A Critical Discourse Analysis of Discursive Representations of Begging and Homelessness on the London Overground

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❯ **Abstract_** *This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse two sets of texts relating to begging on the London Overground rail network. One is a poster, which combines public information prohibiting begging with a charitable appeal, and the other is a small corpus of oral appeals for help made by people begging. The paper analyses the oral appeals as forms of resistance to the discourses evoked by the poster.*

❯ **Keywords_** *Begging, London, Critical Discourse Analysis*

Introduction

Foucault wrote that in seeking to locate and understand power, one should begin by looking at where people are resisting it (1982, p.780). Anyone who has travelled on the London transport system in the last 20 or so years has borne witness to one such struggle, in that travellers are sometimes addressed in platform announcements as 'passengers' and sometimes as 'customers', the first embodying a discourse of public transport as a public good and the second an ideology of marketised and privatised service provision. This paper addresses another site of ideological struggle, analysing two types of text related to begging on the London Overground network. One of the texts is an official poster aimed at encouraging travellers to give to (a) charity rather than directly to beggars, while the other consists of the oral appeals of those asking for help. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's 1989 framework (1989; 2001), I will subject these texts to sociocultural

contextualisation, interpretative analysis and textual analysis in order to identify how the two text types are interrelated in the ways they address, reproduce or seek to resist particular discourses around begging and homelessness.

As a regular user of London Overground, I have recently seen a marked increase in the number of people asking for help, usually on the basis of finding themselves homeless. This is not just a matter of individual perception: the Combined Homelessness and Information Network reported in October 2018 that there is now a record amount of people sleeping rough in London (quoted in Marsh, 2018). I have also seen and heard various campaigns in different parts of the TFL network (of which both London Overground and London Underground are part) advising and sometimes urging travellers not to 'encourage' begging by giving money or food to those asking for it. One way to better understand the power dynamics related to begging is to juxtapose these two types of representation, and to consider the manner and extent to which the oral appeals of those begging constitute a response and a form of resistance to the official notices and other such admonishments.

Methodological Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis aims to uncover "how discourse is related to power relations, ideologies, economic and political strategies and policies" (Fairclough, 2001, p.5). There are several varieties of CDA (see Wodak and Meyer, 2009 for a survey) and the frameworks and methodologies used and espoused by Fairclough himself have changed considerably over the years (see for example Choulakiari and Fairclough, 1999 on genre, discourse and style or Fairclough, 2014 on 'critique-explanation-action'). What all CDA approaches have in common is a problem-oriented approach (Wodak and Meyer, 2009) and a belief that "discourse is language in its relations with other elements in the social process" (Fairclough, 2014). Discourse is "not only a product or reflection of unequal social processes, but is itself seen to contribute towards the production (or reproduction) of these processes" (Talbot *et al*., 2003, p.36); texts embody social structure and discourse in a unity of 'context, interaction and text' (Janks, 1997). Critical analysis of discourse thus aims to raise questions about what and how particular assumptions representing particular interests are positioned and negated within a text in order to get at what power relations lie behind and structure it.

In this way, Fairclough (1989) argues that any spoken or written text is both an instance of a discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of text and a piece of social practice. The researcher should analyse the texts them-selves ('description'), the processes of their production and interpretation (the 'interpretation' of 'discourse practice'), their social context ('explanation'), and the

relationship between all three aspects. Fairclough's distinction between interpretation and explanation has been criticised for failing to theorise just how it is that the critical discourse analyst comes to have more and better insight into the discursive event than its participants do. His term 'members' resources' (which are 'socially determined and ideologically shaped' (Fairclough, 2013, p.11)) implies that analysts, through recourse to social theory, have 'VIP resources' which supersede the constraints of the assumptions and expectations of 'lay' participants. Slembrouck (2001) is also concerned that CDA fails to include the 'voices' of participants and would better conduct its critique in dialogue with them. Fairclough (2014) argues that participants do not analyse the text in 'the same systematic way' as analysts do, but he has also adapted his method to take account of such criticisms. In my own discussion, there will be a good deal of overlap between what can be considered explanation, interpretation and description. Each aspect demands a specific type of analysis. Although he subsequently revised this procedure, the three-dimensional framework enables us to describe the social processes and structures behind a given piece of discourse, understand those that may have influenced its production and interpretation, and identify possible ways to revise discourse in order to emancipate discourse and thus social practices from their ideological constraints.

