

## Applying CDA/SFG in editorials to show power relations and ideology in language use

Áp dụng thủ pháp phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán và ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống làm sáng tỏ mối quan hệ quyền lực và hệ tư tưởng thông qua việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ trong các bài báo xã luận

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**Abstract:** Language is not just interplay between textual structures and social issues in the society. Other than semantics, morphology, and grammar aspects, language is an important avenue for influencing, changing, and shaping people's ideologies and power relations in the society. The paper explores use of language in American media tabloids in creating power and ideologies among in the society. In this regard, CDA and SFG analyses are applied to explore the thematic issues under redress considering articles published in The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Walls Street Journal. Exposition of CDA and SFG's field, tenor, and mode reveal hidden results to support this position. Editorial boards of mainstream media tabloids are in influential position to determine content of publications to influence readers. Written texts are important in perpetuating ideologies and power relations in the society.

**Keywords:** *CDA; editorials; ideologies; power relations; SFG*

**Tóm tắt:** Ngôn ngữ không chỉ là sự tương tác giữa cấu trúc ngôn bản với các vấn đề xã hội. Ngoài các khía cạnh ngữ nghĩa, hình thái và ngữ pháp; ngôn ngữ còn là công cụ quan trọng có ảnh hưởng, thay đổi và định hình hệ tư tưởng và mối quan hệ quyền lực của con người trong xã hội. Bài viết khám phá dụng ngữ báo chí ở Mỹ trong việc xây dựng quyền lực và hệ tư tưởng ở xã hội này. Theo đó, tác giả áp dụng thủ pháp phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán (CDA) và ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống (SFG) để tìm hiểu những vấn đề nội bộ được đăng tải trên các tờ báo trực tuyến Washington Post, New York Times và Walls Street Journal. Thông qua việc trình bày ngữ vực với ba đặc trưng bao gồm trường (field), quan hệ (tenor) và thức (mode) của CDA và SFG, bài viết đã làm sáng tỏ nhận định trên. Ban biên tập những tờ báo chính thống này có vai trò ảnh hưởng tới việc xác định nội dung có tác động đến độc giả. Ngôn ngữ đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc duy trì hệ tư tưởng và quan hệ quyền lực trong xã hội.

**Từ khóa:** *CDA; hệ tư tưởng; quan hệ quyền lực; SFG; xã luận*

### 1. Introduction

The conventional focus of linguistic studies focused on textual structure to show the interplay between social processes and texts. However, focus on semantics, grammar, morphology, and phonology may not necessarily create an understanding of written text. It is important to consider the rhetoric intent of those expressing their opinions through writings. The opinions are coherent, share worldview opinions, which writers bring to audience through texts. This aspect of language is equally important in study of

language. Language not only reflects reality but also fundamental in creating reality. Words carried in texts are not neutral but carry power in relation to interests of those who write publications, political speeches, and other written texts.

Newspaper editorials, opinion leaders, and critical government agencies play a role through their writings, in shaping issues in the society by setting boundaries through writing [1]. Newspapers take the lead role in initiating discourses on important national issues through selective picking of political statements

from important national issues, celebrities, and national figures. Editorials expose the happenings throughout the nation and tell the stories to the audience. They show embellishments and sustain a particular stance by giving their own views on issues under discussion. This essay explores the use of language in news tabloids in the United States to show social ideologies and politics of the day. The essay will apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) in exploring structures of editorials in the Washington Post (WP), Wall Street Journal (WSJ), and New York Times (NYT).

### **Research questions**

Application of CDA and SFG's field, tenor, and mode will answer the following questions:

- 1) Does the medium provide opportunities for active participation of readers?
- 2) Do the editorials achieve delivery of ideology and power through use of language?
- 3) How do the editorials constitute to the delivery of power relation and ideologies?
- 4) Is language a mechanism for delivery of power relations and ideology?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Systematic Functional Grammar**

"This refers to a new approach to the study of grammar that is radically different from the traditional view in which language is a set of rules for specifying grammatical structures," [2, p.14]. Michael Halliday pioneered the SFG from the systematic functional linguistic (SGL). SFG and SGL refers to interconnection of networks that constitute meaning making in interpreting a language as systematic [3]. Halliday

uses the term functional to refer to evolution of language because of the multidimensional nature of human relationships and experiences. It is for this reason that this paper uses the framework of SFG to interpret ideology and power in the American tabloids.

