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Gines Appleford

Language and nation





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ARACNE editrice S.r.l.

www.aracneeditrice.it
info@aracneeditrice.it

via Raffaele Garofalo, 133 A/B
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Introduction

According to the critical linguistics school of thought linguistic and social processes are connected. For the critical linguists there can be an interrelation between language and how it is used to create and reinforce a cultural stance. Other language analysts such as Bell (1991) believe that there are gaps in this way of thinking. Bell (1991), for example, questions whether the clearly definable relationship between a linguistic choice and a specific ideology as described by critical linguists such as Kress (1983) can, in fact, exist. For Bell (1991: 214), 'The belief that there is ideological significance in every syntactic option, and that, we can identify uniquely what it is, is hard to sustain'.

One aspect of discourse is that it can, in specific contexts (e.g. educational texts, newspapers, magazines and other media), have the effect of reconfirming and reinforcing established cultural attitudes and stances. These stances can be inherent to the existing 'status quo' and can be detected in discourse through the study of specific linguistic devices used in text that aim either explicitly or implicitly to support and regenerate the existing concepts of 'common senses' in a given culture, or society. The first part of this study analyses some examples

of the implicit assumption in discourse written for Australian educational purposes. Specifically, the analysis in chapter one discusses one example of presupposition that can be seen in an educational text: the way that this reference book implicitly protects and promotes its own culture and the difference in the way the discourse refers to other cultures (nations), and implicit assumptions that are made regarding cultures that are different, or that it has less understanding of.

The study then discusses the interrelation between cultural presupposition and language from the point of view of 'critical linguistics', to the political speeches of two Australian politicians from the 20th and 21st centuries. It analyses the rhetorical strategies adopted in taking a stance and in creating alignment between speaker and addressee. The political speech as a discourse genre is analysed by focussing on specific aspects of language used by the speakers to create consensus in the a given addressee group.

The latter part of the study focuses on identification and analysis of implicit assumption in political discourse in English and the ways in which discourse can be constructed to maintain and reinforce existing cultural biases. Specifically, it describes the relationship between language and ideology in relation to speeches and interviews given by politicians during two decisive phases of the Howard government in Australia (illegal immigration, Iraq war). The analysis also takes into consideration aspects of the language used by the media at the time. Here the focus is on **identification and analysis of implicit assumption** in the discourse of the media in English and the ways in which, through language, the media can reinforce existing cultural biases and in some contexts work towards constructing a sense of 'common sense' within a given culture sharing the same language. The

examples used in this analysis concentrate on aspects of the language used by the Australian media during two critical phases of Australian government policy (illegal immigrants, Iraq war).

Thus, one way in which the culture and the sense of 'common sense'¹ of a nation becomes fixed is through its language. The English language, throughout the centuries, evolved to characterize the English nation, or the beginnings of the English nation. This idea of an English nation for centuries developed only gradually and largely began to be formulated around the era of Henry VIII and later in the Elizabethan era. Authors such as Shakespeare contributed to this with their works written in the vernacular of the time. Shakespeare began to fix the idea of nation and nationalistic feeling in his plays during the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of his plays told the stories of heroic English kings and queens: the leaders of an evolving nation.

1. 'Common sense' as perceived by Gramsci (1971): 'a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life'.



The interrelation between cultural identity and language in written English discourse

1.1. Introduction

This section of the study discusses the identification of implicit assumption in written discourse in English and the ways in which discourse can be constructed to maintain and reinforce existing cultural (national) values. Texts are analysed to identify the interrelation between cultural presupposition and language. The genre of text examined in chapter one is the educational text (reference book) and the focus is on assumptions that are made in regard to the reader and the reader's cultural stance. The texts are analysed from the point of view of linguistic structures that can be used to create the effect of regenerating and re-confirming the existing 'mainstream' culture. The analysis examines, specifically, the linguistic strategies used by the reference book to describe different countries and different cultures.

1.1.1. *Critical linguistics*

'A discourse colonises the social world imperialistically, from the point of view of one institution' (Kress, 1985:7).

