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The concept of four-level context by Ruth Wodak as an expression of interdisciplinarity in discourse analysis

KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Historical Discourse Analysis (HDA), educational discourse, interdisciplinarity, context, triangulation

ABSTRACT

The concept of four-level context by Ruth Wodak is to provide triangulation and minimize the risk of being biased. Simultaneously the analysis of this concept in combination with the research programme of HDA is an expression of interdisciplinarity's importance in this approach. One should notice that interdisciplinarity is not an aim itself and it is a subject to limitations. The most specific limitations are those which result from triangulation on the interdiscursive level.

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Introduction

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a group of approaches towards the discourse analysis, distinguished by its theoretical references¹ and its active engagement in the examined subjects and phenomena, and the transgression of the description, towards a direction of a political and moral challenge.² The analysis is also distinguished by the issues discussed, that, however, must be adequate to their disciplines,

¹ See: M. Meyer, *Between theory, method and politics: positioning of the approaches to CDA*, [in:] *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, M. Meyer, R. Wodak (eds.) 2001, Sage Publications Ltd., EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) – printed on 7/19/2015 2:01 PM via Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, pp. 14-31.

² T. A. Van Dijk, *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis*, "Discourse & Society" 1993, vol. 4(2), London. Newbury Park and New Delhi: Sage, pp. 249-283; T.A. Van Dijk, *Badania nad dyskursem*, [in:] *Dyskurs jako struktura i proces*, T. A. Van Dijk (eds.) Warszawa 2001, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 9-44; B. Jabłońska, *Krytyczna analiza dyskursu w świetle założeń socjologii fenomenologicznej (dylematy teoretyczno-metodologiczne)*, „Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej” 2013, vol. IX, no 1, pp. 48-61, www.przegladsocjologiijakosciowej.org, access date: 2015-10-05.

are characterised by the unveiling of particular interests and hidden relations of power, denaturalising that which is seemingly “obvious”³, debating that which is unquestioned and in result, uncovering alternatives and choices previously unseen.

CDA has a well-established position regarding educational research, including Poland. A significant amount of literature gives testament to that, where the discourse of education is a subject of research, and researchers apply and/or declare a critical approach to its analysis. ⁴

The property ascribed to the discourse analysis, including the discourse of education, is its interdisciplinarity. It is a characteristic, that isn't limited to the critical approach. The following article shall refer to one of the critical approaches, represented by Ruth Wodak: the Historical Discourse Analysis (HDA). The choice is a result of my research experience but it also follows the very principles of the HDA research programme, articulated by Ruth Wodak. Even at early stages, the author claims that:

“1. The approach is interdisciplinary. 2. Interdisciplinarity is located on several levels: in theory, in the work itself, in teams, and in practise”⁵

And further:

“The theory as well as methodology is eclectic; that is theories and methods are integrated which are helpful in understanding and explaining the object under investigation”⁶

The first part of the article is devoted to discussing the theory of the Four-Level Context as presented by Ruth Wodak, which in turn, will be a starting point for explaining the issue of interdisciplinarity in discourse research. Additionally, an example of the subject of author's research shall be presented, as characterised by

³ A. Luke, *Text and Discourse in Education: An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis* [in:] *Review of Research in Education*, M. Apple (eds.), vol. 21, Washington, D.C. 1995-1996, American Educational Research Association, pp. 7-11; T. Szkudlarek, *Postrukturalizm a metodologia pedagogiki*, “Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Socjologia wychowania XIII- Nauki Humanistyczne-społeczne”, vol. 317; M. Meyer, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

⁴ More on that subject, see: U. Ostrowska, *Krytyczna Analiza Dyskursu (KAD). Z perspektywy badań pedagogicznych*, [in:] *Pedagogika ogólna. Dyskursy o statusie naukowym i dydaktycznym*, T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska (eds.), Bydgoszcz 2011, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, pp. 113-127; H. Ostrowicka, *Kategoria dyskursu w języku i w badaniach edukacyjnych – w poszukiwaniu osobliwości pedagogiczne; zorientowanej analizy dyskursu*, „Forum Oświatowe” 2014, 2(52), pp. 47-68, Downloaded from: <http://forumoswiatowe.pl/index.php/czasopismo/article/view/228>, access date: 2015-07-18; V. Kopińska, *Krytyczna Analiza Dyskursu – podstawowe założenia, implikacje dla badań pedagogicznych, zastosowanie*, „Rocznik Andragogiczny” 2016.

