A study of cross-cultural representation of Social Actors in the discursive structures: A critical discourse analysis (CDA) of American, British, and Persian journalistic Articles

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ABSTRACT: The present study draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA) to seek the applicability of Van Leeuwen's model (1996) – a system network of socio-semantic features (SSFs) – and contrasts its usage through American, British, and Persian discourses. Considering the distinctions among three discourse types, this survey also tries to show the similarities and differences of SSFs existing within, and between culturally identical discourses.

Besides, the Van Leeuwen's model is investigated as a tool for analysis of discourses. The texts are selected from some prominent American, British, and Persian newspapers on the conflict of “Atomic Energy”, which seems to be as a controversial issue within the cultures under study. The time interval for selected texts ranges from May 2013 to November 2013. The analysis of texts is organized through the qualitative and quantitative procedures for 15 sample ones.

Chi-square test is employed to determine the significance of existing differences in the use of SSFs and their explicit-implicit versions by the cultures under investigation. In general analysis, the differences between Western and Iranian cultures are significant, whereas the differences between American and British cultures are insignificant.

Keywords: CDA, Social actors, Socio-semantic features, Discourse, Discursive structures

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used. (Brown and Yule ,1983) indicated that discourse analysis consisted of attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause to larger linguistic units. Then, the role of ideologies was inserted to the analysis, and CDA came into existence as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of text, which views “language as a form of social practice and attempts to unpack the ideological underpinnings of discourse” (Fairclough, 1989, P.20). It seems difficult to interpret CDA in simple terms and this is probably due to the nature of CDA.

Therefore, the main focus in this study is to see how certain discursive structures in a text relate to their underlying ideological structures based on (Van Leeuwen’s model,1996). (Van Leeuwen ,1996, P.33) advocates that his socio-semantic model of analysis aims at answering the questions of how social practices are transformed into discourses about social practices, and what means we have for doing so, and in the sense of how we actually do it in specific institutional context, which have specific relations with the social practices of which they produce representations.

As the study discusses and contrasts the socio-semantic features existing in American, British, and Persian cultures, the results seem to be fruitful in the theoretical and practical respects. In the theoretical sense, the findings reveal the cultural differences existing in the texts through the use of socio-semantic features under investigation. Therefore, in the political field, American, British, and Persian discourses implement these features to send their messages in different languages. The application of this model to Persian and English discourses and presentation of their realizations in Persian and English briefly necessitate providing them with a kind of functional grammar.
Therefore, these findings improve and enrich the linguistic theories in the level of ‘micro’ analysis (of discourse) and ‘macro’ analysis (including analysis of language policy and planning). It is moreover a ‘critical’ approach to discourse analysis in the sense that it sets out to make visible through analysis, and to criticize connections between properties of texts, social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations), which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts. In the practical aspect, the results would also be beneficial to those who are involved in politics, media, cultural studies, and translation because through this way - analysis of socio-semantic feature - it provides them with a cultural and linguistic knowledge about the language that they use.

The following research questions are to be investigated through the research:
1) Are there any meaningful differences between culturally identical discourses (American and British as the Western Vs. Iranian) in the choice of socio-semantic features?
2) Are there any significant differences among American, British, and Persian discourses for the selection of socio-semantic features?
3) To what extent are these socio-semantic features being employed to represent social actors in explicit or implicit manner in American, British, and Persian discourses?
4) To what extent Van Leeuwen’s model as a tool for the analysis of discourse(s) is applicable to the discourses from the three cultures under discussion?

Definition of key terms:
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): It has a main aim to uncover the insinuation of ideology and imposition of power into texts through uses of language, which ordinary readers of texts do not notice.
Social actors: Social actors are those who are involved in social practice whether in the form of agent (the performer of practice), or the patient (the acceptor of the practice). They are represented through socio-semantic features.
Socio-semantic features: They are the combination of linguistic and sociological elements, which bring ideological and cultural features as well as semiotics under an umbrella.
Discourse: Language use conceived as social practice; the way of signifying experience from a particular perspective.
Discursive structures: They, as the peaceful means to exercise power, are the linguistic utterances created to convey a particular slanting ideology.

