of protest even if the source text was neutral.



- Bandar Al-Hejin (2012): Systematising CDA Models for Translation
- Developed three main discourse-analytical models integrating Fairclough's CDA into translation studies.
- Aim: To structure how CDA can explain ideological and cultural mediation in translation.
- CDA-informed translation studies focus on textual shifts to expose ideological motivations.

Model 1 → Translation as Rewriting:

- Translation analyzed as textual, discursive, and sociocultural practice.
- Translator = ideological agent, reflecting target culture values.
- Translation becomes a text in its own right within its cultural environment.



Model 2 – Translation as an Intertextual Chain:

- Both source text (ST) and target text (TT) analyzed at three CDA levels.
- Allows cross-cultural comparison of ideology and linguistic choices.
- Includes retranslation—showing how changing contexts reshape discourse.

Model 3 – Translation as Multiple Versions:

- Examines multiple translations of one source text across cultures.
- Highlights plural discourses in multilingual contexts (e.g., UN, EU, WHO).
- Example: Life and Death in Shanghai translated into several Asian languages.



Limitations of Al-Hejin's Framework

- Does not explain relationships among multiple translations (influence between versions).
- Despite this, Al-Hejin's models remain foundational in applying CDA to translation studies.



Teun van Dijk's Discourse Analysis Approach in Translation Studies

- Van Dijk's model → interaction between cognition/ discourse/society.
- Explains how social power shapes minds and how discourse mediates this influence.
- Establishes a reciprocal relationship between social structures and discourse structures through cognition and ideology.

Analysis involves three levels:

1. Discursive activity
2. Human cognition
3. Social value orientations



Central Concept: Ideology

- Defined as foundational beliefs shared by social groups
- The Ideological Square (1998) helps analyze how discourse:
Reflects, reproduces, or challenges ideologies.
Constructs representations of Self vs. Other.
- In translation, it reveals ideological shifts and translators' interventions, showing whether translations reinforce or contest source-text ideologies.



Li and Pan's Contributions

- Li and Pan combined van Dijk's ideological square with appraisal theory.
- Both frameworks address evaluation and mediation of ideological stances.



Translation = “ideology-governed social practice”

Translators—being government officials—act as institutional agents serving state authorship



Refinement of van Dijk's Ideological Square

- Li and Pan's Proposal → a two-layered adaptation of van Dijk's model.
- Layer 1: Reflects the canonical ideological expectations of the source text — the official stance promoting a positive image of China.
- Layer 2: Represents actual translation practice, where translators mediate between political ideology and target cultural values, sometimes producing surface-level ideological shifts.
- Outcome: This refined model allows for more flexible analysis, accounting for institutional, diplomatic, and cultural influences in translation.

