

MEDIA DISCOURSE IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF LINGUISTS

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ABSTRACT

The study explores media discourse through the lens of linguistics, emphasizing its structure, features, and the role it plays in shaping public perception. By examining discourse in media, the research delves into critical discourse analysis (CDA) to uncover underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and communicative strategies. Then, with Systemic Functional Linguistics complemented with Van Dijk's theory of media discourse as models of analysis, it is observed that linguistic devices such as modality, evaluative adjectives, adverbs, generic phrases, rhetoric and idioms are used to state opinions, make predictions and influence attitudes. The analysis focuses on the lexicon, speech patterns, and rhetorical devices employed in media texts, highlighting how language influences and reflects social realities. This paper contributes to the understanding of media as a linguistic phenomenon, providing insights into the intersection of discourse and communication in contemporary society.

Keywords: Media discourse, linguistic devices, critical discourse analysis, lexicon, speech.

INTRODUCTION

„Language and Media Discourse: Shaping Society and Communication”

Language is a fundamental tool of communication that enables the expression of a wide range of ideas. It plays a key role in shaping and influencing societal attitudes while providing a means to evaluate and convey thoughts. Through language, individuals can persuade, influence, joke, express admiration, and show appreciation. As a central element of human activity, language serves both practical and social purposes. Opara (2011:1) aptly describes language as “a way of behaving and making others behave.” Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), a structural linguist, defined language as a system of signs (signifier and signified) that allows humans to communicate. Noam Chomsky (1957), a generative linguist, sees language as an innate human ability to produce and comprehend an infinite number of sentences through a finite set of rules. It allows individuals to articulate their ideas, emotions, and attitudes, while also evoking various responses and feelings from those they communicate with. As we live in an „age of technology” media has emerged as one of the most influential platforms for communication, shaping public perceptions, constructing realities, and influencing societal attitudes. At the heart of media communication lies media discourse, a dynamic and multifaceted form of language use that conveys information while subtly embedding opinions, ideologies, and predictions. For linguists, media discourse offers a rich field of study, where language is not only analyzed as a tool for communication but also as a means of power, persuasion, and influence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prima’s (2022) study traces the etymology of the term “discourse” to the Latin word *diskursus*, which signifies reflection. According to Prima, discourse fundamentally serves as a foundational concept in communicative linguistics, a field that seeks to achieve universal consensus. Scholars like Teun A. van Dijk and Norman Fairclough have significantly contributed to the theoretical framework of media discourse, particularly through their work on discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). These researchers explored how language in media texts constructs meaning, communicates ideologies, and influences public perception. The term “lexicon” originates from the Greek word *lexis* (meaning “word” or “speech”) and the Latin *lexicon*. It has been a fundamental concept in linguistics since ancient times, especially in the study of vocabulary, semantics, and language structure. Modern linguistic studies of lexicon were significantly advanced by scholars like Ferdinand de Saussure, who explored the structure of language, and later by Noam Chomsky, who emphasized the mental lexicon in generative grammar. The concept of “speech” has been central to linguistics and philosophy for centuries, discussed by ancient thinkers such as Aristotle and Plato in their works on rhetoric and communication. In modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure distinguished between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech), laying the foundation for contemporary studies of spoken language. Philosophers like John Austin and John Searle later explored speech acts, focusing on how speech functions in communication beyond merely conveying information. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was primarily developed and popularized by Norman Fairclough in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fairclough’s work laid the foundation for CDA as a method for analyzing the relationship between language, power, and society. His seminal book, *Language and Power* (1989), is considered a cornerstone in the field. The term “discourse analysis” was introduced by the linguist Zellig Harris in 1952 in his seminal paper *Discourse Analysis*. Harris used the term to describe a method for studying language beyond the sentence level, focusing on the relationship between linguistic elements and their broader social and cultural contexts. His approach was rooted in structural linguistics and sought to analyze patterns in connected speech or text.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method of scientific research has been used for a thorough and structured characterization of the current state of English-language media discourse. The comparative method was used to determine the saturation of linguistic innovations and their prevalence. The typological method, which was used in writing the article, helped to establish the common qualities of the English language in the projection on their diversity of linguistic characteristics. A close examination of newspaper editorials forms the basis of your study, focusing on how specific linguistic features (e.g.,

evaluative adjectives, speech acts, modality) frame narratives, influence public perception, and reflect ideological stances. Textual analysis allows for a detailed investigation of the structure, vocabulary, and rhetorical strategies employed in the discourse. A method focused on identifying and interpreting the lexicon (word choice) used in media texts. By analyzing specific terms, evaluative language, and connotations, the study reveals how lexical choices evoke emotional responses or convey ideological positions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Modality

