

MANIPULATIVE LANGUAGE IN CAMPUS POLITICS: DECONSTRUCTING STUDENTS' MESSAGES ON POSTERS IN SOME GHANAIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The University Campus has often been seen as an important site for the publication of school-related political ideas of young people (Loader, Vromen, Xenor, Steel and Bungum (2015). Against the background that critical discourse analysis seeks to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words of written text or oral speech, this study sets out to deconstruct the language of 'welcome' encoded in posters and banners by would-be student leaders on the campus of some universities in Ghana in order to reveal the ideological elements contained in these posters and banners. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and genre analysis as the analytical framework, the study showed a typical move pattern of engagement used by the aspiring student leaders on the posters. This involves names and images of the participants on the posters, welcome messages, advertised student-leader positions as well as provision of contacts (mobile phone and social media) to further extend the discourse. Also, the study, through critical discourse analysis, deconstructed the language of welcome used by the aspiring student-leaders by indicating how they used the language of welcome as a cover to establish their own ideological and political ambitions. These findings have implications for students who wish to vie for positions in future campus politics and by extension national politics.

Keywords: Campus Politics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Manipulation, Ideology, Deconstructing

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INTRODUCTION

The last few years have brought an enormous interest in new forms of discourse analysis which has resulted in language learning and discourse being studied in a range of ways that continue to offer exciting insight into communication (Glynos, Howarth, Norval & Speed, 2009; Albers, Dooly, Flint, Holbrook & May, 2013). No matter the field of linguistic inquiry, whether Language and Power (Fairclough, 1989), Language and Ideology (Van Dijk 1998), Language and Identity (Edwards, 2009), Discourse and Gender (Kendall & Tannen, 2001), one thing is clear and that is, language is purposefully used to engage others, convey certain types of information, create and recreate the very spaces we inhabit and to reflect and create categories of thoughts that are shared by members of a social group (Armstrong & Ferguson, 2010). According to Kramsch (1998), members of a community or social group do not only express experience; they create experience through language. They give meaning to it through the medium they choose to communicate with one another. Rozina and Karapetjana (2009) mention that, language plays a significant ideological role because it is an instrument by means of which the manipulative intents of politicians become apparent. The two authors further argue that linguistic manipulation can be considered as an influential instrument of political rhetoric because political discourse is primarily focused on persuading people to take specified political action.

Students and Campus Politics

The University Campus has often been seen as an important site for the publication of school-related political ideas of young people (Loader, Vromen, Xenor, Steel and Bungum (2015). Students in institutes of higher education often engage in campus politics with the view to, among others, gaining control of the union which is normally the apex student body dealing directly with the higher authorities on student-related and other academic issues (Munshi, 2014). Campus politics according to Munshi (2014) acts as fertile breeding grounds for future politicians. As a result, there is often direct intervention by larger political parties into students' affairs.

Major Concepts of the Study

The conceptual basis of this study is anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) and ideology. Critical research on discourse focuses primarily on social problems and political issues. It tries to explain discourse

in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure (Van Dijk, 1998). CDA explores opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts and events and wider social and cultural structures (Fairclough, 1989). It has the common interest in de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and retroductable semiotic investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual) (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). McGregor (2003) emphatically states that the objective of CDA is to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words of our written texts or oral speech.

One of the notions emerging out of CDA is manipulation which manifests either in text or talk (Van Dijk, 2006). He identifies two forms of manipulation in discourse; 'illegitimate' and 'legitimate' manipulation. By illegitimate manipulation Van Dijk (2006) points out that manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator and against the best interest of the manipulated. He explains further that this negative consequence of manipulative discourse typically occurs when the recipients are unable to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator. Legitimate manipulation on the other hand may come in the form of persuasion where the interlocutors are made to believe or act as they please depending on whether or not they accept the argument of the persuader. DeSaussure and Schulz (2005) also are of the view that manipulative discourse requires much attention to the ways in which communication is achieved including 'packaging' and formal aspects of sentence, semantics and syntax as well as the intentions of the speaker and the recovery of these intentions by the addressee. This point is buttressed by Rozina and Karapetjana (2009) who attempt to create a nexus between linguistic manipulation and political discourse. They consider linguistic manipulation as an instrumental influence of political rhetoric because political discourse is primarily focused on persuading people to take specific political actions. This is manifested in the creation of new forms of linguistic manipulation such as updated texts in slogans, application of catch phrases, the connotative meanings of words and a combination of language and visual imagery.

