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Applying Critical Discourse Analysis as a conceptual framework for investigating gender stereotypes in political media discourse

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to demonstrate how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be used as a conceptual framework for investigating gender stereotypes in political media discourse. Language and gender studies in media discourse work with a diverse theoretical standpoint underpinning each particular work, and are generally bound by a concern for the reproduction of ideology in language use, which is also one of the aims of CDA. However, CDA has previously been criticized for selecting and using only a small number of texts, leading to concerns of representativeness of the texts selected, and thus susceptibility to the researcher's bias in text selection for an intended analysis. In this paper, we used news reports with reference to the former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra of Thailand as the case study to examine how gender stereotypes related to female politicians are linguistically generated in media text. We demonstrate how an abstract concept such as stereotyping can be investigated through systematic linguistic analysis and how such criticisms, especially that of representativeness of the texts selected, or cherry-picking data, can be addressed when conducting a CDA research project. We propose that the potential bias in data selection can be minimized or even eliminated by systematically obtaining a data set large enough to be a representative sample. Doing so can help increase the ability to describe texts, and more thoroughly convince the reader of the resulting claims regarding how gender stereotypes in politics are reproduced and generated through language used in media.

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Introduction

This paper aims to demonstrate how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be applied as a conceptual framework for investigating gender stereotypes in politics in media discourse. CDA has previously been criticized for selecting and using only a small number of texts, leading to concerns of representativeness of the texts selected, and thus susceptibility to the researcher's bias in selecting texts for analysis. Thus, in this paper, we outline how such criticisms, especially the criticism of representativeness of the texts selected, or cherry-picking data, can be addressed when conducting a CDA research project. We demonstrate how an abstract concept like stereotyping can be investigated through systematic linguistic analysis. We propose that a rigid and well-structured CDA can minimize or even eliminate potential bias in data selection. Doing so can help to increase the ability to describe texts and better convince the reader of the validity of claims regarding how gender

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stereotypes in politics are reproduced and generated through language used in media.

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in Politics in Media

CDA is "a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts" (van Dijk, 2004, p. 352). It seeks to show how ideological presuppositions are hidden underneath the surface structures of language choices in text (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Scholars working under the umbrella of CDA schools may work with diverse theories and various foci, but they are bound by a concern for the investigation of the reproduction of ideology in language (Fairclough, 1992). CDA looks into, for example, institutional, political, gender, and media discourses (Wodak, 2001) and how certain social groups may be ill-represented or misrepresented in various types of discourse.

The importance of language used in media in generating the taken-for-granted claims about women and the media's reinforcement on hegemonic ideologies of gender are also highlights for Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (DA & CDA). The studies of gender stereotypes in politics and media related to stereotypes of female politicians in media lie in the fact that there is a polarity in language that is used to describe female and male politicians (Anderson, Diabah, & Mensa, 2011). Some studies have investigated, for instance, naming and referential features used to refer to female politicians and to describe them in comparison with their male counterparts (e.g. Barnes & Larrivée, 2011; O'Gragy, 2011). One study worth mentioning (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003) found that reported speeches of both female and male politicians were mediated by masculine norms of political reporting.

Though the use of CDA concepts is deemed appropriate for such studies, it is crucial to further discuss some criticisms of this approach.

Criticism of CDA

Several criticisms have been leveled at the methodology adopted by CDA research. The most notable ones come from Widdowson in a series of articles (Widdowson, 1995a, 1995b), in which he argues that many of the concepts and analytical models of CDA are vague. Apart from Widdowson, other CDA critics agree that: 1) texts are arbitrarily selected; 2) texts are limited in length, which leads to concerns over representativeness of the texts selected; and 3) there are limitations and difficulties in drawing any conclusion (Schegloff, 1997; Sharrock & Anderson, 1981; Stubbs, 1997; Verschueren, 2001; Wetherell, 1998).

Though CDA, just like any other approach, has received harsh criticism, conducting it with some thorough procedures can help increase the ability to describe texts and to bring out the ideologies concealed in texts so that they can be more easily challenged (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The criticisms mentioned above are issues that can be overcome.

Addressing Criticism

To address the criticism of prioritizing context over text, a study should start from a textual analysis; then the findings can be interpreted and discussed against any relevant sociopolitical context. This can be done, for example, by discussing text production and consumption, and how they affect the pattern of ideologies found in the textual analysis. To address the point of representativeness of the texts selected, or cherry-picking of data that arises from the 'randomness' of data selection (Widdowson, 1998) or a lack of rigor in collecting data, the study should aim for credibility and dependability by being as truthful and transparent as possible in giving sufficient details about the data source. The data must be obtained systematically, and there should be enough data to provide a representative sample. Moreover, to make the analysis "transparent so that any reader can trace and understand the detailed in-depth textual analysis" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 11), much effort should be put into the description of the methodology to clearly explain how the data has been collected, selected and downsized. Moreover, the analysis should be made "systematic and comprehensive" (Widdowson, 2004, p. 110). To be aware of the confirmability and transferability of the study, as suggested by Paltridge (2006), an 'audit trail' should be provided in the appendixes so that readers can trace and understand each of the steps of the analysis. Finally, by carefully addressing potential criticisms, the issue of making much interpretation out of little evidence can be resolved.

Methodology

Operationalizing CDA as a Conceptual Framework for Investigating Gender Stereotypes in Media Discourse

This research examines how gender stereotypes related to female politicians are linguistically generated in media text. We used Yingluck Shinawatra as a case study to see: 1) how her representations, as Thailand's first female prime minister, are linguistically constructed in the English-language press in Thailand; and 2) how gender stereotypes in Thai politics are distributed worldwide through media discourse. We have used CDA as a conceptual framework, and Transitivity Analysis from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as an analytical framework. However, this paper is not primarily aimed at presenting the results of the research project, but to demonstrate a method of addressing the main criticism of CDA: a lack of rigor in collecting data, or arbitrarily selected texts, which leads to concerns over the credibility or trustworthiness of the research.

We address the criticism of representativeness of the texts selected, and avoid cherry-picking data that arises from the 'randomness' of data selection (Widdowson, 1998) by following the criteria set by Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 98):

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