⁵ See: R. Wodak, The discourse-historical approach [in:] *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, M. Meyer, R. Wodak (eds.) 2001, Sage Publications Ltd., EBSCO Publishing; eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) – printed on 7/19/2015 2:01 PM via NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUŃ, p. 69.

⁶ Ibidem.

its discursive aspect, in order to present a framework of interdisciplinarity, that occurs in particular research.

The CDA Interdisciplinarity regarding triangulation as presented by Ruth Wodak

According to Ruth Wodak, the theoretical triangulation⁷ in HDA research is accomplished with the theory of the four-level context. The very presence and meaning given to context is no curiosity, as it is an inherent element present in the qualitative orientation of social research. Ruth Wodak attaches a special meaning to context, claiming that its omission could prevent the integral and clear analysis as well as interpretation.⁸ The author indicates, that the application of this theory, allows to transgress past the realm of language, gather interdisciplinary sources of proximate disciplines, and simultaneously, maintain an awareness of particular theoretical decision-making and their consequences.⁹

The author lists the following levels of context:

- the immediate language or text internal context;
- the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses;
- the ‘middle range’ theories context;
- the ‘grand’ theories context.¹⁰

The first, “internal” level of contextual analysis fully expresses the interdisciplinary character of discourse analysis. The interdisciplinarity results from the fact, that the very application of discourse analysis is viable only in cases, where the discussed social issue is of discursive nature, and in result – the solutions for social issues are based on the analysis of discursive practice. This is due to the basic assumption of CDA, that the language and the social realm constitute each other.¹¹ The

⁷ R. Wodak’s approach towards triangulation is characterised as theoretical: M. Meyer, op. cit., p. 29. It should not be mistaken for the triangulation theory by Denzin: U. Flick, *Jakość w badaniach jakościowych*, trans. P. Tomanek, Warszawa 2011, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, p. 84.

⁸ R. Wodak, Wstęp: *Badania nad dyskursem – ważne pojęcia i terminy*, [in:] *Jakościowa analiza dyskursu w naukach społecznych*, R. Wodak R., M. Krzyżanowski (eds.), trans. D. Przepiórkowska, Warszawa 2011, Oficyna Wydawnicza Łośgraf, p. 23.

⁹ R. Wodak, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

¹⁰ R. Wodak, The discourse-historical approach [in:] *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, M. Meyer, R. Wodak (eds.) 2001, Sage Publications Ltd., EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) – printed on 7/19/2015 2:01 PM via NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUŃ, p. 67.

¹¹ N. Fairclough, A. Duszak, Wstęp: *Krytyczna analiza dyskursu – nowy obszar badawczy*, [in:] *Krytyczna analiza dyskursu. Interdyscyplinarne podejście do komunikacji społecznej*, A. Duszak,

main requirement of CDA is to ensure a “linguistic surface”¹², but in the words of Ruth Wodak – “The approach is problem oriented, not focused on specific linguistic items”¹³, meaning that language analysis is not an aim *per se*. Contrarily, the social significance ascribed to the discourse, raises the importance of language. Considering the premises of CDA, regarding the relations between the language and society, one should not perceive this analysis exclusively in instrumental categories.