The critical linguistics school of thought (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, Trew, 1979) maintains that the way we view the world is through language, or more specifically through the way language is used. Particular language forms, or particular lexical choices can have the power to create and reinforce ideologies and cultural stances: ideology in the Gramscian (1971) sense of the word as ‘common sense’. This conception of ideology is outlined by Fairclough (1989, 84) in his study ‘Language and Power’ in which he cites Antonio Gramsci’s definition of ideology: ‘a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, law, in economic activity, and in all manifestations of individual and collective life’. The Gramscian conception sees ideology as the existence of a ‘common sense’ that is taken for granted in any given society. Fairclough (*ibid*) extends this concept of ‘implicit philosophy’ to written and spoken discourse: interpretation of a text is the result of a merging of the content of the text and the ‘common sense’ values of the reader, or interpreter of the text. For Fairclough (1989: 26) there are three categories, or dimensions in discourse: description, interpretation and explanation. The latter, ‘explanation’, regards the relationship between interpretation of a text and its social context as well as the relationship between interpretation of a text and its social effects (*ibid*).

1.1.2. *Critical Linguistics and discourse*

The critical linguistics school of thought also argues:

... [T]hat all linguistic usage encodes ideological patterns or discursive structures which *mediate* representations of the world in language; that different usages, (e.g. different socio-linguistic varieties or lexical choices or syntactic paraphrases), encode different ideologies, resulting from their different situations and purposes, and that by these means language works as a social practice: ... it promulgates a series of versions of

reality and thereby works as a constantly operative part of social processes (Malmkjaer, 1991: 89).

The ideas underlying this type of analysis are based on the theory that it is the text that constructs the reader, the reader interprets the text in relation to her/his own cultural stance and that the constructor of the text and the reader of the text may already have some presuppositions in common. The reader, in this case, may be described as the 'ideal reader'. In other words the 'ideal reader' already (a priori) shares the same, or similar cultural values (the same 'common sense values) as the writer of the text. This concept was put forward by Gunther Kress (1985: 36) in his study 'Linguistic processes in sociocultural practice', in which he analyses text from the point of view of the interrelation between culture and language. For Kress linguistic and social procedures are totally connected. Kress uses three categories to emphasize the 'total connectedness of linguistic and social processes.' These categories are: discourse, genre and text. For Kress these three categories create social meaning through the tool of language: 'A discourse organises and gives structure to the manner in which a topic, object or process is to be talked about' (Kress: 1985:4).

1.1.3. *Genre and Discourse community*

Swales (1990) defines the concept of discourse community as a group having a common set of goals and whose members agree on the characteristics of the genre, or genres of text utilized by the group. For Swales the expectations that the discourse community has adopted 'may involve appropriacy of topics, the form, functioning and positioning of discursal elements, and the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community' (Swales, 1990: 26).

According to Swales' (1990: 24 –27) definition a discourse community:

- has a broadly agreed set of common goals;
- has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members;
- it uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback;
- utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims;
- has acquired some specific lexis;
- has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise.

The concept of discourse community is inherent to the concept of text analysis. According to Hertzberg 'use of the term "discourse community" testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups (Herzberg, 1986: cited in Swales, 1990: 21).' A discourse community communicates using the discourse genre it has in common with its fellow members. For Swales (1990:45) genre is 'a class of communicative events' adopted by a given discourse community to carry out, and to communicate the aims of the community through use of the genre of the community. A genre normally has 'structure, style, content and intended audience' in common (Ibid:58). For Christie (1985:11), genre consists of the overall structure of the text: it is a text that has 'a staged, orderly sequence of steps through which meanings are made. Christie cites various types of genre in her study: procedural genre, narrative genre, descriptive genre (ibid). Other examples of text genre types are: educational genre (e.g. school textbook), academic genre, scientific genre, bureaucratic genre, newspaper genre.

1.2. Educational Genre

This current study is based on the ideas expressed by Kress in his 1985 work on the linguistic expression of social meaning, in which the author argues that meaning in the social world is constructed through language. In his work Kress analyses the interrelation between culture and language through an analysis of various texts.