While Fairclough suggests that analysis should proceed from the descriptive to the interpretive to the explanatory, he also writes that it is not important which kind of analysis one begins with, as long as the analysis demonstrates the connections between them: as Janks (1997) argues, "[i]t is through seeking out the interconnections that one uncovers the patterns and disjunctions that are to be described, interpreted and explained" (p.329). For my purposes, given that I am dealing with very short texts, a top-down approach is most practical, focusing *in* rather than out, beginning with the socio-historical context, moving through the discursive practices and then analysing the texts themselves. But first, here are the texts that I shall be analysing.

Setting and data collection
The poster in Figure 1 appeared in early 2019 around the Overground network. It was initially prominently displayed at the entrance to stations, and then over the following weeks larger posters were installed on platforms, a smaller version was posted inside the carriages, and the text was also broadcast on the trains at irregular intervals.

Figure 1

I collected the oral appeals by discreetly noting down what I remembered of what people said once they'd moved on in a way that ensured that my observation was inconspicuous. The sample of texts thus gathered represents rather an ad-hoc selection of oral appeals, but I did endeavour to choose a representative variety of the two dozen or so I collected on London Overground between January and March 2019.

1. *Sorry to bother you, my name's… I recently became homeless, I'm sleeping in a park at the moment, trying to get some change to get into a hostel tonight*

2. *Hello, I'm homeless (UP), I'm collecting for something to eat and drink, if you could spare any pennies I'd be very grateful, thank you very much*

3. *Sorry to bother you I wonder if anyone can help me out for a bit of food and drink it's freezing cold*

4. *Sorry to bother you, my name's…., I hate asking but I got thrown out of my flat by bailiffs when I lost my job and no one's helping me, when you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing.*

5. *Sorry guys, I'm homeless, I really am homeless, and I'm just trying to get some money for some socks or even a bed for the night, if anyone can help…*

Sociohistorical Context

While it is far beyond the scope of this study to investigate the demographics and economic and social circumstances of the people begging in the context of London in 2019, *The Guardian* reports that 'immediate factors [such as the] rollout of universal credit and freezes to local housing allowance rates put even basic accommodation beyond the means of many' (Doward *et al.*, 2018) Shelter estimated that as a result of this and the broader housing crisis, there were as of 2018 almost 170 000 homeless people in the capital (Shelter, 2018).

While 'only a relatively small proportion of homeless persons beg' (Tosi, 2007, p.226), they are reliant on public spaces to do so, and are thus 'among those who suffer most under measures to control urban space'.[1] One strand in tackling homelessness attempts to make the homeless themselves disappear from public spaces, since among other things, '[t]he presence of street begging is a strong signal that our welfare institutions are failing to protect some people in dire need. If successful, anti-begging policies have the potential to eliminate that message' (Adler *et al.*, 2000, p.1). In line with this, one member of the London Assembly recently called on the Mayor to 'curtail this [begging] activity', and in his response, Mayor Sadiq Khan stated that London Underground is 'trialling new customer communications this year' (London Assembly, 2018).

Figure 1 is an illustration of such a communication, and it involves a Diverted Giving Scheme (Pérez-Muñoz, 2018), which helps to finance NGOs that have better infrastructures and broader perspectives than individual donors when it comes to effectively helping beggars. This also means that money may be more evenly distributed, because as Moen argues (2014, p.74), 'when you give money to a beggar, you are statistically likely to give the most money to the ones with the locations, looks, and tricks [sic] that prompt people to give'.[2]

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[1]   In London and other cities, formerly public spaces are increasingly privatised (see e.g. Minton, 2009, 2017).