The second level of analysis ensures the triangulation of research and/or methods, as well as theories and/or data¹⁴ and is a continuation of level one. The second level strengthens the interdisciplinarity of the discussed approach. The phase transfers the balance point from particular “texts” or their parts (units of analysis) to a group of texts. It is no mere summary, but a pursuit of relations between different pieces of text. That enables the discourse reconstruction, which, according to Ruth Wodak “presupposes an existence of patterns and common properties regarding knowledge and structure, while the text is a particular, unique accomplishment of the discourse”¹⁵. The discourse reconstruction enables the pursuit of relations with other discourses (interdiscursivity). That precise moment strengthens the interdisciplinarity of the described approach. Applying the triangulation of researchers, methods, theories or data, even if limited, allowing for the comparison of discourses¹⁶, enables the “activation” of new areas, that may potentially transfer from different scientific disciplines, different than those previously researched. The third and fourth levels of context are the interpretation of the discourse in the social-political-historical and theoretical context¹⁷, and in result necessarily acquire theories from different

N. Fairclough (eds.), Kraków 2008, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac naukowych UNIVERSITAS, p. 16.

¹² M. Meyer, *Between theory, method and politics: positioning of the approaches to CDA*, [in:] *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, M. Meyer, R. Wodak (eds.) 2001, Sage Publications Ltd., EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) – printed on 7/19/2015 2:01 PM via NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUŃ, pp. 15-16.

¹³ R. Wodak, The discourse-historical approach [in:] *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, M. Meyer, R. Wodak (eds.) 2001, Sage Publications Ltd., EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) – printed on 7/19/2015 2:01 PM via NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUŃ, p. 69.

¹⁴ K. Rubacha, *Metodologia badań nad edukacją*, Warszawa 2008, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, pp. 87-88.

¹⁵ R. Wodak, *Wstęp: Badania nad dyskursem – ważne pojęcia i terminy*, [in:] *Jakościowa analiza dyskursu w naukach społecznych*, R. Wodak R., M. Krzyżanowski (eds.), trans. D. Przepiórkowska, Warszawa 2011, Oficyna Wydawnicza Łośgraf, p. 18

¹⁶ V. Kopińska, op.cit.

¹⁷ R. Wodak, *Dyskurs populistyczny: retoryka wykluczenia a gatunki języka pisanego*, trans. J. Wawrzyniak, A. Wójcicki [in:] *Krytyczna analiza dyskursu. Interdyscyplinarne podejście do komunikacji społecznej*, A. Duszak, N. Fairclough (eds.), Kraków 2008, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców

scientific disciplines. Interdiscursivity ‘expands’ interdisciplinarity further. Various researchers may assume different positions on the programmatic level, which in turn affects the methodology of conducted research. The researchers may refer to different theories on the macro-, meso- and micro- levels (image 1)