Review of Literature:
Overview of CDA:
As far as the theoretical origin of CDA is concerned, one may distinguish between its philosophical and linguistic roots. On the philosophical side, CDA is influenced by Neo-Marxism, especially by Gramsci’s and the Frankfurt school’s emphasis on the cultural underpinnings of hegemony (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). It is from their sympathy for critical theory that CDA scholars take their emancipatory research goals. On the linguistic side, CDA draws upon Bernstein’s sociolinguistics (1971), Halliday’s systematic linguistic theory (1978, 1985, 1994), but also borrows from Bakhtin’s concept of (intertextuality, 1981). Most obvious, however, is its strong affinity with pragmatics, from which CDA takes many of its central assumptions. Although CDA is very much a product of the 1990s, it, as it was pointed out above, does have a predecessor, namely ‘critical linguistics’, developed in the late 1970s by British linguists such as( Fowler ,1979) and( Kress;Hodge ,1979).
According to (Van Dijk ,1998), CDA is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts.

Directions in CDA:
According to Van Dijk (1998), CDA is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts. He stresses the point that CDA is not so much a direction, school or specialization – next to the many other ‘approaches’ in discourse studies. Rather, it aims to offer a different ‘mode’ or ‘perspective’ of theorizing, analysis and application throughout the whole field. He asserts that since CDA is not a specific direction of research, it does not have a unitary theoretical framework.

Ideological structures:
Ideology is referred to as a systematic body of knowledge based on a specific conception of the world. Their body of knowledge therefore comprises a system of meaning, which reflects a particular insight into world and reality. Power relationships organize this system slanting toward a particular group of society; thus, ideological
structures are those slanting ruling ideas that are penetrated in people’s common sense and reinforced via their language use unconsciously.

**Stages of text analysis:**

In order to reach the layers of meaning beneath the surface of an utterance, one needs to go beyond the sentence level considering social and historical links to the context and using background knowledge.

Primarily, an introduction provided concerning the formal properties of the text comprising: the reference, the topic, the date, number of words, and number of sentences. In the second stage, discursive structures are derived and examined by utilizing the structural framework of (Theo Van Leeuwen, 1996). In the third stage, after reading the text subtly and precisely, in each case, the underlying ideological structure is discussed in a few sentences. Using these socio-semantic categories in relation to ideological condition of the text production, the analyst reaches the intended message of the text, which will be represented through figures, tables, and quantitative computations in the fourth stage of discussion. Finally, the findings of this study show how certain discursive structures in a text relate to their underlying ideological structures.

**The Van Leeuwen’s model:**

By studying the representation of social actors in system network, we try to find the ways through which the social actors can be represented in English discourse as well as which choices the English language gives us for referring to people. The various categories in the network had made it clear that, in actual discursive practices, the choices need not always be rigidly ‘either/or’. Boundaries can be blurred deliberately for the purpose of achieving specific representational effects. The network brings together what linguists tend to keep separate: it involves a number of distinct lexico-grammatical and discourse-level linguistic systems, transitivity, reference, the nominal group, rhetorical figures, and so on, because all these systems are involved in the realization of representations of social actors. Nevertheless, there is some linguistic consistency in the network.

Initially, it involves three of the major types of transformation, deletion, rearrangement, and substitution. Each type of transformation involves distinct linguistic system: deletion involves voice, and also nominalization and adjectivalization, rearrangement principally involves transitivity, while substitution is initially realized by aspects of the structure of the nominal group, that is, the system of reference, and numeraive and then by lexis, different classes of noun, including aspects of morphological structures.

**Relevant studies and the background of CDA in Iran:**

Since CDA is a novel issue in the case of research, we can find more articles and published books in recent years. Among the scholars whose works have profoundly contributed to the development of CDA are (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1999), (Van Dijk, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2004), and (Wodak, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2001). Till now, a remarkable number of critical discourse analysts have focused on the grammatical construction of discursive structures, to name but a few: Kress and (Trew, 1978), (Halliday, 1985), (Fairclough, 1989), (Hodge and Kress, 1996), (Yarmohammadi and Rashidian, 2003), and (Yarmohammadi, 2004).

