

Language and Power in Blogging: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract. Relatively few studies have investigated the role of language in exposing ideology in society. As asserted by Huckin (1997), whenever language is studied, one should not forget to include the society and the context where language exists. This study aims to explore the ways in which forms of language, from individual words to complete discourse structures, encode something of the beliefs and values held by the language users, particularly the ideology on power in society. The study examines 40 blogs of freshman students of Mindanao State University—Iligan Institute of Technology and analyzes them using the three Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methods: transitivity, presuppositions, and deixis. The results reveal that the 40 blogs of the respondents follow the recurring presentation-opinion pattern. Using the three CDA methods, the ideology on power consists of fifteen types which are reflected in the 40 blogs. These types of power are manifested through the roles they play in the sentences. Using transitivity and thematic role method, the powerful entities function as agents. In the presupposition, the ones assumed as dominant and influential by the bloggers are considered powerful forces. Using deixis, the place, time, and person frequently referred to are the ones regarded as powerful. The results of the study suggest that indeed language encode, shape and maintain ideology in society that proves the assertion that language and power always go together. On the basis of the results of this study, the following recommendations are presented to future researchers: (1) that other methods of critical discourse analysis be used to determine the ideology on power revealed in the blogs of professionals such as teachers, lawyers, businessmen and others; and (2) that social networking sites be considered for critical discourse analysis.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, ideology, society, blogs

1. Introduction

It is a human impulse to express opinions and feelings. Expressions come in varied ways through writing and speech. Hence, a lot of studies have been done on these expressions to try to explain matters. However, most of these studies are more on the linguistic aspect—studying phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. It is as though language is produced in isolation (or simply a text), which is not really the case. Language exists in “some real-world context,” so it is very much affected by such factors as the production, interpretation, and context (Huckin, 1997). So whenever language is studied, one should not forget to include the society and context where it exists. Since a particular text (spoken or written) exists in a particular context which has varied meanings depending on the process of production and interpretation, linguists like Saussure and philosophers like Wittgenstein agree that language plays an important role in structuring and creating reality and ideology of a society (Clark, 2007).

The study which focuses on eliciting ideology from both written and spoken texts is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA, until now, does not have a formal methodology on analyzing particular texts; thus, it is believed to be an approach or an attitude toward textual analysis which makes it unique from all other textual analysis in six major respects as presented by Thomas N. Huckin (1997). First, it analyzes texts in a real-world context and it tries to take into account the most relevant textual and contextual factors including history. Second, it studies text in three levels (production, interpretation, and context). Third, it concerns with the societal issues overtly or covertly manifested in texts. Fourth, it draws attention to the

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imbalances, injustices, and inequality in a society. Fifth, by revealing negative practices in a society, it aims to support the victims of oppression to reconstruct the society for a change. Finally, it uses clear and simple words to reach nonspecialists in society.

In a capsule, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) attempts to study the structures of ideology, especially on power and authority, which underlies the acts of both speech and writing (Clark, 2007). CDA is critical in the sense that the readers, when reading texts, should not remain passive and take all the assumptions raised by the author. Instead, every reader should question these assumptions. Also, the readers are encouraged to analyze the social issues raised in the texts because these contribute to the construction of ideology in society. The linguists working using CDA believe that language is an important tool in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power in society. CDA's aim is to make the users of language become conscious of how language conveys the domination and control of people in society. Fairclough (2001, as cited in Clark, 2007) asserts that CDA is a means of "helping people to see the extent to which their language does rest upon common-sense assumptions and the ways in which these common sense assumptions can be ideologically shaped by relations of power" (p. 154).

This paper focuses on the 40 blogs of MSU-IIT freshman students because blogging is the most modern and accessible way through which these students can express their ideology on power. The objective of this paper is to explain the ideology on power as embedded in the language of the students' blogs, and how this ideology is expressed in these blogs. In analyzing the blogs, three CDA methods of analysis are employed: transitivity and thematic roles to reveal the recurring agents of the clauses; presuppositions to expose the recurring assumptions in the sentences; and deixis to divulge the frequent time, place, and person references in the paragraphs.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

2.1. Transitivity

One of the common methods used in CDA in studying language is transitivity. Transitivity studies the doer (agent), the receiver (recipient), and the place/method (circumstance) of an action (process) in clauses (Clark, 2007). Through transitivity, seven ideologies on power are identified from the blogs of the students: gender, social class, religion, government, media, parents, and language. In this paper, only one type of power is discussed—parents.