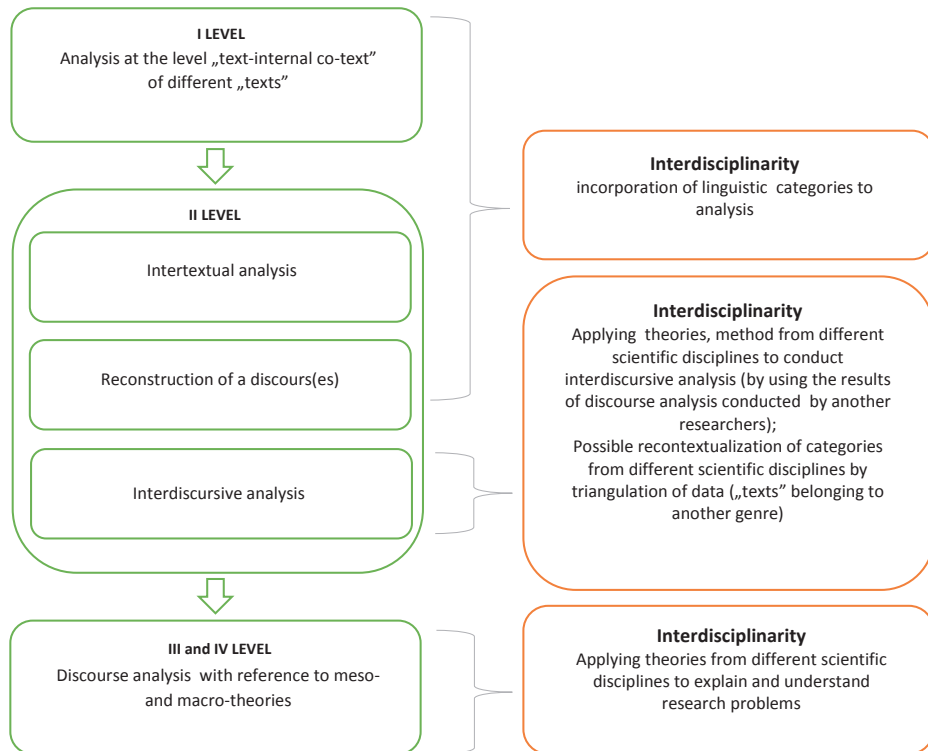


Image 1. Interdisciplinarity in the concept of the four-level context, in discourse analysis.

Source. Own research

Triangulation alone, at the level of data, may increase interdisciplinarity, as the type of data may enforce turning to various disciplines (e.g. the analysis of the discourse based on the written word and the analysis drawing upon the visual evidence). Image 1 is a diagram showing the way in which the interdisciplinarity is/may be accomplished in the discourse analysis, based on the concept of four-

level context the Four-level Context. The image shows, that including of elements of various scientific disciplines is accomplished according to particular levels of analysis. One should mention however, that the research practice involves a certain “switching” between levels¹⁸, which in consequence causes the process to be non-linear. Although, the reason, for which elements from different scientific disciplines are included in the discourse analysis, is strictly related to particular levels of the analysis, the overlapping of particular levels, the repetition of certain tasks in analysis, leads to the interdisciplinarity resulting from levels I, II, III and IV, also lacks linearity.

One should mention, that aim of the theory of the four-level contexts, as presented by Ruth Wodak, is to ensure triangulation, and minimise the risk of bias.¹⁹ Simultaneously, in combination with the programme premises of HDA, the analysis is an expression of the significance ascribed to interdisciplinarity within this approach.

School citizenship education – an example of interdisciplinarity within the textbook discourse research.

The aim of the conducted research, described in the book titled *Citizenship education in school. A critical analysis of the school textbooks' discourse. (Edukacja obywatelska w szkole. Krytyczna analiza dyskursu podręczników szkolnych)*²⁰, was to reconstruct the framework of school citizenship education, based on the textbook discourse regarding citizenship. The very fact of designing the research of school citizenship education, enforced turning to the knowledge of different scientific disciplines: pedagogy, sociology, philosophy, political sciences, and law. The turn was necessary in order to determine the research problem, although in the aforementioned phase it was a result of the discourse analysis. The turn however, was not specific or characteristic of the analysis. Simultaneously, assuming a set of premises regarding the relations between the language and the world, especially the social constructivism by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann²¹ as well as the theory of social structuration by Anthony Giddens²², increased the interest regard-

¹⁸ M. Meyer, op. cit., p. 30

¹⁹ M. Meyer, op. cit., p. 29-30

²⁰ V. Kopińska, *Edukacja obywatelska w szkole. Krytyczna Analiza dyskursu podręczników szkolnych*, Toruń 2017, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK.

²¹ P. Berger, T. Luckmann, *Spoleczne tworzenie rzeczywiŹności*. Przekł. J. NiŹnik, Warszawa 1983, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy,

²² A. Giddens, *Stanowienie społeczeństwa*, przekł. S. Amsterdamski, Poznań 2003, Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo,

ing discursive issues. As a result, the initial theoretical analyses led to the conceptualisation of the following analytic categories: the concept and understanding of law, citizen participation and student participation. Each category required an interdisciplinary analysis. The interdisciplinarity at the first level of contextual analysis led to an *incorporation of linguistic categories*²³ into the research. In this case, the discursive strategies regarded as “systematic ways of using language” of different levels of complexity, ascribed to different levels of the organisation of the language systems and leading to the accomplishment of particular aims, were to be included.²⁴ It was further strengthened during the reconstruction of a discourse model at the intertextual level. Although, regarding my research, the interdiscursive context did not lead to the inclusion of others scientific disciplines, it became necessary at levels three and four. These levels required turning to the knowledge regarding the theory of law, the philosophy of law, sociology (including sociology of law and sociology of education), and pedagogy.