Moreover, Among Iranian scholars, Yarmohammadi is undoubtedly the pioneer of CDA research in Iran whose work is outstanding even for foreign researchers. He has written many books and great articles in this field and conducted many theses with the focus on CDA. His books in this case are the "Mainstream and critical discourse" (2004), and "Communication within critical discourse perspective" (2006) in which he gathered some articles about CDA approaches.

In fact, this is a short explanation of CDA history in Iran. Undeniably, many researchers have worked on CDA, which we do not mention them here.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**Data Selection:**

This study seeks to investigate the applicability of (Van Leeuwen’s model, 1996) to American, British English, and Persian discourses. This research needs a familiar and yet controversial issue for its analysis. Among the available international issues, Iranian-American and British conflicts on ‘Atomic Energy’ is the most worldwide and well-acquainted one.

The case is being disputed by international organization – IAEA, UN Security Council – and it is in its peak of negotiations. Therefore, 15 articles are selected from the prominent newspapers on this issue. The period of time is from May 2013 to November 2013. The general characteristics of these articles are: Expository and Formal among The newspaper articles which are authentic texts and valuable resources for they reflect cultural values, ideologies, and existing dominant relationship in a particular community and they can be implemented for the purpose of CDA.

According to (Fairclough, 1989, P.152), “As even a single sentence has traditionally been seen to imply a whole language so a single discourse implies a whole society”.

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In the selection of articles in different newspapers, it is almost impossible to find texts with the same length; therefore, only the texts with the similar number of words or nearly identical number of sentences are selected for statistical comparison.

**Procedures of the Data Analysis:**
In order to fulfill the goal of proper and efficient analysis, this study has kept pace with two procedures for the analysis, namely qualitative and quantitative analysis.

**Qualitative analysis:**
To implement these procedures, the study follows these stages for each text: Namely, identification of text (name of the newspaper, number of words and sentences, and the date), then, mentioning the discursive structures; afterwards, in order to reach the ideologies and meaning beneath the surface of an utterance, the researcher needs to read the text carefully and explain the social and historical links to the context and sketch the ideological structure of each text. Next, the discursive sentences, which are extracted from the text, interpreted sentence by sentence; Fairclough (1989) indicated that unit of analysis would be a sentence because it is a self-contained independent measure of a single message representing the language and discourse. Finally, the researcher presents the messages of the article, which the writer has attempted to convey in relation to the specific contexts of situation and intended audience.

This survey is conducted in line with Yarmohammadi’s framework (2006), but differs from it in the choice of Van Leeuwen’s socio-semantic model (1996) for the interpretation stage.

**Quantitative analysis:**
This research consists of some statistical analysis to compare and contrast the use of socio-semantic features in different cultures under investigation. In other words, the model is operationalized by means of frequencies, percentages, and statistical test of nominal data chi-square through which texts are examined for similarities and differences in the choice of socio-semantic features.

To accomplish the task, first, social actors who are participating in the conflict (i.e. American, British, EU, and Iranian governments, the authorities of IAEA, UN Security Council and journalists) are examined for their representations through the features in question.

These features, according to Van Leeuwen's model (1996), can be divided into these major categories, namely: Exclusion, passivation, categorization, genericisation, impersonalization, Nomination, specification, activation, differentiation, association, and single determination.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Analysis of SSFs:**
All the texts were selected from well-known newspapers of the respective countries to investigate the use of SSFs. For this reason, related frequencies and percentages are obtained. As this figure shows, the number of sentences is somehow the same (average 20.25); the highest frequency of exclusion is 16 with 28.5%. For other terms the findings are as follows: For passivation, the highest frequency is 11 with 18.9%; for impersonalization the highest frequency is 8 with 18.1%; for genericisation the highest frequency is 7 with 10.6%; for categorization the highest frequency is 15 with 21.1%; for activation the highest frequency is 6 with 12%; for specification the highest frequency is 4 with 7.1%; for association the highest frequency is 4 with 8.3%; for differentiation the highest frequency is 8 with 14%; for nomination the highest frequency is 15 with 24%; for single determination the highest frequency is 6 with 12%; for indetermination the highest frequency is 7 with 12%; for dissociation the highest frequency is 4 with 6.6%.