In relation to texts from educational institutions it is important to understand what discourses of knowledge, of morals, of authority, of gender, of power, appear and which of these are dominant in constituting the texts. This can give a revealing insight into the real contents — the hidden curricula — of any occasion within the larger scale processes of education (Kress, 1985: 18).

Texts are taken from an Australian educational textbook and are analysed from the point of view of the messages that are communicated to the reader regarding the way the Australian textbook implicitly or explicitly portrays its own culture and the cultures of other countries. A clear division in the attitude to western and non western countries can be interpreted in many of these texts, and a distinct 'common sense' attitude emerges from the descriptions in these texts. The descriptions chosen regard countries of very different cultural and ethnic backgrounds: Afghanistan, Australia, Indonesia, Iran, Libya, UK, US.

The genre of text according to the Kress (1985) definition is the 'educational text'. In the educational texts chosen the western ideological stance of the author(s) is implicit. For example, Australia may be described as having '*rolling tracts of pastoral land*' and '*magnificent beaches*'. Whereas, a non western country may not be described in such ideal terms. The same book when referring to a non western country (Indonesia) refers to the '*military*' regime and '*demands for*

independence', in other words from the point of view of the 'ideal' western reader it uses implicit negative language.

For Christie (1985: 22), ideologies may be thought of as sets of beliefs, attitudes myths, assumptions and values associated with social groups, institutions and classes. Thus, critical discourse analysis necessarily includes many different aspects of society. Fairclough (1995: 63) singles out three areas of socio-cultural practice as significant in studies on discourse: '... economic, political (concerned with issues of power and ideology), and cultural (concerned with questions of value and identity)'. With written text, the text constructs the reader and the reader interacts with the text. Thus, an Australian educational reference book is likely to present a text which implicitly reflects the ideological categories of the economic and social system characteristic of the Australian western capitalistic reader model. For example, in the text the Australian countryside is described as a tourist attraction, in other words in terms of economics — how it can be exploited economically.

For Kress, all social and cultural processes,

...[I]nvolve the transmission of cultural values and of social meanings; though in education that is a primary focus. [...] All social processes are in part about their own reproduction. [...] Education, however, is an institution particularly focused on the reproduction of culture; that is its *raison d'être*. All social interactions involve displays of power; in education this is highlighted through a characteristic conjunction of knowledge and power (Kress, 1985:1).

The text on Australia constructs and communicates with the ideal western capitalistic reader. Seen from the capitalistic point of view what was once Australian countryside (or, 'bush') has now become a destination for tourists — a source of revenue to boost the Australian economy. *'Tourism is now Australia's largest foreign exchange earner*

,...’ The ideal western reader position as projected in the text is reflected. This section of text is not in the Economics section of the text, however, the emphasis remains on the economic aspect. The ‘ideal’ reader interacts with the text: the ideal reader implicitly agrees with the western capitalistic ideal of boosting the economy, that nature is to be seen principally as an economic resource.

The principal concern here originates from the capitalistic ideology underlying the text. To quote Kress on this the text implicitly regards ‘ways of thinking about nature and the economy, [...] in short a certain kind of capitalist ideology.’ [...] The economic utility of nature and its exploitation are seen ‘as an unquestioned (natural) desire, and necessity (Kress, 1989:69).’

1.2.1. *An educational text*

A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organizes and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about in that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions. (Kress, 1985: 7)

The following sections of text taken from the introductory sections of a reference book which gives facts about the countries of the world are analysed to identify the differences between the ways western and non western countries are described to identify the occurrence of possible cultural bias in an educational text. First, it may be appropriate to begin with, the description of Australia:

While Australia is described as having ‘*rolling tracts of pastoral land*’ and ‘*magnificent beaches*’, a non western country is not described in such idyllic terms. The same reference book when referring to Indonesia — a non western country — does not present such an ideal picture. Although the first part of the paragraph presents a pleasant picture

of a myriad of pacific islands there is a marked change in the second part where a series of negatives are implied.