Let us analyse this issue, using the example of one of the analytic categories, present in the research – the understanding of law (image 1). The articulation of this category is a result of theoretical analyses. The framework and model of citizenship education are a response to a certain set of social expectations towards citizens, i. e. the type of citizenship.²⁵ The type of citizenship results from the dominating theory of democracy. Law is an essential element of each theory of democracy. Therefore, the socially constructed knowledge regarding the nature of law, is an issue important for the framework of citizenship education. The issue seems especially interesting, regarding a critical approach, as it appears neutral, being a result of significant linguistic objectification. The analysis of the meanings of law, selected and legitimised in education, unveils alternatives, brings questions and allows for its evaluation.

Regarding the above-mentioned analytic category, my main point of interest was to answer the question: “What kind of understanding of law is exposed in analysed discourse?”

²³ M. Meyer, op. cit., p. 16

²⁴ R. Wodak, *Dyskurs populistyczny: retoryka wykluczenia a gatunki języka pisanego*, trans. J. Wawrzyniak, A. Wójcicki [in:] *Krytyczna analiza dyskursu. Interdyscyplinarne podejście do komunikacji społecznej*, A. Duszak, N. Fairclough (eds.), Kraków 2008, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac naukowych UNIVERSITAS, pp. 195-196, R. Wodak, The discourse-historical approach [in:] *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, M. Meyer, R. Wodak (eds.) 2001, Sage Publications Ltd., EBSCO Publishing: eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) – printed on 7/19/2015 2:01 PM via NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUŃ, p. 73.

²⁵ The type of citizenship may also be considered as a theoretical construct that is subject to evaluation by empirical research, or reconstructed on empirical base.

The specific research questions were formulated as follows:

What image of law is constructed in the discourses of analysed textbooks? What positive/negative properties are ascribed to law? What arguments and argumentation schemes are used for the legitimisation of possible examples of predication? From what perspectives or view points, are the determinants and modes of argumentation articulated? Did the analysed utterances include any intensification or mitigation.

The construction of the above research questions indicates, that while operationalising the category of understanding of law at the first level of contextual analysis, I referred to the discursive strategies, described by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak.²⁶ The research regarding the use of these the strategies in analysed textbook texts, provided the “linguistic surface” regarding a selected CDA approach, and in result a recontextualisation of linguistic categories towards the research regarding educational discourse. The pursuit of the relations between various texts (intertextuality) allowed for a reconstruction of the discourse regarding legal interpretation. During the analyses, it was necessary to include the school core curriculum of the citizenship education context as well as varying legal-organisational premises (e. g. admission conditions of proposed textbooks to be included in the school education, or the legal possibilities of textbook choice). Knowledge regarding the sociology of law proved essential as well, particularly the theory of legal culture and the issue of disfunction regarding the culture of creating, applying and maintaining law, which in combination with the historical context (encompassing the specifics of political system transformation, significant for legal (dys)function), proved resourceful for the analysis. The evaluation of research results, allowing for a reconstruction of the discourse, required turning to knowledge regarding human development. It is imperative to remember, that school textbooks are “dedicated” to students at a certain age and, in regard of the educational, including didactic, correctness, and should be based on the standards of psycho-social development.

The models of discourse of the discussed category, reconstructed on the ground of internal and intertextual analysis, were subject to an analysis, regarding both content and organisation. Considering the former, I referred to the above-mentioned constructivism by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and to the structuration theory by Anthony Giddens. In terms of the organisation discourse, the concept of the pedagogic code and pedagogic device of Basil Bernstein proved useful. Image 2 below illustrates the discussed example.

²⁶ M. Reisigl, R. Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination. Rhetorics of Racism and Ant-Semitism*, London 2001, Routledge, M. Reisigl, *Dyskryminacja w dyskursach*, trans. D. Przepiórkowska, „Tekst i Dyskurs” 3, 2010, pobrano z www.tekst-dyskurs.pl/tid_3.html, access date: 2013-08-19.

