

Power Relation Negotiation between Writers and Readers Embedded in Some CNN Commentaries

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Abstract: Power relations exist between social groups, institutions, women and men, young and old, ethnic groups, etc. In mass media discourses, they exist between authors and viewers, listeners or readers. Besides, it is said that power relations are always relations of struggle – the term which, according Norman Fairclough [1], is used in a technical sense to refer to the process whereby social groups with different interests engage with one another. If applying Fairclough’s view to the case of CNN commentaries which are used in our investigation, media discourses can be seen as sites where text producers exercise their power through well-written language; and thus, they should be involved in a struggle (a power relation negotiation) with assumed readers over whom they supposedly want to influence their opinions. In this kind of struggle, this paper demonstrates that the writers exercise their power via linguistic means while taking into due consideration the ‘ideal’ readers’ position. It could be claimed that throughout the media discourses, commentators do have to negotiate the power relations with assumed readers.

Keywords: Assumed readers, ‘ideal’ readers, mass media discourses, power relations, power relation negotiation.

1. The subject and the scope of the study

The study is only a small-scaled language analysis on power relation negotiation with the subject being some CNN commentaries on socio-political problems. There will be three articles being put under close investigation in order to unravel the seem-to-be unequal relations between commentators and readers, and to find out how this kind of relationship is embedded and negotiated in one of the most

influential and important journalistic mainstreams – commentary. They are media discourses taken from CNN, opinion page – a prestigious news source in America. The first one is the commentary entitled ‘Are you addicted to the Internet’, written by Dr Catherine Steiner-Adair – an internationally recognized school consultant and author of the famous book ‘The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age’; the second commentary, ‘Help each other, not ISIS’ belongs to Dean Obeifallah, a columnist for the Daily Beast and

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editor of the politics blog The Dean's Report; and last but not least is 'The sex freak-out of the 1970s by Sally Kohn, a CNN political commentator.

As widely accepted, commentaries are omnipresent; they can be found abundant in CNN; thus, finding materials for this study is obviously not a challenging job; yet, finding the right ones which could match the aim of this paper is a hard task. The three commentaries used in this paper are carefully chosen basing on two main criteria; the first one is the prestige of the commentators: Dr Catherine Steiner-Adair, Dean Obeifallah, and Sally Kohn are the writers of high credit; they often have their commentaries posted on CNN, and their works always attract a lot of comments from the readers. The issues that are discussed directly in the commentaries account for the second criterion; and such topics as Internet addiction, ISSI, and sexual revolution would be of great interest and relevance to our current world.

There are many approaches to the study of language, namely, linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence, conversation, discourse analysis in social psychology and critical discourse analysis (CDA), amongst others. This study is carried out under the light of CDA because talking about CDA is talking about taking some political stance to analyze language and via CDA, language is seen in close relationship with power and ideology, which are all of relevance to this small study.

2. Theoretical basis: CDA – Power – ideology and mass media discourse

In the view of Norman Fairclough [1], discourse is seen as a favoured vehicle of

ideology; and the exercise of power in modern society is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language. Thus, it can be said that power, ideology and language are closely knitted; and talking about CDA means talking about power, ideology and how they are reproduced through language. In the book entitled "Language and Power" [1], Norman Fairclough mentioned one important aspect concerning discourse usage, that is, how discourse is related to unequal measures of power.

It is crystal clear that language and power have strong and bonded relations. Rarely do people enter some kind of meaningful communicative situations without attaching to their talks specific aims and their pre-supposed positions; and consciously or unconsciously, they show their role, their power in those kinds of discourses. Norman Fairclough once had an interesting discussion specifically on two major aspects of the power/language relationship, be it power in discourse and power behind discourse; and he also touched on the hidden relations of power [1]. That is when he talked about written language, and the growth area for this sort has been the mass media – namely, television, radio, film as well as newspapers. What needs to consider here is that in contemporary society discourses where participants are separated in place and time are prolific and plenteous; hence, it is essential and important for us to do some studies on this kind of discourses.

In terms of mass media discourses in general and commentaries in particular, one of their prominent features is the 'one-sidedness', that means if in face-to-face interaction, participants alternate between being the producers and the interpreters of the text, in media discourses there is a sharp divide between producers and interpreters. There

seems to be just writers who are present in the scene with the absence of the second participants.

Another striking characteristic that we should bear in mind is that media discourses are designed for mass audience, and there is no way that producers can even know exactly who is in the audiences; thus, they produce language with some interpreters in mind, or put it more simply, what they do is address an ideal /assumed subject, be it viewers, or listeners, or readers. Media discourses have built into it a subject position for an ideal subject.

Among various media discourses, commentaries are considered one of most important journalistic types, and they are typical of dexterously written language where power relation struggles, power relation negotiation and ideologies are richly and implicitly presented. Commentaries are often said to be the individual products and they bear the writers' distinguished identity. Writing this sort of articles, 'producers' all know clearly that they are in the 'battle' in which they have to try to win the readers' heart and mind through linguistic means; and this work obviously requires great efforts and art in accurate and effective language use so as to control a fully biased text with the purpose of invading the target audience ideologically and politically and ultimately of persuading or manipulating them to their pre-set aims without their notice.

However, without the 'real' appearance of the readers, whether the writer holds the whole power in the discourse? Do 'ideal readers' have some position in the written text and in commentator's mind? And thus, is the negotiation of power relations between the writer and assumed readers embedded in his/her discourse? They are all interesting questions

related to power relations that are of the core of this linguistic study.