The language of the two descriptions in their initial introductory sentences is similar. The text on Australia concentrates on the geographical dimensions: '*The world's sixth largest country, Australia is an island continent ...*'. Similarly, the text on Indonesia also begins by describing the geography of the country: '*The world's largest archipelago...*'. However, on closer examination a difference in the attitude of the writer of the text emerges in the choice of language forms. Firstly there is a contrast in the number and type of superlative adjectives used in the two texts. The Australia text is more heavily weighted with superlative adjectives (two regarding geographical fact [*largest, most populous*], but also one regarding wealth [*richest*]). The Indonesian text has only one superlative adjective which regards a simple geographical fact (*largest*).

The Australia description continues to depict Australia as a country of idyllic pastoral scenes, or of magnificent beaches. The language used is bright and positive implying a peaceful, and idyllic land: '*rolling tracts*'; '*pastoral*'; '*magnificent*'; '*the country's richest area*'. Nothing negative is connected with this country, and it has no political problems: at least, this is what is implicit. This is implied from what is not said, as much as from what is said.

For Fowler (1991: 46): 'Unconsciously, readers 'read in' — a more active process than 'reading off', and already existing values (for example, those of patriotism, class, hierarchy, money) are reinforced in the interaction between the producer of the text and the reader. The patriotism of the author of the text on Australia is evident in the discourse, while his/her representation of other cultures that are more alien to him/her, for example Indonesia, seem to hold some implicit criticisms. Also implicit is the Australian 'common sense' attitude

to 'money', or to the economic aspect of the land: the land is seen as something to be exploited as an economic resource: the land is seen as a '*foreign exchange earner*', sport is seen as something that will give '*a massive economic boost*.'

According to Dow (1995), economics language comes more naturally to people in the western world because it is part of everyday language. Further, she maintains that modern man is an economic man and goes so far as to suggest that the effect of economists on human behaviour 'may have contributed to the pathological need for modern man to gain wealth.' Much of the discourse in the texts examined in this chapter concentrates heavily on the economics aspects of particular features of the countries: this is part of the 'common sense' ideology of the author(s). For example, the 'common sense' attitude in Australia sees sport as a money maker.

Comparing the two texts it may be said that the implied common assumption that characterises the ideal western reader of these texts is: Australia is an ex colony that went in the right direction; Indonesia is an ex colony that went wrong. An important aspect of text analysis is not only what is said in the text, or how it is said, but, also what is not stated in the text. For example, while the negatives are mentioned in the Indonesia text, any mention of negatives is omitted in the Australian text. The constructor of the text, in choosing to either include or exclude statements can be said to be constructing a bi-ased text. As Fairclough (1995: 105) states: 'Before engaging in analysis of what is in the text [...] one needs to attend to the question of what is excluded from it. [I]t is also important to be sensitive to absences from the text, to things which might have been 'there', but aren't — or [...] to things which are present in some texts appertaining to a given area of social practice, but not to others.'

What is not said in the Australian text, for example, is reflected in the teaching of Australian history up to recently in Australian schools. The teaching of history was Anglo oriented. Aborigines, for example, existed only to a limited extent in Australian history and in the school texts. According to the historian Macintyre (2003):

The first Australian histories were not histories of Australia they were histories of British settlement in the antipodes. They were published in London as well as locally and directed to British as well as to Australian readers. [...]. The first academics to practice the discipline of history in Australia, similarly, were not historians of Australia. They were teachers of European, British, imperial and colonial history. Australian history appeared in this curriculum as an aspect of European and British expansion. It was taught comparatively, so that Australia and New Zealand (they were often joined together as Australasian history) were considered along with other societies formed by British settlement. And it was taught sequentially so that the student understood the colonial society as an offspring of the parent, inheriting its traditions, reproducing its institutions and upholding its ideals (Macintyre, 2003: 31, 33).

Macintyre (2003), in his study 'The History Wars', describes the current debate between 'left wing' and 'right wing' historians regarding what constitutes the true Australian history, regarding how (amongst other things) the aboriginal question was largely left out of Australian histories, and regarding how much of the truth about the harshness of the first penal colonies was left out of the early histories. The history of Australia, up to recently, represented the Anglo oriented western capitalistic point of view. For example, Macintyre (2003: 43) cites one Australian anthropologist (Scanner, 1968: 5) who labeled this "the great Australian silence" about the relationship between "ourselves and the Aborigines". Within this context, when the official, establishment view of Australian