[2]   The scale, complexity and nature of the problem mean, however, that what charities can achieve is inevitably limited. Hostels are not necessarily the perfect answer to rough sleeping – Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin (2007) report that many such facilities are increasingly over-institutionalised, and can be 'an organisational barrier rather than an instrument for remedying and reducing homelessness'. Pérez-Muñoz argues convincingly that many schemes which involve outlawing begging are 'based on the assumption that beggars have real opportunities to stay out of the streets and go back to work. We should not assume without argument that this idea is sound' (p.931). In an era of increasing homelessness, with few major state-level policy responses even up for discussion, there will inevitably be people who try to use begging in public places as a means of survival.

Interpreting the Discourse Practices

The interpretation of discourse practice is concerned with the way participants arrive at an understanding of the text and looks at the connections between the text, other texts and related discourses, i.e. with its intertextual and interdiscursive dimensions. Fairclough argues that texts are normally heterogeneous as they are 'constituted by combinations of diverse genres and discourses' (1995, p.134), and my analysis of the interpretive context will consider how the texts in question relate to statements by Transport for London itself and to previous campaigns, as well as to pre-existing discourses regarding begging.

Identifying the interpretive context

Fairclough (1989, p.146) provides a series of questions designed to identify key elements of the interpretive context, and these can be taken in turn, focusing first on the poster and second on the oral appeals:

- **Contents: What's going on?**

  The poster: An official notice giving information, displayed at London Overground stations and in carriages in East London encouraging people who are considering helping someone they see begging to give to a (named) charity instead.

  The oral appeals: Produced by people in the act of asking for help (begging).

- **Subjects: Who's involved?**

  The poster: This is part of a joint campaign between Transport for London, its subsidiary London Overground and the office of the Mayor of London. It is aimed at passengers on the network. The other participants are the charity identified in the poster and the beggars themselves, who are only mentioned fleetingly.

  The oral appeals: These are addressed by the beggars to the passengers on the network, i.e. whoever was occupying a particular carriage at that moment.

- **Relations: In what relations?**

  The poster: This represents the official voice of the institutions which run and, to an extent, police the transport network. It explicitly addresses the passengers. It's not clear from the poster whether the specified charity (the Whitechapel Mission) is party to the campaign, although in correspondence with the charity itself it transpired that the wording and design came from London Overground and is subject to change depending on the response of the public.

  The oral appeals: The oral appeals can be seen as part of a three-way conversation, to which the poster also contributes. Although beggars are mentioned in the poster and can see that they are mentioned, they are not explicitly addressed.

Instead, both the official notice *and* the appeals of those begging are addressed directly to the passengers, whose actions in giving or not giving respond differentially to the two 'parties'. With the spoken appeals, the passengers do not quite fit the definition of ratified participants provided in Goffman's Participation Framework (1963), as they are neither overhearers/bystanders nor addressed or unaddressed recipients – individual passengers rarely pay explicit attention to the person begging, but often behave as if nothing is taking place, thus relegating the beggar to the status of a 'non-person'. Partly thanks to the poster campaigns, most passengers will be aware that begging is actively discouraged on Overground trains, so some choose to ignore entirely an activity and appeal which they know to be considered illicit.

- **Connections: What's the role of language?**

The poster: The genre is explicitly that of a public information campaign, but it also carries both an implicit message of prohibited behaviour and a charitable appeal. Unlike most fundraising appeals, it features no graphical elements such as photos, and no details of how to donate to the charity in question, reflecting the fact that it represents several distinct orders of discourse and serves a dual and therefore ambiguous purpose.

The oral appeals: These are rhetorical appeals for help, usually in the form of money but also for the satisfaction of other basic needs. One striking feature of this particular activity type is that it involves a captive audience in that the passengers are not in a position to simply walk away.