Language and Ideology

Fairclough (1989) draws a link between language and ideology. According

to him, ideologies are closely linked to language because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour. He mentions further that through ideology and ideological workings of language, the exercise of power in modern society is achieved. Van Dijk (2006) corroborates this by maintaining that ideologies are largely expressed and acquired by discourse, that is, by spoken or written communicative interaction. In other words, ideologies are acquired, expressed, enacted and reproduced by discourse. For example, he points out that the pronoun 'we' is one of the structures typically used to 'deictically refer to the in-group of the current speaker'.

Theorizing Political Discourse

Chilton (2004) argues that language and political behavior can be thought of as based on the cognitive endowment of the human mind rather than as social practices. He emphasises that political activity does not exist without the use of language. In other words, the practice of politics is predominantly constituted in language. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) emphasise that a relevant aspect of political discourse focuses on the structure of argumentation in a political speech. This structure of argumentation may be designed to achieve a particular purpose; to convince an audience that a certain course of action is right or a certain point of view is true. This, the two authors refer to as the 'intended prelocutionary effect' which is intrinsically associated with the speech act of argumentation.

Van Dijk (1997) states that political discourse represents political actions or practices which are discursive practices. For example, lexical items not only may be selected because of official criteria of decorum, but also because they effectively emphasise or de-emphasise political attitudes and opinions, garner support, manipulate public opinion, manufacture political consent or legitimate political power. He argues further that given the nature of political polarization in the political process, one may expect the typical positive evaluation of 'us' and 'our' actions in positive terms and of 'them' and 'theirs' in negative terms. Another level or dimension of discourse structure in political discourse is what Van Dijk (1997) terms super-structures or textual 'schemata'. Here, political discourse may make meanings more or less prominent for obvious partisan reasons. Information may be highlighted in a headline, summary or conclusion. Conversely, relatively insignificant details may get extra emphasis by putting them in prominent schematic categories and vice-versa in order to conceal important information. At the level of

lexicon, Van Dijk (1997) states that, in political discourse, words are used to describe opponents or enemies in a more negative way while individuals within a discourse; text or talk, describe their 'bad' habits, properties, products or actions with euphemisms.

In terms of syntax, Van Dijk (1997) reiterates that there is political manipulation of syntactic style such as the use of pronouns, variations of word order, the use of specific syntactic categories, active and positive constructions, nominalizations, clause embedding, sentence complexity and other ways to express underlying meanings in sentence structure. Best known at the boundaries of syntax, semantics and pragmatics according to VanDijk (1997) is the partisan use of deictic pronouns. For example, the use of the political plural 'we' or possessive 'our' has many implications for the political position, alliances, solidarity and other socio-political position of the speaker, depending on the relevant in-group being constructed in the present context. Such pronomial self-references may vary depending on which reference group is most relevant for each argument. Thus, principles of exclusion and inclusion are at play and reflect the partisan strategies of power in the political process.

Related Empirical Studies

Linguistic enquiries in campaign messages of students in politics are under-researched. However, scholars have focused attention on mainstream politicians and the language they use in persuading the electorate for votes.