The choice of this method was based on three metafunctions of experiential, interpersonal, and textual ideals of language use. SFG is; therefore, important in assessing the use of language for experiential purposes. "We use language to talk about our experiences of the world, including the worlds in our own minds, to describe events and states and the entities involved in them," [4, p.28].

Experiential Metafunction covers world issues through representation of subject matter and contextual expression of texts. Interpersonal Metafunction on the other hand represents writers' aspects of a text, relative social status, and social distance in the society. [4] asserts, with respect to Interpersonal Metafunction that, "We also use language to interact with other people to establish and maintain relationships with them, to influence their behaviour, to express our own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs," (p.28).

Contextual Metafunction shows the relationship between communicative distance and spontaneity/interactivity of textual expressions. Concerning Textual Metafunction, [4] writes, "In using language, we organize our messages in a way that indicate how they fit in with other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing" (p.28).

Field in SFG means the topic covered in the WSJ, NYT, and WP editorials in order to answer the events unfolding on Obamacare, the status of the health care

plan, and what the text is all about. In the examination of a language project in the web, it is appropriate to find out the aim of its content in a vivid and detailed manner to make readers make sense of issues explored. Vocabulary use would therefore determine content delivery through the web and the likely benefits of the environment over conventional print media.

According to [5], tenor is participants' role in delivering message in an interaction. Hallidays' tenor answers the question on who controls content delivery with respect to power and status. In this respect, this research will establish power and controls behind the editorials, the readers, and advertisers' roles.

Mode on the other hand refers to the communication channel used and it explains the role of language in message delivery. Mode examination shows the nature of message delivery (spoken or written), language/code used (French, English, or Spanish), graphical representation or images, and if there is combination of semiotic systems. Under this analysis, focus will be on functions of the modes in order to point out the predominate ones. Mode also explains the choice and distinction between web texts from print texts. Field, tenor, and mode descriptive categories would lead to comprehensive evaluation of content of the three journals with respect to relevance of Obamacare to the Americans.

## 2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is a method of discourse analysis that explains the use of discourses featuring in daily language to signify power relations in the development of new information. [6] posits that both written and spoken words have power. Hence, CDA analyses word use in discourses to explain power relations,

political dominance, inequality, and biasness as expressed and maintained in texts. CDA approach is also referred to as critical linguistics that focuses on interdisciplinary issues in studying language behaviours. There are three main concepts developed in a CDA elucidation. It covers the tenets of social demography (race, ethnicity, gender roles, age, class, and status), culture (accepted norms in a society), and discourse (choice of word used in texts) [7].

The aim of CDA is to find the existing relationship between culture, discourse, and social demography. The beliefs that a particular nation holds will be expressed in writing things that conform to what the people perceive as normal and neglect those perceived as negative. The society compels writers to say what they feel is right. Identity also shapes social structures as depicted in the way people think, act, and write. Written text is a method of communication that presents facts, tenets, and social identities of writers. For instance, [8] researched on journalists' reserved interests for the powerful forces in the society. This essay examines text use in the three identified print media in America to show ideology, politics, and language use.

Ideology has different and overlapping meanings depending on which discipline one refers. In the context of this paper, ideology restricts the use of word to make reference to societal beliefs, attitudes, values, and doctrines relation to politics and socio-economic lives of the American people. The ideologies shape Americans' perception to construct and interpret reality, as no editorials will ever be neutral, unbiased, and innocent. The media is never transparent in communicating the global objectives; instead, it is an avenue of defining social

processes. In this regard, CDA exploits the hidden meanings in texts, as language is a systematic use of linguistic terms that reflect ideological and discursive systems [8]. Editorials, headline features, and news reports among other media aspects have linguistic manipulation to express social values in the world of symbolic systems.

It is also basic to define the context and use of the term power in this discussion. Power in this context refers to capabilities of an entity to manipulate issues and maintain them in a way that benefits it. The power of language can be discussed in public discourse and interpersonal communication. The public discourse refers to the manner in which media houses use English language in web editorials.