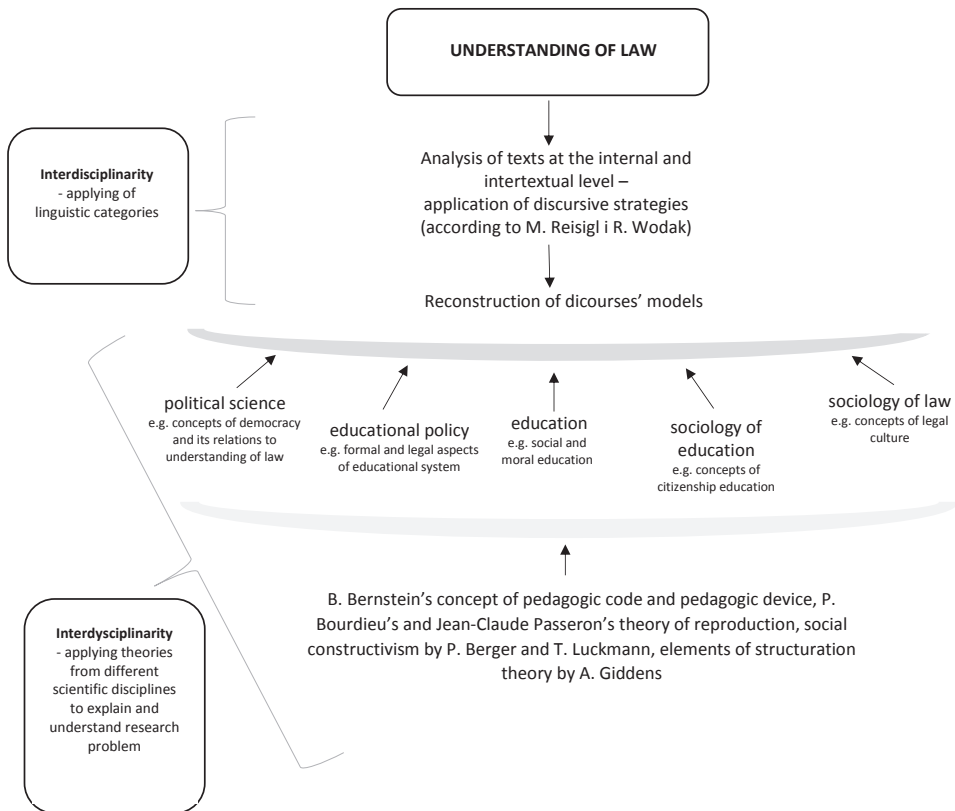


Image 2. Interdisciplinarity in a scheme of discourse analysis as presented by R. Wodak, using the example of the understanding of law category.

Source. own research²⁷

Once again, similar to image 1, one should highlight, that the diagram shown is purely organisational. In research practice, certain steps, phases and levels of analysis overlap, and they are continually repeated. However, each step is present, and conscious researchers are well aware of the particular level they are at. In result, in the analysis of the category of researchers, an analysis at the “internal” and intertextual level is constantly accompanied by the switching between various scientific disciplines in order to understand the contents of the discussed discourse, its internal organisation, to attempt of reading the meaning and consequences of obtained results, for the framework of school citizenship education. One should mention, that

²⁷ Based on: V. Kopińska, *Edukacja obywatelska w szkole. Krytyczna analiza dyskursu podręczników szkolnych*, Toruń 2017, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK.

the category, which analysis formula was presented by image 2, was one of numerous categories analysed in the research, therefore, the results and conclusions obtained in this category were viable for combination with the others, which allowed for a reconstruction of the school citizenship education. The research required to return to the initial theoretical analyses, that preceded the formulation of the research problem and conceptualisation of the analytical categories. The interdisciplinary approach was necessary for each of the researched categories, which means that it is possible to create a number of additional diagrams, as presented by image 2, in order to determine the scientific disciplines/subdisciplines and/or theories/concepts from these disciplines, that proved contributive to my analyses.