In investigating the stylistic analysis of selected political campaign posters and slogans in a regional Nigerian elections, Sharndama and Mohammed (2013) report that whilst the vocabulary of the campaign posters are descriptive and emotive with the syntactic features being concise, precise and usually in declarative mood, the graphological features are designed to attract the attention of the electorate. Juffermans (2013) also shows how the occasional use of local language in the publicity campaigns of mobile phone operators serve as symbolic rather than communicative functions in ethno-linguistic relations in the Gambia and also how retailers in a major shopping street use images more than multilingualism as a vernacular strategy to accommodate illiterates in their audiences. Mcilwain (2007) investigates how political advertisement uses the trope of the 'Afro' to argue against a black candidacy in a local political contest appealing to voters to be reminded

of the negative associations of blackness with inferiority, criminality and perceptions of black militancy whilst D'angelo (2010) suggests an analytical framework capable of highlighting the communicative purposes, reader-oriented strategies and visual-linguistic interaction employed in the multimodal genre of academic posters. Jayasuriya (2015) investigated posters that advertise spoken English classes in Sri Lanka with the view to analyzing the language, visuals and ideology behind them. Whilst all these studies attempt to establish the linguistic implications of texts on posters, banners and messages on websites in different socio-political scenarios in society, none of them effectively addresses the issue of language and media messages on posters and banners as used by students in a typical campus politics.

The present study interrogates the ideological undercurrents in students' language on posters and banners in campus politics in some Ghanaian universities. The primary objective of this study is to deconstruct students' messages on these posters in order to expose the implied meaning these messages seem to communicate to the audience.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Besides studying various disciplines, students in higher education are also active in campus political activities which act as fertile breeding ground for future politicians (Munshi, 2014; Besar, Jali, Lyndon & Selvadurai, 2015). Whilst it is common knowledge that Students Representative Council (SRC) is found in most second cycle and tertiary educational institutions, in Ghana, there is ample evidence that many of the political leaders since independence were student leaders who graduated from the SRC through to the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) from the various university campuses (Ahiatrogah & Koomson, n.d.). One of the media through which prospective student-leaders hope to reach the student electorate is through posters and banners which are often pasted or hung at vantage points to catch the attention of the students. An emerging phenomenon which is prevalent in almost all campuses in Ghanaian universities is the tendency for prospective student-leaders to 'welcome' students back to campus with well-crafted messages at the beginning of a new semester. This observation is in tandem with Potter's (2008) assertion that developing precise messaging involves evaluating the responses of the target audience which would lead to raising

awareness and influencing behavior. A badly packaged message according to Alberts, Nakayama and Martin (2007) could also prove the undoing of the communicator. It is against this background that the present study attempts to do a critical discourse analysis of students' language of 'welcome' on posters and banners on some Ghanaian university campuses.

The main objective of this study is to deconstruct the language of 'welcome' by would-be student-leaders to reveal the ideological elements contained in the posters and banners; however, the study is directed by the following research questions:

1. How are ideological elements captured in the language of 'welcome' on posters and banners by would-be student leaders on the various university campuses?
2. Which linguistic engagement strategies are used to involve the audience in the discourse of the posters?
3. What is the relevance of obligatory or optional moves of the 'welcome' posters on the university campuses?

METHODOLOGY

The current study generally adopts a qualitative approach in investigating the ideological undertones of the language of 'welcome' on posters and banners by prospective student-leaders on various campuses in some Ghanaian universities. Elements in the methodology involve establishing the data source, study population, study sample, research instrument and the unit of analysis for the study. The study population involves all posters and banners of aspiring student-leaders that seek to 'welcome' students back to campus in a new semester in three public tertiary institutions in Ghana namely: Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), University of Ghana (UG) and University of Professional Studies in Accra (UPSA). These universities were selected because of the dual reasons of the researcher's special affiliations with one of them (Lecturer, GIJ) as well as residential proximity to the campuses of UG and UPSA which made gathering of data quite convenient. The main source of data is the posters and banners depicting the image and identity of the aspiring student-leaders which also contain their campaign messages. It took the researcher six weeks to collect the data from the campuses of these three universities. Whilst some of the data were obtained

through direct personal contact with the aspiring candidates, others were obtained through snapshots of the posters pasted at various points in public places on the various campuses in the targeted universities. In all, a total of fifty-six (56) posters and banners were collected in the targeted tertiary institutions. Out of this number, forty-eight (48) were purposively selected as the sample for the study because they contained specific messages of 'welcome' to students in a new semester. Any poster or banner that did not have this special characteristic was not added to the sample. For ethical considerations, three of the candidates gave me the permission to use their images and messages on the posters for the analysis. The study employed textual analysis as the research instrument specifically using CDA to deconstruct the ideological undertones in the messages of the posters as well as identifying the linguistic features used as engagement strategies to relate with the audience (students).

