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Critical Discourse Analysis of an Online Indian-English Newsletter

Jennifer Tan- de Ramos, PhD

De La Salle University – Manila

*Corresponding Author: tanj@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract. This study uses Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to reveal how articles in an online Indian –English newspaper capitalize on various linguistic items such as the mood element, the personal pronouns, and the modal verbal operators to navigate the minds of their readers to view the texts and these writers of the texts in a positive way. In particular, the study examines three Indian newsletters, all written in English and that are accessed online. Analysis of the articles in the online newsletter reveals that the writers use three emergent frames. These thematic frames are positivity, vacillation, and evasion. The frame of evasion reflects the kind of attitude Indians possess in terms of avoiding outright antagonism and this is manifested as well in the Indian culture. Precisely because of the linguistic choices that they employ, the online newsletters are able to negotiate their ideology without appearing to provoke anger from their readers. The findings have several significant implications in the areas of critical discourse analysis and intercultural communication. One, the connection between language and culture is not to be discounted. Two, the language used by the writers represents the writers' identities and how they want to be viewed in the intercultural community/ies they are writing for. In this case, since the medium of communication is online, the reach of representation is on a global scale.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; intercultural communication; evasion; vacillation; positivity

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of Critical Discourse Analysis, henceforth referred to as CDA, is important to find out why writers write the way they do. For example, in news write ups, writers sensationalize killings, crimes, and government corruption because these news items are the stories that the general public seem to favor reading over other news stories that merely report or highlight what some

politicians are currently doing. In linguistics, this is the strategy of framing. In short, the writers always have the power to express their ideologies in the written texts simply because they can choose certain words over others to highlight the interests that these writers serve, and to consequently hide the ultimate truth from the readers. Additionally, since words are never neutral (Fiske,1994), the study of CDA serves to illuminate the hidden meanings that lie behind written text.

Two important areas on CDA have

usually focused on the genres of press conferences (Bhatia, 2006, Kaur, Arumugam, & Yunus, 2013) and media communication, particularly product advertisements (Begoll, 2006, Gu, 2019). Analyses of these genres reveal different discursive strategies of positivity, influence, power, and evasion on political conferences and conflicting ideologies of capitalism and consumer culturalism on product advertisements. With the advent of computer - mediated publications, the area of critical discourse analysis is being given a new and far reaching perspective. Because of online accessibility, a wider readership is privileged to obtain not only the latest issues of articles published online but also those issues that have been published several years back. *TESOL Journal*, for instance, publishes online on a regular basis. Additionally, electronic publications are increasing because of the relatively easy regulations and procedures required to initiate online publications. Hence, the birth of electronic journals and newsletters have given CDA a more interesting scope and features to inspect. This paper shows what CDA features are displayed using computer-mediated communication. This study also examines how intercultural writers of online news articles frame their language to represent their intercultural community in a manner that is positively beneficial for them.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Language, from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, is seen as a social system that operates in four components or strata (Mahboob & Szenes, 2010) of a written or spoken text – phonology- graphology, lexico- grammar, discourse- semantics, and context. As a theory, it operates under four underlying assumptions. One, language use is functional. Two, language functions to make meanings. Three, the meanings language operates in are affected by the social and cultural contexts through which language is used. Four, the semiotic process of language use is the writer's choice (Eggs, 2005).

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Analysis of this particular study looks at the last two strata of SFL – the discourse- semantics and the context. Briefly, the discourse - semantic

component of the text views the text as a whole. It looks into the text for the underlying meaning that it reveals. This meaning is constructed by looking at the three metafunctions for the meaning-potential that language conveys. Of the three metafunctions – the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual – this study will only cover the interpersonal metafunction as meaning-making through the relationships between writer and reader and between writer and message as reflected in the online Indian – English newsletter under study.

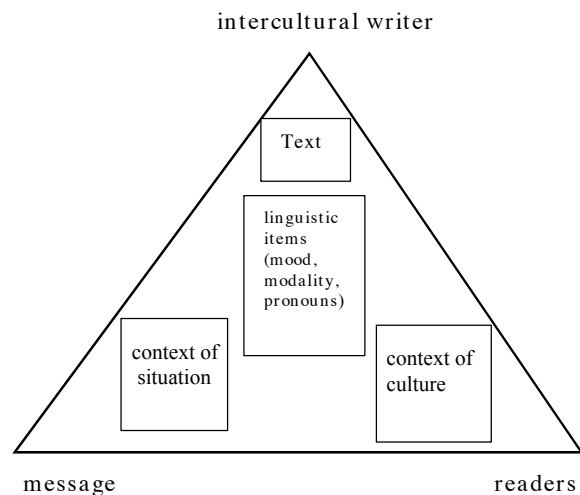


Fig. 1 Variables in the Interpersonal Metafunction of SFL

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of meaning- potential from the perspective of the interpersonal metafunction of SFL. The writer uses linguistic cues that are reflected and embedded in the culture and situation that the writer is writing for to be able to convey the message that the writer wants to convey to the reader. In the level of context, the meaning of a text is examined by looking at the context of situation and the context of culture. The context of situation in a text considers the relationship between the social environment and the functional organization of language (Halliday, 1985). The context of situation which, in SFL, is known as the *register*, deals with three variables known as the semiotic functions. These variables are field, tenor, and mode. According to Matthiessen and Bateman (1991), field is the nature of the social interaction which the interlocutors or participants engage themselves in. One important point of departure here



is the role language plays in this social activity. Tenor refers to the participants and their roles in the given interaction. The term also has particular bearing on the participants' power and expertise. Mode, on the other hand, is the symbolic organization of the text (Matthiessen & Caffarel, 2007). It also considers the type of rhetorical mode used in a given channel of communication. The diagram above shows the relationship and interaction among the three components of the context of situation in SFL. The context of culture, meanwhile, considers the play of cultural dimensions that are at work in a given text and how these cultural dimensions integrate themselves into the language that the writer uses in the text.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses what element in the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) served as the basis of examining the corpus, as well as the steps undertaken to analyze the data.