The blog *GRANDCHASE—BEST ONLINE GAME EVER* shows how parents control the minds of their children. In this blog, the blogger reveals that who and what he wants to be in life are all because of the influence of his parents. There are instances where the noun *father* functions as agents in some clauses: *My father also wants me to become a doctor; he tells me to study hard; my father left us to go abroad; and he bought the playstation.* In all these statements, the noun *father* functions as the agent performing behavioral processes (like *want*), verbal (like *tell*), and material (like *left* and *bought*). The first two statements reveal how much the father influences the blogger to study hard so that he may become a doctor. The last two statements show how the father supports the education of his child by going abroad to earn money and by buying play station to encourage his child to study.

Althusser (1971, as cited in Clark, 2007), the leading proponent of neo-Marxism, supports the ideology on family as a powerful entity in society. Althusser believes that the family is one of the state apparatuses for shaping ideology because, to him, ideology actually puts all classes of people into 'subject positions,' hence ideological processes take place in what he calls ideological state apparatuses.

2.2. Presuppositions

Brown and Yule (1989) define presupposition as "the assumption the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge" (p.29). Huckin (1997) agrees with them that one of the various CDA methods he suggests for analyzing texts is presupposition. He defines presupposition as the use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative (Huckin, 1997, p. 83). This idea is also confirmed by Fromkin and Rodman (1983) as they define presupposition as the "explicit assumptions about the real world" (p. 189). In the blogs of the freshman students of MSU-IIT, more issues on society are clearly reflected using presupposition. Through presuppositions, twelve issues are

discovered from the students' blogs: gender, social class, education, occupation, religion, values, media, Philippine products, places, relationships, cosmetics, and language. However, in this paper, only two are presented—Philippine products and the English language.

The Philippines has been colonized by the Spaniards, Americans, and the Japanese. Such colonization has made a great impact on the Filipinos even after the colonizers have left the country. One of these effects is the idea that Philippine products are substandard or inferior to those produced by the Americans. This ideology is assumed in the blogs of the freshman students at MSU-IIT.

In the blog *Bagong Buwan* (New Moon), the blogger comments why he likes the movie. He mentions that he likes the movie so much because it has inspired him to become a peacemaker in response to the Christian-Muslim conflict in Mindanao. The blogger's goal is to convince Filipinos to help build peace and unity in Mindanao. The message of the blogger appears to be pro-Philippines; however, there is one comment in this blog which manifests his assumption on Philippine movies. Consider his statement "*I have a great interest in this movie even though it is only a Filipino created movie.*" The comment includes that he is interested in the movie *Bagong Buwan* **even though it is only a Filipino created movie**. A reader of this blog may accept such concept that *Bagong Buwan* is **only** a Filipino created movie but the question is: Why consider it as **only** a Filipino created movie? What is with Filipino created movies? The adverb *only* is used in this statement, which means "nothing more." This blogger must have assumed that if it is a Filipino movie, it is substandard and inferior compared to Hollywood movies or probably movies made outside the Philippines.

The ideology that Philippine products are perceived by Filipinos as substandard and inferior can be explained by some proponents of post-colonialism. Frantz Fanon (1961), in *The Wretched of the Earth*, claims that people in colonized countries suffer from losing their identity as they lose their culture, language, and even entertainment. Also, Edward Said (1993) in *Orientalism* discusses that people from the West impose their ideology on the people in the East. In the process of losing identity and receiving new, such ideology becomes 'naturally part' of the colonized people. Because they have lost their identity during the period of colonization, Filipinos no longer take pride in their products today.

In the blog *Filipino versus English*, the blogger tries to explain the preference of Filipinos to English rather than Filipino language when in fact, these two languages are the same, serving varied aspects of different sectors in the Philippines. Apparently, the goal of the blogger is to convince the readers that the two languages are equal—neither superior nor inferior. However, there are statements in the blogs that show the blogger's assumptions on the English language as superior to Filipino language, which is the opposite of his supposed claim. Consider this statement: "*English was the language that will give us a big financial help and can nurture our minds to be more practical and to obtain more benefits.*" It is clearly assumed by the blogger that English appears to be superior to Filipino since it is the language that makes the Filipinos financially well-off. This entails a couple of assumptions, too: (1) that if one knows English, he is most likely to be hired; (2) that the job he gets is usually a better one that pays well; and (3) that English can nurture minds to be more practical and to obtain more benefits. What the blogger assumes as being practical here is answering the global demand for speaking or knowing the language of science and technology which is English. Thus, it is practical to learn English to become globally competitive.