Analytical Framework

Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model of CDA together with Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse engagement marker (reader pronoun) and Swale's (1990) genre analysis formed the basis of the analytical framework for the study. Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis which involves the object of analysis, the discursive process by means of which the object is produced and received as well as the socio-historical conditions which govern these processes, transforms into an analytical method. These are: the linguistic description of the formal properties of the text, interpretation of the discursive processes involved in the production of text as well as the explanation of the social context within which the text was produced. This was complemented by Swale's (1990) concept of 'move' in genre analysis to identify the textual regularities on the posters and banners with the view to establishing the obligatory and optional moves whilst Hyland's (2005) engagement strategy of reader pronoun was used to determine how the aspiring student-leaders use language to engage the audience (students) in the discourse of the poster.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the study is based on the research questions formulated to guide the research:

Which message on the posters is obligatory or optional on the 'welcome' posters on the university campuses? How are ideological elements captured in the language of 'welcome' on posters and banners by would-be student leaders on the various university campuses? What is the relevance of obligatory or optional moves of the 'welcome' posters on the university campuses?

Establishing obligatory and optional moves in the posters

Swales' (1990) concept of genre analysis involves the notion of 'move' analysis. This is often used to identify the textual regularities in certain genres of writing whether they are obligatory or optional. Moves that occur regularly in a genre are considered obligatory while those occurring less frequently are considered optional (Swales, 1990; Li, 2011).

The current study establishes four basic messages (moves) on the posters ostensibly to welcome students back to campus at the beginning of a new semester. These were found to be quite recurrent in almost all the posters gathered by the researcher. First is the name of student (sender of the message) on the poster with his/her accompanying photograph (move 1). Next is the boldly written and warm message of 'welcome' to all students entering campus to begin a new semester (move 2) Then comes the student's major political statement defining his/her vision/manifesto to the audience (students). This comes in different forms such as a catch phrase using a hashtag or a definite statement or principle, or a quote of an influential person (move 3). Another frequent message on the poster is the student leadership position the sender of the message is gunning for (move 4). This is usually followed by the contact social media address or phone number of the aspiring candidate (move 5).

It must be pointed out here that the frequency of the moves in the posters is modeled along that of Rasmeenin (2006) cited in Noudoushan (2012) who classified moves as 'obligatory' when observed in 100% discussions, 'conventional' when observed between 66%-99% and 'optional' when it occurs in less than 66% of the discussion. However, unlike Rasmeenin (2006), the current research classifies moves into two categories; obligatory and optional moves. The researcher, in this study, tags obligatory moves as those observed between 61%-100% of discussions while regularity of moves occurring between 0%-60% of discussions are considered optional.

However, in the case of the obligatory moves, moves that fall within the range of 75%-99% are classified as highly obligatory and if the move occurs in 100% of situations, it is fully obligatory.

The table below presents a clearer picture of the analysis:

| Genre Type | Move Type | Move Function | Frequency | Total No of Posters | Percentage | Status of poster |
|----------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|-------------------|
| | Move 1 | Name & Picture | 48 | 48 | 100% | Fully obligatory |
| Student Poster | Move 2 | Welcome message | 36 | 48 | 75% | Highly Obligatory |
| | Move 3 | Key statement | 24 | 48 | 50% | Optional |
| | Move 4 | Aspiring Position | 36 | 48 | 75% | Highly Obligatory |
| | Move 5 | Candidate's contact | 35 | 48 | 72.9% | Obligatory |