Intertextual context

The poster campaign replaced an earlier set of announcements which took a very different approach to discouraging begging. These announcements were used all across the London transport network and were based on advice from British Transport Police. There were subsequent reports in at least two newspapers, one in *The Independent* ('London Underground criticised over 'heartless' announcements telling passengers not to 'encourage' beggars' (Bulman, 2018) and the other in *The Metro* ('Anti-begging Tube announcements 'encourage rich people to ignore the homeless'' (Roberts, 2018). One common criticism regarded the wording of the announcements, which warned passengers that beggars were 'operating' on the tube. Some critics observed that this choice of words framed those begging as criminals.

In both articles, the same spokesperson (TFL's Director of Compliance and Policing) is quoted and gives much the same message: London Underground will be trialling new customer communications this year (see Mayor Sadiq Khan above), and the organisation is "already in the process of changing their announcements to

encourage people to give to charity…We encourage people to donate to the London Charities Homeless Group rather than to beggars travelling on the Tube or rail network, so that donations can directly help fund homeless services."

Interdiscursive context

It is probable that most passengers encountering these two sets of appeals will have heard and/or read about the earlier campaigns. Their expectations will also have been conditioned by a range of broader discourses likely to structure their understanding of begging and homelessness. Having looked at the sociohistorical and intertextual contexts, it is now worth identifying some common ways of talking about homelessness and begging, some of which we have already encountered and some of which emerge in the texts themselves when subjected to linguistic analysis.

a) *Begging is a criminal activity so beggars should be treated as such*. This was mentioned earlier, in discussion of both the sociohistorical and intertextual contexts. It encompasses multiple sub-discourses (e.g. criminal gangs) and operates at the highest policy levels.

b) *Beggars are not in genuine need.* This is a very common discourse in online forums, radio phone-ins, etc. According to one comment in an online discussion of attempts to reduce begging on the Overground, "You underestimate what those train beggars take in. You only need a couple of suckers per hour to give you folding money and you're earning better money than half the subscribers here" (Reddit, 2019). Another sub-discourse identified by one of Adler *et al.*'s (2000, p.211) informants is that the existence of the Welfare State means that there is no excuse for begging as "no one in this country is that poor".

c) *Anyone begging is not competent to handle their own financial resources.* To quote one of the people interviewed in Hewitt (1994), it is pointless giving money directly to beggars as "they spend it on the wrong things" (ibid p.134). A sub-discourse is that they are all drug addicts. Partly as a result, it is also said that is that it is better to "give them food" (ibid, p.123).

d) *It's better to give to an organised charity than to a street beggar.* A Guardian article debating whether or not one should donate directly to the homeless (Johnson, 2018) reports that "UK homelessness charities are almost unanimous on the question of giving money [directly]: it is better not to…All of the institutions in question agree that money should instead be given directly to them rather than to beggars."

e) *Corporate Social Responsibility.* It is now widely accepted that corporations should hold themselves accountable for problems that occur within the ambit of their operations. As we have seen, TFL has made statements about begging but

does not appear to have an officially stated policy. There is a rail by-law which states "Except with written permission from the Operator no person on the railway shall tout for or solicit money, reward, custom or employment of any kind" (Cross Country Trains, 2019), but that is a general prohibition that does not specifically apply to TFL. Insofar as public statements are concerned, the only stated policies related to collecting money relate solely to charity collections (Transport for London, 2019). In the Metro article the spokesperson talks of "signpost[ing] commuters towards these positive ways to make a difference" and states that "If buskers and beggars are disrupting customer journeys then TFL has every right to tackle the issue". It is noteworthy that this statement addresses corporate rights rather than responsibilities.

f) *Humanising discourse, respecting the dignity and circumstances of those begging.* The petition against TFL's previous advertising campaigns (referred to in the Metro article) embodies this discourse: 'The announcements currently running on the underground are deeply dehumanising, encouraging wealthy commuters to see those forced to beg on trains as a nuisance to be ignored – rather than people who have been badly let down by the system, and who deserve support and compassion.' (change.org, 2019).