**Contrastive Analysis:**
After obtaining the frequencies of the features, the texts are compared via the Chi-square test. Tables show all cases through which Chi-square test is utilized to reveal the range of significance of cultures.

**The comparison between Western and Iranian cultures:**
In this part, via analyzing the data, the researcher compares western (American & British) and Persian texts. The Chi-square test proves meaningful differences between the texts of these three cultures in their choices of all SSFs. The following table shows the comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Observed – Expected</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western – Persian</td>
<td>1105-1092</td>
<td>52.98</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$P<0.02$  
$Df =12$  
$CV=24.05$
Diagram 1. The comparison of Chi-square results between western and Iranian cultures ($X^2$)

**The comparison among all four cultures:**
In this part, via analyzing the data, the researcher compares all (American, British, and Persian) texts for the choice of SSFs. The Chi-square test proves meaningful differences between the texts of these three cultures in their choices of all SSFs. The following table shows the comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Observed – Expected</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bt – Pt</td>
<td>551-538</td>
<td>33.68</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&lt;0.01</td>
<td>df = 12</td>
<td>CV = 26.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Inter-rater and Intra-rater reliability:**
Reliability and consistency of findings in this study are examined by the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Formula (2-tailed). For this purpose, the data are selected from American, British, and Persian texts, altogether. To secure the reliability of the analysis, the computation is performed two times within the interval of 3 weeks by the researcher and a colleague.

Firstly, the researcher provides the intra-rater reliability procedure. Secondly, the other researcher – the colleague – who is familiar with the procedure of the survey engages in the inter-rater reliability. The time interval for eliciting and checking two sets of data is 3 weeks. In these cases, correlation rates are significant and hence findings are proved to be reliable by themselves. Then, the researcher’s findings are correlated with those of the colleague with the same procedure. For all cases, correlations are significant at 0.0001 level, which reveal a high correlation at the finding of the two raters.

**Discussion:**
The application of Van Leeuwen’s model (1996) throughout the 15 texts via the qualitative and quantitative procedures provides the study with the following results:

1) Regarding the first question of the study, i.e. whether any significant differences exist between the two culturally identical discourses in their choices of SSFs, from each culture five texts are selected and examined for their possible differences.

However, the comparison between five American and British texts does not reveal any significant differences in the choice of SSFs. Afterwards, western cultures (American & British) and Persian are focused for analysis. As results display, significant distinctions exist for the choice of overall SSFs in western and Persian cultures.

Thus, we conclude within western cultures (American & British) variations on the use of SSFs are less probable, while, the situation is reversed within Iranian culture (Persian), and as the analyses of samples indicate, political and cultural perspectives can influence the choices.

2) In regard to the second research question, i.e. whether any significant differences exist among American, British, and Persian discourses for the selection of socio-semantic features, comparison conducted among three cultures.

As analysis manifests, three chi-square tests are applied to three groups of assessments. This comparison contains three cases of analyses; they are (At – Pt), (At – Bt), (Bt – Pt), text types. They are examined separately for their choice of SSFs. Among previous comparisons, case (At – Bt), ($X^2$=4.76) does not reveal any significant distinction in the selection of SSFs. Therefore, we conclude these variables are affected by factors such as political and cultural perspectives that can be relatively similar in cultures under investigation. Moreover, the results of chi-square tests in the cases prove significant differences exist among the discourses in the choice of SSFs.

Thus, within the confines of the present study, American and British cultures are similar in the selection of SSFs. However, Persian and English cultures differ from the others. The findings of this part guide us to conclude American and British texts, and Persian and English texts are nearly identical in their choices of SSFs. As the
differences among cultures are more likely to happen than similarities for the choice of SSFs, the choices can be influenced by political views.