Summary and discussion

Interdisciplinarity is inherent in the Critical Discourse Analysis, as described by Ruth Wodak. It is due to the very fact of conducting research regarding discourse in social sciences, the HDA research programme, and particularly, the concept of the four-level context. Interdisciplinarity is important and desirable at every level enumerated by Wodak, although the importance lies not in the value of interdisciplinarity itself, but in the ability to give a comprehensive explanation of the discussed social issues, which include a discursive aspect. It is not about absolute freedom. The choice is determined by certain problems (the need to use certain terminological instruments) as well related to particular decisions made at the programmatic level.²⁸

The moment, which spawns the most questions in the concept of the four-level context by Ruth Wodak, is the interdiscursive analysis. Questions appear, regarding the its scope and, from a different perspective, its limitations (including the intentionally introduced limitations). If this level means the pursuit of relations between discourses and Wodak herself allows the triangulation of researchers, theories, methods and data, while emphasising on the significance of interdisciplinarity²⁹, then questions arise regarding a possibility of a scientifically unjustified freedom in interpreting that level. This question particularly refers to the triangu-

²⁸ R. Wodak, Wstęp: *Badania nad dyskursem – ważne pojęcia i terminy*, [in:] *Jakościowa analiza dyskursu w naukach społecznych*, R. Wodak R., M. Krzyżanowski (eds.), trans. D. Przepiórkowska, Warszawa 2011, Oficyna Wydawnicza Łośgraf, p. 25.

²⁹ R. Wodak, *Dyskurs populistyczny: retoryka wykluczenia a gatunki języka pisanego*, trans. J. Wawrzyniak, A. Wójcicki [in:] *Krytyczna analiza dyskursu. Interdyscyplinarne podejście do komunikacji społecznej*, A. Duszak, N. Fairclough (eds.), Kraków 2008, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac naukowych UNIVERSITAS, p. 194.

lation of theories and methods. A conscious theoretical choice made earlier at the programmatic level has further consequences especially in the area of the integrity, between the problem and chosen methods. because, as the necessity of a conscious theoretical choice made at the level of premises, consequences and the integrity between the subject and chosen methods, these choices had already been made. The limited possibilities of choice, result from the fact, that the triangulation is applied at the interdiscursive level, which means, that one should examine the relation between the discourse, reconstructed in the conducted research, and the discourse regarding the same problem, however reconstructed with the use of:

- different data (implying further research, probably with different analysis methods, determined by the specifics of the genre),
- different methods (if there are methods applicable regarding the adopted theoretical premises and adequate regarding the researched problem),
- different theories (the choice is significantly limited (impossible?), as it results in a change at the programmatic level),

or referring to the analyses conducted by other researchers; two options are possible;

- work conducted within a team, that regarding analysis does not imply a division of responsibilities, but conducting the entire work by each and every team member;

or

- an independent analysis of the discourse regarding the same problem, by different researchers, which may lead to different theoretical premises, different methods and data).

The triangulation is, therefore, limited to the aims of the analysis on the interdiscursive level, which means remaining at the level of **discourse analysis**.

One should note, that image 2, presenting the scheme of an example analysis of the category used in conducted research, the interdiscursive analysis was not included. It is no mistake. The interpretation of the interdiscursive level in combination with the possibilities regarding triangulation and the limitations, which I myself enforced (also considering the aim of the triangulation³⁰), led to a decision to remain at the intertextual level, within the second level of analysis.³¹

To summarise, the interdisciplinarity is an inherent element of the concept of the four-level context, that according to Ruth Wodak, ensures triangulation. However, one should remember about two types of limitation:

³⁰ V. Kopińska, *Edukacja obywatelska w szkole. Krytyczna analiza dyskursu podręczników szkolnych*, Toruń 2017, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK.

³¹ The situation, however, was not applicable to all categories within the research.

- first: including elements of various scientific disciplines is limited by the scope of the discussed problem;
- second: interdisciplinarity that may occur at the inderdiscursive level is limited not only by the aim of the conducted triangulation³², but also by the characteristics of the level.

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³² Regarding notions on that subject, see: U. Flick, *Jakość w badaniach jakościowych*, trans. P. Tomanek, Warszawa 2011, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 88-89.

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