Entities are institutions like political parties, government, and influential companies. The institutions control the media while the media help the institutions to maintain power. The interdependence of the power controls and the media is mutual. The media benefit because by covering stories from the institutions, they get reward. In web editorials, viewership is based on the number of clicks paper article. The more ideological a story is, the more readerships it attracts. Media owners have their own ideologies and the ideologies of the clients, which control news production. The other ideology is the viewership or readership's perception, which should be under control to attract huge advertising revenues from clients. To have an article published, editors must look at all levels of ideologies in relation to what owners want and advise writers comply accordingly. Writers too have their level of control. They decide on which news to pursue within a multidimensional set of choices on

unfolding events. To keep their jobs, they must be up to 'standard'.

### 2.3. Research Methodology

This paper looked at the language interplay in WP, WSJ, and NYT in covering political issues surrounding Obamacare in the US. The focus was on editorials on significant national issue of political, economic, and social interests. The paper identified the headline features, and text expression to explore linguistic devices that project ideological views and power relations. To identify the editorials, Google search was made with three different search words: 'Wall Street Journal editorial on Obamacare, The Washington Post editorials on Obamacare, and New York Times editorials on Obamacare. The results were selected carefully to include only editorials, articles written in almost the same period, (October-November 2013), and based on similar issues of Obamacare. After the search, I applied CDA and SFG in exploring the texts in the articles in order to find out the role of language in power relations and ideology in mainstream American tabloids.

As noted in the section above, several events unfold in every single hour across the globe and one role of the media is to identify the worthy items to write. The choice on Obamacare was based on what would appeal to the readers and be acceptable to the editorial teams. Editors have the authority to change content by adding or deleting to comply with owner's ideologies. By the time the audience look at the edited articles, only the facts that cover interests of the power institutions and ideological power appear. For the purpose of this research, the topic of interest is Obamacare because of the divergent opinions expressed by Americans on the health care program.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Systematic Functional Grammar Analysis

##### 3.1.1. SFG's Field

It is common from all the newspaper editorials to refer to the Republican's Affordable Care Act to analyse Obamacare relevance. WP defines interactants by positions and political party affiliations. For instance, the text begins, "After pressing for months, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder (R) last week finally..." [9]. The reference of such stature creates ideological power, as

readers would develop biasness for or against cited facts based on whether they lean towards Republicans or Democrats as the main political parties. The editorials have all tried to use simple terms in texts for everyday use. Even though some terms would be unavoidable, the level was kept as low as possible. Of the three newspaper articles, NYT uses the simplest terms while WP used most technical terms. This explains why NYT does not give links in the text while the rest of the editorials provide the links.

**Table 1. Field**

Editorial	Topics: <i>technical and recurrent</i>	Interactants
The Washington Post	'Republicans should get out of the way of Obamacare'	Plain language but knowledge of insurance policy, health care would give additional advantage, gives links to potentially technical terms, technical terms in the text include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 'Speech therapy' (health)</li> <li>✓ 'Medical foods' (health)</li> <li>✓ 'Forced equity' (financial)</li> <li>✓ 'Copay' (financial)</li> <li>✓ 'Permitted plan' (insurance)</li> <li>✓ 'Affordable Care Act' (health and insurance)</li> </ul>
The Wall Street Journal	'The ObamaCare Awakening'	Provides links for technical terms, justifies facts through citation of sources. These terms would be technical for an ordinary reader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 'Affordable Care Act'</li> <li>✓ 'State insurance market'</li> <li>✓ 'Medicaid programs'</li> </ul>

The New York Times	<i>'A New G.O.P Excuse for doing Nothing'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Uses simpler terms in communication apart from 'Affordable Care Act'</li> <li>✓ There is no link to follow in case one is interested in searching for Affordable Care Act</li> <li>✓ Define the identities of people referred to in text</li> </ul>
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### 3.1.2. SFG's Tenor

The texts have similar tenor because they are all editorials of mainstream media tabloids in America. There could have been expected variations if the analysis was on different writings; for instance, peer reviewed journal and an online magazine article. The arising similarity in tenor also arises from the fact that the

articles cover the same issues (ObamaCare) within the same period (October, September, and November 2013). The choice of same topic and period is to find out if there are ideological differences and differences in power relations among the three editorials. Results on this ideology and power differences will be explored in CDA section.