Quantitative analyses explain the effect of ideological and journalistic views on the analysis of SSFs. In both procedures of the study, the model serves as an efficient tool to follow the traces of power relationships in texts, particularly western discourses, which provide the evidence for the applicability of the model. Among SSFs under study exclusion is the most frequent implicit choice by all the texts. However, nomination is the most frequent explicit choice by all the texts under study.

**CONCLUSION**

The results of the study gained from the analysis of the data reveal the interaction between ideological and discursive structures. In spite of the efforts that have been made to show the neutral stances of texts, the results unfold particular orientations and bias towards the issue in question, that is social actors under investigation who are represented by distinctive socio-semantic features to legitimize/delegitimize their practices from the writer’s point of view in a particular context of situation. The study, itself has assumingly taken the neutral stance and attempts to analyze the texts in a scientific and systematic way without taking orientation towards the social actors in question.

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses reveal that in three cultures under investigation, the same socio-semantic features are implemented by journalists to achieve certain purposes with respect to the dominant political environment in their relevant states. In this relation, although the similarities for the choice of SSFs exist within and between same cultures, variations are more probable mainly caused by different political and cultural perspectives.

**Implications:**

As the study discusses and contrasts the socio-semantic features existing in American, British, and Persian cultures through the application of Van Leeuwen’s model (1996), the results seem to be fruitful into two respects, namely: Theoretical and Pedagogical.

Theoretically speaking, the findings reveal the cultural differences that exist in the texts using socio-semantic features under investigation. Therefore, in political field, American, British, and Persian discourses implement these features to send their messages in different languages. The application of this model to Persian and English discourse and presentation of their realizations in Persian and English briefly necessitate providing them with a sort of functional grammar.

Pedagogically, the results would be beneficial to both EFL teachers and students; particularly those involved in politics, media, cultural studies, and translation because it provides them with a cultural and linguistic knowledge about the language that they study. Critical language study programs may also employ the results both for domestic and foreign language curricula.

The study has also examined the grammatical realizations of SSFs in both Persian and English languages in brief. Consequently, the study can be evaluated as significant in both theoretical and pedagogical fields.

**Suggestions for further research:**

Of course, other discourse genres can be studied from a critical point of view although we are unable to mention all of them. Thus, medical talk can be extensively studied within a conversation analytical framework that until recently was less interested in critical approaches, there have been some studies that critically examine the well-known power-relationships between doctors and patients. Similarly, talk in the courtroom is imbued with relationships of legalized power, power over life and death, and critical discourse analysis of such talk has been around for quite some time.

Another obvious area for critical study of text and talk is that of education and science, where power, ideology and reproduction have been notions in much social science research for a long time. Although systematic discourse analyses are still rare, one of the important critical dimensions of educational and scientific discourse is the study of the representation of women, minorities, immigrants, and in general other peoples’ in textbooks and academic discourse.

Finally, although corporate have received extensive (critical and other) attention detailed analysis of corporate communication and business talk is still rare, let alone a CDA perspective on such discourse. The relations between power and discourse are not merely studied in the more linguistically oriented CDA approaches. Also in the area of communication and social psychology, power and dominance are notions that have received ample attention.

Taken in a broad sense, CDA has produced a vast amount of work. Many of the social and political studies of language, language use or discourse also deal with questions of power and inequality. This is explicitly the case in most feminist work on language and discourse. Many studies of discourse in the media, politics, and education tend to be critical, whereas this is less the case for, e.g., medical talk or corporate communication.
Precisely because the critical paradigm focuses on the links between language, discourse and power, the social and political dimensions received virtually exclusive attention. Thus, despite a large number of empirical studies on discourse and power, the details of the multidisciplinary theory of CDA are still on the agenda. The last suggestion maybe that the recognition of similar/different socio-semantic features as the basis for language realization is necessary for those who learn a foreign or second language with the desire to communicate effectively in the target language. In proceeding years, the target culture should be involved extensively in language and teaching programs.

REFERENCES