g) *Just give them some money.* The notion that donations to individuals are purely a question of personal choice is widely shared. A *New Statesman* article in October 2017 was entitled 'Why you should give money directly and uncondi- tionally to homeless people: Who are you to judge what to do with their cash?' (Broomfield, 2017).

h) *Society, rather than individual failings, is to blame for poverty.* The last thirty or so years of neoliberal hegemony have been marked by an increasing tendency to prefer individual failings (such as laziness or a lack of willpower) rather than social factors as an explanation for poverty (natcen.ac.uk, 2013). Nevertheless, explanations that place much of the blame for (e.g.) increasing homelessness still circulate widely.

Text Analysis

In CDA, analysing the linguistic features of the text involves reading against the grain of its particular logics, in order to discover which discourses the text makes available to its audiences and how its authors "establish hypotheses about discourses at work in society" (Janks, 1997, p.331). This analysis will allow us to identify salient characteristics that may either connect the text to the contexts and

discourses we have been discussing or serve to point us in other directions. The fact that the two types of text are (very) brief means that my analysis can try to cover a broader variety of features rather than limiting itself to one or two specific aspects.

Text analysis of the poster

The first clause ('If you want to help someone you see begging…') takes for granted that there are people begging on the Overground network and assumes that not everyone may be inclined to help them. Thus the poster does not constitute a straightforward charitable appeal. It gives no further reason for the presence of people begging, presenting the reader with a choice and suggesting a course of action on the condition that they may wish to contribute. The fact that the poster provides no means of giving in the form of a QR code or number to text suggests that its purpose is more about reducing begging than raising money. Although it uses the imperative form ('donate…') it does not use the word 'please', which would carry a normative implication that people *should* give. This ambiguity in its appeal also derives from the lack of any explicit admonition *not* to give to beggars. In Fairclough's terms, it embodies at least three orders of discourse: an information poster (as signalled by the 'information' logo), an official proscription of certain forms of behaviour, and an appeal to people's charitable impulses. The sparseness of its visual design suggests it may be a trial poster.

The style of the text is institutional, devoid of personalisation, occluding the person writing the notice. This is achieved not just via the presence of the three official logos but also by the absence of any first person pronouns in the text. In the final clause, however, the phrase 'Any donations will be…' has the form of a commissive speech act, or more specifically a promise, but it is not clear whose voice is providing the assurance. Is it TFL or the 'Whitechapel Mission'? The inverted commas around the name of the charity perhaps suggests that it is TFL, thus the poster serves to distance its producers from the benefitting institution.

Another striking feature is the shift within the first sentence, in that the beneficiary of the first clause ('someone you see begging') is not the same as the beneficiary in the second one (the 'Whitechapel Mission'). This shift presupposes that 'it is better to give to a charitable institution than directly to a beggar' and reminds us of the statement from TFL about *signposting* commuters to where they can make a positive difference and, by implication, not make the situation worse. The subsequent use of the passive voice ('Any donations will be used carefully and your generosity will be welcomed') also serves to syntactically occlude the agency of the 'someone' begging. After the very first clause, they make no further appearance in the text. The choice of language thus positions them as objects of intervention rather than subjects with their own agency.

The poster does not address the person begging. There is no suggestion of 'if you are begging' or 'if you are caught begging'. Beggars are likely to see the poster but are not included in the 'you' of its addressee. The use of the second person 'you', along with the presentation of a choice, evokes a marketing order of discourse, also indexed by the use of nominalisation in the phrase 'your generosity', and culminating in a promise ('will be used carefully and gratefully received'). There seems to be an implicit contrast in the final sentence ('Any donations will…') which relates back to the first choice. Just as the promise of marketing discourses is always dependent on the 'consumer' making the right choice and often operationalises the prospective consumer's 'fear of missing out', the promise that the giver's donation 'will be generously received and carefully used' suggest that if they make the wrong choice and give directly to the beggar, the donation will *not* be welcomed and may instead be wasted. Thus the poster evokes the paternalistic discourse of incompetence – those begging are positioned as not being able to manage their own needs.