Modality reflects a writer’s evaluation of or attitude toward the likelihood of a particular situation. It serves as a tool for making claims to knowledge, enabling writers to express various types of statements, such as assertions, opinions, hypotheses, and speculations (Cameron, 2001).

In the editorials analyzed, modal auxiliary verbs such as “may,” “can,” “will,” “should,” “would,” and “could” were employed to convey modality. These verbs allowed the writers to embed expressions of belief, attitude, and obligation within their statements.

1. The proposed policy may lead to significant economic growth if implemented correctly.”

(The writer is indicating a possibility but not certainty.)

2. Community engagement can play a vital role in solving this issue.”

(The writer highlights potential or capability.)

3. The government’s decision will have long-term consequences for future generations.”

(The writer is making a strong prediction with confidence.)

4. Policymakers should prioritize education reforms to address inequality.”

(The writer expresses an opinion on what ought to be done.)

5. Increasing public investment would likely improve infrastructure quality.”

(The writer hypothesizes an outcome based on a condition.)

6. The recent changes in legislation could create new opportunities for small businesses.”

(The writer suggests a potential outcome.)

Evaluative Adjectives and Adverbs.

The editorial writers used strongly evaluative adjectives and adverbs as linguistic tools to convey their views on the deplorable situation in the country.

1. President Goodluck Jonathan, of course did not create the sorry state of modern Nigeria.

2. At mid-term, there is still no urgent sense of crises

3. This means absolutely nothing to those in the majority who subsist on less than N200 a day.

Modality Through The Use of Reporting verbs

Modality refers to the speaker’s or writer’s attitude toward the possibility, necessity, or obligation of an action or situation. When expressed through reporting verbs, modality reveals degrees of certainty, obligation, or possibility.

Expressing Certainty

The researcher **claims** that climate change is primarily caused by human activity.

Expressing Possibility

The article proposes that alternative energy sources might reduce emissions.

Expressing Obligation or Necessity

The author advocates for stricter environmental regulations.

Expressing Doubt or Criticism

The author challenges the validity of the opposing argument.

Rhetorical Strategies and Figurative Language

Metaphors and idiomatic expressions were commonly used to simplify complex political and social issues. For instance, metaphors like “breaking the chains of corruption” evoked emotional responses while reinforcing ideological messages. Repetition and hyperbole were used to emphasize critical points, making certain narratives more persuasive and memorable.

Examples from the excerpts were:

1. Why should the country be subjected to such organizing experience with its attendant socio-economic consequences?
2. To what extent has the year of faith enabled the various target groups to start performing their roles better than before?
3. Why do wealthy Nigerians prefer to send their wards abroad for tertiary education including to less endowed sister countries like Ghana?

Thus, rhetoric were used to influence readers and draw their attention to the situation of affairs being discussed. The use of the device evoked emotional effects to the readers.

CONCLUSION

The study of media discourse through the lens of linguistics reveals the intricate relationship between language, ideology, and power. Media discourse, as a site of linguistic analysis, serves as a platform where societal norms, values, and ideologies are constructed, reinforced, and sometimes challenged. By employing tools such as critical discourse analysis, lexicon analysis, speech act theory, and rhetorical strategies, linguists uncover how media texts influence public opinion and shape perceptions of reality. In conclusion, media discourse is a powerful linguistic and social phenomenon, and its analysis offers invaluable insights into the ways language shapes and is shaped by society. By continuing to analyze media discourse through a linguistic perspective, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of how language functions as a tool for social influence and ideological transmission.

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