Table 1: Frequency of moves on the posters

From the table, it is apparent that aspiring student-leaders prefer to display their identities (names and photographs) on the posters and that constitute the 'first move' on the poster. This occurred in all the 48 posters gathered by the researcher (100%) and makes it a fully obligatory information/message on the poster. It also means that the name and image of the aspiring student-leader on the poster is very crucial and almost indispensable. The purpose is to familiarize themselves with the general student body and court their attention for easy identification when it comes to any student-related campus elections. The second move (move 2) constitutes a statement usually containing the word 'welcome' meant to usher in the students back to campus to begin a new semester. This occurred in 36 out of the 48 posters constituting 75% of the total posters collected for the study. This renders that piece of information 'highly obligatory' on the poster. Moves four and five are classified highly obligatory as well. They occurred in 36 out of the 48 posters (75%) and 32 out of 48 (72.9%) respectively. The 'move function' here seeks to advertise the aspiring student's position he/she wishes to

contest in campus election as well as providing their contact address, be it via phone or any of the social media platforms. Finally, 'move 3' is a piece of statement that comes in a form of an advice or a popular catch phrase designed to serve as a link between the aspiring student leader and the student electorate. This occurred twenty-four times (24) out of the total forty-eight (48) representing 50%, thus making it an 'optional' piece of information on the poster. The relevance of the fully obligatory as well as highly obligatory moves on the poster indicates a higher level of persuasion on the part of the contender. The high frequency of these moves reflects the most important message that the candidates wish to convey to the electorate.

Deconstructing the Posters through CDA

It must be emphasized that the main objective of the present study is to deconstruct the language of 'welcome' by would-be student leaders to reveal the ideological elements contained in the posters and banners. Critical Discourse Analysis explores opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts and events and wider social and cultural structures with the primary objective of uncovering the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words of written text or oral speech. (Fairclough, 1989; McGregor, 2003). This is often achieved through illegitimate manipulation (Van Dijk, 2006) where manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator and against the best interest of the manipulated, or when the recipients are unable to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator.

The analysis of the present study therefore is based on Fairclough's (1989) perspective of CDA where the object of analysis is the 'welcome' posters and banners pasted in different corners of campus ostensibly to welcome students back to campus usually at the beginning of a new academic year. The question here is, what are the real intents of these would-be student leaders in the welcome posters? Which latent ideologies express themselves in the language of these posters? An attempt to provide answers to these questions is seen in the analysis of three of such posters, one each from three public tertiary institutions in Ghana namely: University of Ghana, Ghana Institute Journalism and University of Professional Studies Accra (UPSA).



Figure 1: 'Welcome' Poster at GIJ

In figure 1, it is apparent that the manifest communicative purpose of the student advertiser (Suraiya from GIJ) in the poster is to welcome students back to campus which is boldly written. However, she employs Hyland's (2005) engagement strategy 'reader pronoun' (you) in establishing some kind of connection between her and the general student body. The strategy here is to draw in the public (students) and show some solidarity with them. However, the political ideology and intents espoused by the student are not far-fetched. These are expressed in three ways in the poster. First, her concise political message and vision are captured in the words 'the GENDER agenda'. The student makes it clear that her agenda or manifesto is to champion issues concerning gender which is cleverly foregrounded and comes in capital letters. In the same poster of 'welcome', the student clearly advertises the political position she aspires to hold in campus elections and this is also boldly captured in the statement 'SRC WOMEN'S COMMISSIONER hopeful 2016'. In so doing, she announces to the entire student body her readiness to contest for that position. Finally, she provides all her contacts including phone number and all social media contacts such as twitter address, Facebook, email and Instagram. These social media platforms are very

popular with students and the intention here is to extend her political intents even beyond the poster in which she advertises her ambitions. Thus, in deconstructing the language of 'welcome' on the poster which ostensibly is supposed to be the central message, the student cleverly throws in her political and ideological intents. This is done to manipulate students to identify with her and vote for her in any upcoming campus elections. As Van Dijk (2006) mentions and corroborated by Rozina and Karapetjana (2009), manipulative discourse occurs when the recipients are unable to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator. This is manifested in the creation of 'updated texts in slogans, application of catch phrases... the connotative meanings of words and a combination of language and visual imagery'. Whilst the apparent communicative purpose is to 'welcome' students back to campus, the real intention was for the student advertiser to make clear her ideological and political inclinations and ambitions via the poster. She does this by stating her manifesto, declaring to contest a specific student-leader position (Women's Commissioner) and providing various contacts (phone number and social media communication) which would enhance further engagements with the students as she pursues her ideological and political position. All this information cover a wider space on the poster and appear to overshadow the statement of welcome put up on the poster.