**Table 2.** Tenor

Editorial	Status	Affective Involvement	Contact
WP	From editorial board to readers; presumed equals	Low; business to clients	Frequent (editorials) Occasional (topic on Obamacare)
WSJ	From editorial board to readers; presumed equals	Low; business to clients	Frequent (editorials) Occasional (topic on Obamacare)
NYT	From editorial board to readers; presumed equals	Low; business to clients	Frequent (editorials) Occasional (topic on Obamacare)

### 3.1.3. SFG's mode

**Table 3.** Mode

Mode	Washington Post	Wall Street Journal	New York Times
1. Language	<p><i>Written:</i> English  <i>Planned:</i> article  <i>Accompany an action:</i> talking about Obama-care but refers to Affordable</p>	<p><i>Written:</i> English  <i>Planned:</i> article  <i>Accompany an action:</i> talking about Obama-care but refers to Affordable</p>	<p><i>Written:</i> English  <i>Planned:</i> article  <i>Accompany an action:</i> talking about Obama-care but refers to Affordable</p>

	Care Act, Medicaid program etc.	Care Act, Health and Human Service rules	Care Act
2. Interaction	<i>Immediate</i> : readers can leave comments after reading <i>Rapid</i> : emails, Facebook, Twitter links given	<i>Immediate</i> : readers can leave comments after reading <i>Rapid</i> : emails, Facebook, Twitter links given	<i>Immediate</i> : readers can leave comments after logging in. <i>Rapid</i> : emails and social media links provided
3. Images	Both images on Obamacare and ads are present in the article	No images on Obamacare but there are ads from both clients and NYT other editions	No image given in relation to the story, images for ads present

The language in the WP is planned, an article that accompanies actions. The planned language with high lexical density (ACA mentioned 5 times, no ellipsis, and with limited use of pronouns ‘you’ and ‘our’ only used once, no ‘we’, ‘I’). In WSJ, similar language is used in texts except for the moderate lexical density and no use of pronouns at all. Limited use of pronouns, according to [10], is to respond to gender gaps created in written texts. The use of pronouns also creates individualism and selfishness in texts most common among male stereotypes compared to female stereotypes [11]. In the NYT, there is slight difference in the use of language due to preference of using article kind of writing with limited conversations. The conversations are direct quotes from political leaders in America (mainly Republican leaders) in order to refute claims made on Obamacare.

Halliday’s focus on field, mode, and tenor has been used in the editorials to give avenue for active participation of readers. All the editorials except NYT leave space for readers to give their feedbacks on the articles. The views expressed form part of the textual content of the articles. Hence, readers can also

share their ideologies on the politics of Obamacare. All the articles have email links for rapid feedbacks from readers, and this ascertains that the three articles allow for active participation of audience.

Ideology and power relations are also portrayed in the three articles through language use. It is easy to know the editorials that lean Republicans or Democrats based on how editorial teams debate issues surrounding Obamacare. CDA shows the interplay between institutions of power on delivering written contents. Editors regulate content of stories created by writers based on media owners’ ideologies and power relations. Therefore, the content of the texts in the three articles depicts the beliefs of power institutions on Obamacare. “A New G.O.P Excuse for doing nothing,” is the article title from [12]. This definitely shows that Republicans’ criticism of Obamacare is pointless and that they support Obamacare.

WSJ’s article is titled “The ObamaCare Awakening: Americans are losing their coverage by political design”. Before a reader peruses through the content, it is possible to determine whether the editorial team leans Republicans or Democrats. [13] writes,

"The political problem for the White House is that these choices are a threat to ObamaCare. If too many people keep these policies instead of joining the government exchanges, ObamaCare could fail." They hold the view that Obamacare would be expensive for the Americans and as such, does not support the government of the day on this issue.

The headline in [9], "Republicans should get out of the way of Obamacare", is direct and shows that they are against Republicans opposition to the health care plan. It also shows they support the Obamacare "Republicans, having opposed the bill and supported the legal challenge to it, are entitled to be unhappy about the outcome, though in our view they are wrong on the merits," [9]. Hence, all the editorials deliver power relation and ideologies through their writings.

### 3.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA on the three articles showed that there are different levels of power and ideologies.