Another assumption is found in the statement: "*Here in Philippines, if you are good on speaking English, you can be considered as an intelligent person and if not, you are poor.*" This is another assumption on the English language in the Philippines that if a Filipino speaks good English, he is considered intelligent. Furthermore, the blogger assumes that if one does not speak English, he is considered poor. These assumptions clearly show how Filipinos consider the English language as a superior or prestigious language, considering that these words come from the blogger who claims that both languages are equal. Thus, there is a discrepancy between the blogger's claim and the underlying structure of his sentence. The above statement is already a second assumption on the English language—and there is not even one good claim for the Filipino language in the said blog. Because English is assumed as superior, Filipinos put prestige on the language and would prefer to learn and use it for these reasons: (1) because it can financially help the

speaker, (2) because it is the international language, (3) because it offers more benefits, (4) because it is the intellectual language, and (5) because it is the language of the rich.

The ideology on the English language as superior to Filipino can be explained by Fromkin and Rodman, Fanon. Fromkin and Rodman (1983) said that although languages vary, all are equal. However, the speakers give prestige to some languages which they perceive as superior. In an example given by Fromkin and Rodman, Americans give prestige to the Standard American English (SAE) and consider the Black English, one spoken by the black Americans, as inferior because of its phonetic and phonological features being different from the SAE.

2.3. Deixis

Another CDA method is deixis. The term deixis, to Lyons (1978), comes from a Greek word meaning “pointing” or “indicating” (p. 646). Fromkin and Rodman (1983) further explain that deixis is categorized into three: place, time, and person. On the one hand, the result using deixis confirms the findings using transitivity and presuppositions; on the other hand, it shows that the most powerful being in blogging is the blogger because he can manipulate and control the topic and readers. That the blogger has power is supported by Douglas Brown (2001) and Barbara Kroll (1990). Brown claims that a writer holds power as he writes. This power includes the power “to emend, to clarify, to withdraw” (p. 341). Such power is further explained and elaborated upon in the three writing theories presented by Barbara Kroll.

3. Summary and Conclusion

The use of transitivity, presuppositions, and deixis reveals that the students’ blogs conveyed fifteen types of power as part of the ideology in the Philippine society: (1) Males are superior individuals in society; (2) The rich are only for the rich and are the only ones who have the right to be happy; (3) Education gives power because of the knowledge it provides; (4) Medical doctors are superior because of their help and money, and the OFWs have the power to help the country through the dollars they send; (5) God is powerful being because He is the source (of strength, wisdom, understanding, success, help, and life), a hero, a controller of events, a cause for success, and a reason for honor; (6) Good values make one superior because they make people moral; (7) The media is powerful because of the positive and negative effects it has on people; (8) Foreign products are preferred by Filipinos because they are of good quality and standard; (9) The tourist spots, like Bohol as a superior place in the Philippines because it is preferred by both Filipinos and foreigners; (10) Love is power because it can make a girl a real girl, it controls one’s thoughts, it can change one’s activities and feelings; (11) Cosmetics is power because it makes women beautiful and attractive; (12) The English language is superior to the Filipino language because English can financially help its users, it is an international language, it offers benefits to its users, it is an intellectual language, and it is the language of the rich; (13) The parents, especially the father, are considered as powerful entities because they can motivate their children to study and affect their children’s decision; (14) The government has power because it can affect and control people’s activities and it is believed to save society from troubles and problems; and (15) The blogger is powerful because he can manipulate and control both the topics and the readers.

Furthermore, this study discloses that all the fifteen types of power are reflected through the language used by the bloggers. By using transitivity, the powerful sectors in the society participated as agents in the sentences and the inferior sectors are conveyed as passive and function as mere themes or recipients of the actions performed by the agents. By using presuppositions, the dominant sectors in the society are assumed to be powerful. Finally, by using place, time, and person deixis, the types of power found in transitivity and presuppositions are validated. However, it is also discovered that the most powerful being in blogging is the blogger himself. The blogger is considered powerful because he controls and manipulates the development of the blog; therefore, he has the influence over the readers.

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that the students’ blogs are structured to accommodate the ideology of society in relation to power as a whole and that of the bloggers as individuals in society. This shows that blogging, just like newspapers and magazines, is also an avenue for building and maintaining power in society.

Then, the Philippine society manifests ideology in relation to power similar to that of the Western countries. In fact, most of the types of power revealed in the students' blogs are from the ideology of the colonizers. This suggests that the Filipinos have maintained the ideology on power instilled by the colonizers, resulting in deethnicization, cultural immersion, and hybrid identity.

Also, the structure of the language of the 40 blogs clearly reveals ideology on power in society. Such ideology on power being reflected in the blogs confirms the idea of Fairclough (2001) and McCarthy and Carter (1994) that language helps in shaping and maintaining ideology in society because language itself reflects ideology and power. The fact that the language of the freshman students in MSU-IIT reflects ideology and power proves the assertion that language and power always go together.

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