The status of the poster, which is signalled as an official product of the institutions which manage the Overground network, also seems to embody a discourse of corporate social responsibility. Thus it marks a shift from the previous campaign. Negative discourses certainly are evoked, but it is not implied that beggars are not in genuine need or that they are engaged in criminal activity, as in the TL campaigns advised by the police.

Text analysis of the oral appeals

The very fact of making individual appeals for help in public can be read as a form of resisting the discourse that the public should only give to charities and ignore individual beggars entirely. Thus we might expect that in the oral appeals made by those begging, there would be an explicit focus on individual goals and circumstances, presenting individual cases of injustice and inequality in opposition to the impersonal prohibition.

In terms of the overall structure of the appeals, we can see that there is a script structure at work, which broadly has the following form:

Text 1: *Sorry to bother you, my name's… I recently became homeless, I'm sleeping in a park at the moment, trying to get some change to get into a hostel tonight.*
Apology – introduction – circumstances – purpose or goal

Text 2: *Hello, I'm homeless (UP), I'm collecting for something to eat and drink, if you could spare any pennies I'd be very grateful, thank you very much*
Introduction – purpose or goal – request – thanks

Text 3: *Sorry to bother you I wonder if anyone can help me out for a bit of food and drink it's freezing cold*
Apology – request – purpose or goal – circumstances

Text 4: *Sorry to bother you, my name's…., I hate asking but I got thrown out of my flat by bailiffs when I lost my job and no one's helping me, when you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing.*
Apology – introduction – circumstances

Text 5: *Sorry guys, I'm homeless, I really am homeless, and I'm just trying to get some money for some socks or even a bed for the night, if anyone can help…*
Apology – introduction – purpose or goal – request

One of the first things we notice upon looking closely at the language used is that by introducing themselves with their names almost all of those begging seek to assert their identity in the face of the anonymity imposed on them by the official discourses. In rhetorical terms, they also present a rhetorical ethos, i.e. an assertion of the credibility of the speaker (Leith, 2011). One of the appeals also seeks to narrativise their specific circumstances: '*I got thrown out of my flat by bailiffs when I lost my job'.*

The fact of addressing an audience which is physically present may help to determine the use of the declarative mood, and there are very few clauses which are not in the first or second person along with a mixture of what Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) call relational verbs (*to be, to become*) and material ones (*lose, get into, sleep, get, spare*). While the poster employs the passive voice ('to be' + past participle) to occlude the agency of the beggars, the oral appeals employ the active voice in almost every clause.

Numerous subordinate clauses also explain 'why' someone has found themselves in such a situation: '*When you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing'.* This provides some insight into the specific experience of being homeless. In some cases, the appeals evoke the discourse of 'society is to blame', referencing social inequality and injustice. In the course of narrativising his circumstances one appeal reports that '*I got thrown out of my flat',* where the choice of the passive voice emphasises the role that wider society rather than personal failings have played in this misfortune*.* In a similar vein, in the choice of the phrase '*I lost my job'* it does not specify why*.* This connects it to the humanising discourses, with appeals for empathy ('*it's freezing cold')* and is echoed in the use of rhetorical devices evoking pathos, such as the parallelism of *no one's, nobody, nothing ('no one's helping me, when you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing').*

The choice of grammatical aspect is significant. The use of the present continuous stresses the contingency of their current circumstances ('*at the moment,*')*; whether or not they will be able to change them is presented as conditional on their receiving help; thus they do not present themselves as inherently helpless or incompetent.