**Table 4.** Levels of power and ideologies

Institution of Power	Ideological Power
- Media owners	- The papers either support or criticize Democrats and Republicans views on Obamacare.
- Editors	- There are no anti-US or pro-US stances
- Writer	- Wall Street Journal also brings in Liberals' views in their discussion
- Advertisers	- No religious issues showed in texts in a way that significantly influence discussion
- Readers	

The opening statement from [12], "With unrestrained glee, Republicans are using the calamitous debut of the Affordable Care Act as their latest justification for undermining of all health care reforms," uses strong vocabularies and proper nouns to catch readers attention. Many political jargons were identified such as opportunist theme, Senate immigration bill, the White House (Obama's administration), and big government programs. The choice of these words is to bring out politics as a social activity with its own code of language that is appealing to a select audience. The choice of words and message passed in the editorial shows the ideological perspectives of the editors, how their position would affect the ideological position of the readers, and how the influence is revealed in readers' responses. David from Brooklyn responds to the article by saying, "The Congress, on the other hand, is fully conscious of the evil it is doing, for by throwing nihilistic obstacles in the path of the entire country, they cripple our chances of keeping up in the international race for the most civilized," [12]. Even though the editors did not bring Pro-US stances, the article influences David to blame Republicans and show love for America. The article portrays the Republicans as non-reformists on the important social responsibility of health.

[13] On the other hand does not support the Democrats' Obamacare. Instead, they focus on the applicability of the Affordable Care Act despite its technical hitches. They put it, "The millions of Americans who are receiving termination notices because their current coverage does not conform to Health and Human Services Department rules may not realize this is by design." The texts use political jargon as well as the noun White House is also used many times with the

same hidden meaning as in [12]. Other political terms used include ObamaCare refugees, liberal paternalism, and political press corps (those media houses supporting the health care plan). The opposition to the current government is also depicted in the manner in which they refer to the president as Mr. Obama. They use negative words in their texts, for instance, ObamaCare losers, and Obama's repeated falsehood. The choice in words is intentional to bring out strong message against ObamaCare as a solution to the American population.

WP's Editorial Board refutes Republicans' opposition to the Obamacare. As expected, the WP is headquartered in Washington DC where White House is also built. The media house supports the government of the day from the article title itself. Of the three editorials, WP uses the least political jargons and instead, uses financial and insurance terms to explain the hurdles created by the Republicans. The editors use the health and financial terms to represent their pro-government views and protagonist acts on issues surrounding Obamacare through language modification. The texts show that the magazine leans towards the government. It influences readers to think in the same ideological perspective as "The Voice of Reason" posts that, "At last...what has taken you so long...and why have you limited your editorial to just Obamacare (how about The American Jobs act)?" [9]. The reader takes active participation in the discussion and suggests future topics for the editorial to consider in future writings. At the end of the read, I ascertain that the paper is pro-Democrats and supports their ideology on the health issues surrounding Obamacare.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research examined and found out that ideology plays important role when editors present their articles texts in headlines and body of articles. Based on the Critical Discourse Analysis, the analysis reveals that there are hidden meanings that editorial boards create beyond the rhetoric and imaging of political discussions. Choice of words cannot be accidental but systematic to influence audience towards a particular ideology in written texts. The multiple topics that cover Obamacare in all the three mainstream media shows that the health care plan is of great significance to the Americans. The editorial boards prefer the use of plain, short, and traditional texts in the headlines. The ideological meanings of the articles' contents are editors' expressions to the people they want to influence. The responses elicited by readers in most cases, as found out in this research paper, hold the same position as the editorials. The articles are therefore, significant avenue for influencing the perceptions of the people through careful choice of titles and words in context. There are interests served in the articles and those whose interests are criticized.

The research paper also compared the different manner in which the three editorials used elements of SFG to explore different treatments of complex and simple constructions. Mode showed slight differences among the articles because they are similar publications addressing similar issue (Obamacare) within the same period. Tenor showed not significant differences from the articles but the field had notable differences. SFG analysis revealed that language use in writing is systematic to impose influence on readers. The CDA and SGF analyses affirm that language is a mechanism off championing power relations and

ideologies from opinion leaders and institutions. Conformity of ideological perspectives is important for the survival of the mainstream media tabloids and for the benefits of media owners and the powers beyond them.

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