2.1 Data

This study chooses three publications - one each year – from 2008 to 2010. Articles were chosen on the basis of their being written by Indian English writers. Also, what was considered was that there would be no similarity in the covered months to be analyzed. Specifically, the study chose July 2008, June 2009, and December 2010.

2.2. Procedure

The study is done in three phases. The first phase identifies how the interpersonal metafunction may be gleaned from the message of the newsletter. The second phase identifies and analyzes how the interpersonal metafunction is realized linguistically, leading to its positive value. Finally, the third phase analyzes how Indian texts negotiate the recurrent themes in their online newsletters.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interpersonal metafunction establishes the manner by which the writers and their readers interact, the use of language to establish and maintain relations with the readers, to influence their behavior, to express the viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs. In essence, this concept mainly concerns the roles of the writers and the readers. Influence is achieved through use of mood and modality as well as personal pronouns.

Table 1. Summary of Mood in the Articles of an Indian-English Newsletter

Art	% of D	% of INT	% of IMP	% of EXC	Total (S)
1	96.00	10.86	10.86	10.86	92
2	93.54	0	0	6.45	31
3	63.16	21.105	15.79	0	19
4	96.3	1.85	1.85	0	54
5	100	0	0	0	34
6	59.09	0	40.9	0	22
7	95.74	3.19	0	1.06	94
8	93.75	0	0	6.25	16
9	100	0	0	0	27
10	95.65	2.17	0	2.16	46

- *D- Declarative
- *INT- Interrogative
- *IMP- Imperative
- *EXC- Exclamatory
- *S- Sentences
- *Art - Article

Results show that the interpersonal metafunction is represented in three aspects: mood, modality, and the use of personal pronouns. Table 1 displays the summary of mood in the articles that were examined. With most percentages ranging between 59 and 100, the Indian-English newsletters contain a predominance of declarative clauses, a



feature that is quite common in any form of media that is meant to provide a report or even an analysis of special topics of interest, directed at a specific audience. Hence, as the purpose of the writers in a newsletter is to inform and to express their position, clauses are best in their declarative frames.

For instance, the article begins with the text “*Rainbow Drive was beginning to go the way of all ‘dry’ colonies just four months ago. It does not have a water supply connection from the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and has been dependent on its rapidly depleting borewells*” provides the information of the condition of the water supply in an apartment complex on one of the towns in Bangalore, India. As the article continues, however, the descriptions done in declarative clauses describe the progress of the water supply that the town in India enjoys in just three months. Additionally, although there was resistance on the part of the residents to the idea of digging up more wells to improve water supply, this opposition was not emphasized. Instead, declarative statements focused on the steps undertaken to solve the problem. This kind of attitude of avoiding outright antagonism is reflected as well in the Indian culture (Ruud, 1999). Research on Indian society and culture reveals that instead of saying ‘no’ to another person, Indians will offer a response just to please the hearer. This strategy of evasion is a key feature Bhatia (2006) was able to extract from his CDA of political press conferences.

Table 2. The Frequency Count of the Modal Verbal Operators

Modal Verbal Operators	Number of Occurrence	% of Signaled Relations
Will	10	22.72
Can/cannot	20	45.45
Must	0	0
May	3	6.81
Would	8	18.18
Could	3	6.81
Total	44 units	99.97

On the feature of modality, findings reveal that ‘can/cannot’ is predominantly used in comparison to the other modal verbal operators. According to Ye (2010), modality shows the writers’ judgments of the gravity of their responsibility in putting forth certain propositions. The term *modality* also invokes the writers’ validation of the worthiness of their information and proposition. Table 2 shows the

summary of modal verbal operators used by the Indian – English writers.

In the newsletters examined, ‘can’ is adopted the most over the other modal verbal operators. The use of ‘can’ relieves the writer of the pressure of his proposition since the Indians reading the article may react and contest what he is saying. Just as ‘can’ lessens the impact of the statement, so is the use of ‘will’, with an occurrence of 22.72 percent indicating inductive reasoning, an accepted or logical truth (Hykes, 2000).

On the aspect of personal pronouns, the use is an integral component in the analysis of the interpersonal metafunction precisely because personal pronouns establish the proximity or the distance between the writers and their readers.

Table 3 illustrates the summary of personal pronouns used in the online Indian articles.

Table 3. Frequency Count of the Personal Pronouns

Personal Pronouns	Units	% of signaled relations
First		
I	9	14.06
We	22	34.38
Me	1	1.56
Our	10	15.62
My	0	0
Us	9	14.06
Total		79.68
Second		
You	8	12.5
Your	5	7.81
Total	64	20.31

Personal pronouns like ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘my’, ‘our’, ‘we’ refer to the writer while ‘you’ and ‘your’ point to the reader. Based on the data, the highest percentage of personal pronouns comes from the plural first-person pronoun ‘we’ at 34.38 percent.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, the paper has discussed the validity of the propositions put forth. Using the interpersonal



metafunction of the Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach, the messages of the Indian-English newsletters are identified through three aspects – mood, modality and the personal pronouns. That language and culture are inextricably intertwined cannot be invalidated by the analysis just presented.

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