Figure 2: 'Welcome' Poster at UG

The content of the next poster looks even more manipulative. Yes, it is true that the candidate indeed welcomes the entire student body back to campus, even going one step further in offering them a piece of advice to stay focused on their academic journey, it is evident that there is more to just the message of welcome. For example, the candidate boldly displays his ambition of becoming the next University of Ghana SRC President and this is conspicuously captured in the enclosed message: UG SRC'19 PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL. That is not all. He creates a slogan preceded by the hashtag **# Make the SRC Great Again**. Certainly, this is a political allusion to the prime message of the current president of the United States of America, Mr. Donald Trump who campaigned and won the 2016 Presidential elections of the United States on the ticket of the Republicans. Alluding to the main campaign message of the current US President, this candidate presents similar message to his colleagues ostensibly to assure them that if they vote for him he would surely make the University of Ghana SRC 'great again'. Thus, whilst the seemingly obvious intention of the poster is to welcome students back to campus, the latent and more important reason for the candidate is to make a political capital out of the poster by openly announcing his candidature to the upcoming SRC elections of the University of Ghana.

Thus, through the conduit of the welcome message, the aspiring student-leader cleverly packages the rest of the message in such a way that the focus serves his interest more than the student body. This is achieved through manipulative use of language and typography of the text.

Again, the content of the poster in figure 3 follows similar pattern as the earlier one. It involves the portrait of the student-advertiser which covers a greater portion of the space available for the poster and captures her name which is boldly written in a manner that makes it easily noticeable even from a distance. Also, the aspiring student-leader in the poster makes use of engagement strategies like reader-pronoun as a way to draw in the reader/public into the discourse. For example in the third poster (figure 3) the aspiring student-leader not only welcomes all students back to campus but goes ahead to wish them a fruitful semester: 'Have a fruitful Semester'. This statement comes with an ellipsis of the second person plural pronoun 'You'. Thus, the statement 'You have a fruitful semester' is meant to connect the aspirant with the general student population and establish the fact that she shares in their concerns and welfare. Even though she does not overtly

state the position she aspires to contest for, she does so subtly by providing her Facebook contact as well as phone number that will engender further interactions with the students regarding campus politics as seen in the figure below:



Figure 3: 'Welcome' Poster at UPSA

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to deconstruct the language of 'welcome' in order to reveal the ideological elements contained in the posters and banners. CDA and genre analysis based on the analysis of data, three key findings emerged in relation to the research questions. First, data from the present study showed a particular pattern of engagement used by the aspiring student leaders on the posters. This involves name and image of the participants on the poster which was a constant feature occurring in 100% of all the discussions thus becoming a fully obligatory feature. Besides, the participants in the poster gave 'welcome' messages, advertised student-leader positions they are contesting and provided their contacts (mobile phone and social media) to further extend the discourse. These were generally highly optional and

occurred in over 72% in all the discussions. The second major finding was that the participants in the poster-used reader pronoun 'you' as an engagement strategy quite effectively to reach out to the intended audience (students) and involve them in the discourse. This was intended to make them feel important and establish the point that the prospective student-leader cared about their welfare. Finally the study deconstructed the language of welcome used by the aspiring student leaders by indicating how they used the language of welcome as a cover to establish their own ideologies and political ambitions. This was made possible through the discursive realization of the student-leader positions advertised and the personal contacts they provided in the content of the posters. These actually belie the true intents of the posters instead of the ordinary phatic communication they appear to convey. These findings have implications for students who wish to vie for positions in future campus politics and by extension national politics.

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