In all cases, it is not clear whether the speaker is addressing an individual or a collective audience – the 'you' could address both. In Text 4 the speaker employs a universal 'you' to appeal for empathy. The choice of this device attempts to include the audience, or rather to be included, and thus seeks to reposition the listener in relation to the speaker, as if to fill in the absence in the official discourses which tend to erase the needs and identity of the person begging.

With regard to the mood of the text, there is an absence of imperatives (e.g. 'Donate to…'), with all the clauses in the declarative mood. There is an instance of an intensifying adverb in Text 5 when the speaker insists that they are *'really* homeless'. This can be read as resisting those discourses which construct an identity for those begging as *not* genuinely homeless.

All contain apologies, polite forms, mostly in the form of subordinate clauses, e.g.: *if anyone can help… I hate asking but…* In addition to asserting their specific circumstances, most appeals also express goals or purposes: *some change to get into a hostel* (Text 1)*; something to eat and drink* (Text 2)*; a bit of food and drink* (Text 3); *some money for some socks or even a bed for the night* (Text 5). This could be read as a means of resisting interpretations which draw on discourses around drugs and the assumption that those begging waste whatever money they are given. In the process several of the appeals make use of hedging to downplay their needs and the nature for the help they are asking for, for example *'a bit of' 'some change'* or the euphemism *'spare some pennies'*. The use of '*just*' in the phrase '*I'm just trying'* can be understood as merely, simply, to emphasise that they are not asking for anything outlandish or making unreasonable requests. This contributes an informal, conversational tone, as if in dialogue with someone, and can be interpreted as an attempt to confront discourses that depict those begging as troublesome and disruptive.

Conclusion

This analysis has inevitably been limited by the brevity of the texts. A more effective analysis would use a wider range of lengthier texts and draw on other critical discourse frameworks in a more systematic way. Nonetheless, close study allows some general conclusions about how power operates in and through these texts.

Blommaert (2005, p.1) and Foucault (1982) both specify that there is nothing inherently wrong or bad about the existence or exercise of power *per se*. However, both begging and prohibitions on begging and the social circumstances that force people into it are *problems* of power, and I have dealt here with two instances of discourse which involve manipulation, which makes the tools of CDA particularly useful given that 'manipulation is one of the crucial notions of Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 2006).

The authorities use certain discursive strategies to try to tackle the phenomenon of begging on their networks, in an attempt to respond to (their audience's presumed knowledge of) the prohibition on begging on the Overground and the subsequent positioning of those begging as either criminals or incompetents; in response, those begging appear to employ a range of persuasive tools.

My analysis of the interpretive and the textual content of the poster has illustrated a clear shift in discourse from criminalising approach to one in which their agency is syntactically erased. In response, those begging seek to make themselves audible and visible – *intelligible*, in Judith Butler's terms (Butler, 2011). Anti-begging policies have the potential to address the symptom of deeper inequalities that begging represents without tackling the underlying malaise which involves unequal access to housing and its policy treatment as a private rather than public good. The language in which such measures are enacted can, as we have seen, have the effect of syntactically erasing their visibility. Any attempt to address the 'problem' of 'begging' should involve the beggars themselves, rather than constructing an identity for them as non-persons. It could even seek, in line with the proposal made by Johnsen *et al*. (2020), to include the normative perspectives of all stakeholders in a rational, rhetoric-free and non-paternalistic debate on the ethics of exclusion-based responses to street homelessness; this would allow for those begging to narrativise their situations and to explain their circumstances and goals. Transport *for* London should seek to include and talk *to* those Londoners who don't have homes, extending that inclusivity to the language it uses to talk *about* them. Clearly this latest campaign represents an advance from previous ones which have sought to criminalise the activity of begging on public transport, but further consideration of these issues should consider how a future poster campaign might incorporate rather than exclude the voices and agencies of those forced into begging in a way that (as Johnsen *et al.* (ibid) also argue) acknowledges the moral ambivalences and sometimes intractably conflicting commitments involved.

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