3. Power relation negotiation in commentaries

3.1. The choice of wordings

Right from the beginning of each commentary taken from CNN opinion page, there is always small, yet unequivocal caption saying: 'the opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author'. It sounds like the assertion for the text producer that he/she would step into the discourse with the whole power to express his/her views on some socio-political problems; and hence, he/she has the absolute right to demonstrate the thoughts linguistically in his/her own way regardless of others' opinions on the same subject. However, is it the case? If we understand the power relationship between the commentary writers and the readers following this cliché, we are easily misled into the jungle where, we, the target readers, are completely lost in the ideological battle set up by the authors, and become the passive-information receivers.

But why do we have such cliché? Obviously if seen from the surface, we can notice without difficulty that in commentaries, the writers often draw on a clear classification scheme in order to express their views while claiming their political stance explicitly; that is to say, they voice their thoughts in favor of, or in opposition to the issue mentioned in the discourse. How can they do so? A careful and thoughtful choice of wordings helps them achieve their seem-to-be-superior-to-the-reader position.

In the commentary “Are you addicted to the Internet” by Dr Catherine Steiner-Adair [2], a classification scheme is drawn upon in opposition to the addiction to the internet with the support of such words as ‘excessive computer gaming’, ‘alarming trend’, ‘compulsive Internet use’, ‘growing concern’, ‘bad habits’, ‘feeling of loss’, ‘problematic relationship with tech’, ‘digital gadget overusing’, ‘health concern’, ‘deeper damage’, ‘chronic tension’, ‘emotional distress’, ‘decreased performance at work, at school, and in life’, ‘obstacle to emotional intimacy’, ‘restless’, ‘angry’, ‘depressed’, etc. These words act as the important reminders of the problem brought up in the discourse, giving the prominence to the discussed issue while serving the author’s ideological purpose of imprinting onto the readers’ mind the writer’s negative ideas.

One could argue that all the words listed above just help build up a particular ideological representation of the reality, they have nothing to do with the power relation negotiation between the commentator and readers; however, if we look deeper at the connotation of each word, we can notice that each one was chosen purposefully with the aim of projecting the author’s negative attitudes towards the internet addiction problem, and this is obviously her strategy of drawing up the common ground with the readers, and then their solidarity, their agreements on her views, which is where relational values of the words come into the picture. This hidden, yet interesting aspect could be easily discovered if analyzing the words up close.

To bring up the problem of internet addiction, Catherine didn’t simply employ such words as computer game using or internet problem; instead she added some strong adjectives before each noun: ‘excessive’ was

chosen, not the word ‘much’ (excessive computer gaming); not ‘normal’ or ‘bad’, but ‘alarming’ (trend); not ‘regular’ or ‘voluntary’, but ‘compulsive’ (Internet use); and not ‘normal’, ‘big’, but ‘growing’ (concern); etc.; in addition, she often opted for ‘big words’ when mentioning to the Internet overuse in the society: ‘an addiction’, ‘a complicated ... social problem’, ‘a social phenomenon’, ‘an urgent health concern’, ‘bad habits’; and she also wielded the words: ‘feeling of loss’, ‘chronic tension’, ‘emotional distress’, ‘compromised physical health’, ‘restlessness’, ‘irritability’, ‘anger’, ‘anxiety’ to talk about the blatant and worst effects of this problem on people. Through careful choice of wordings, she skillfully led the readers to accept her opposing views to the internet addiction; she definitely knew such strong, powerful words with negative nuances could help build up the common ground with the readers, and thus, she could sway their positions, their opinions to hers: the problem is obviously there, and everywhere; and it is serious, hence, we would have to acknowledge it, though its being the ‘hard truth’, to find out the solutions, the extensive treatments.

Likewise, Dean Obeifallah in his commentary entitled ‘Help each other, not ISIS’ [3], he defended the true Muslim Americans by the words: ‘inspiring interfaith work’ (done by Muslim community), ‘their close and mutually respectful working relationship’, ‘local Tennessee Muslim community leaders unequivocally condemning, denouncing the attack’, etc. By making his classification scheme blatant, the author was working his ideological way into the mind of the readers, creating the feeling that he was controlling them by imposing his ideas without their notice. Once again, we witness the use of strong words:

‘condemn’, ‘denounce’, ‘thoughtful denunciation’, and vividly positive adjectives: ‘inspiring’, ‘respectful’. Step by step, the author brings the assumed readers to his views: Muslim Americans are condemning, denouncing the terrible deeds committed by Muslim terrorists, and they are engaging in inspiring, respectful works for the community; and thus, we shouldn’t define Islam to many Americans, they have nothing in common with ‘bad actors’, other than sharing – in name only – a faith.

The similar scenario is resorted to when the author touches on the ‘wrongful’ judgments made by some individuals towards the true Muslim Americans, yet via a striking difference in the choice of words: (media business model, under which) ‘*sensationalism* sells’; ‘the hate *spewed*’ (by certain U.S. elected officials, the professional anti-Muslim bigots and some far right religious clerics); ‘their demonization’, ‘outlandish allegations’, ‘debunked claim’, ‘baseless, fear mongering comments’. Such words as *spewed*, *demonization*, *outlandish*, *debunked* or *baseless*, *mongering* clearly show the negative evaluations of the author to the reality depicted in the discourse; via this way, the commentator would like to picture into the ideal readers’ mind the ‘wrongful’, irrational attitudes of some people towards the Muslims in general. We can see that the author is doing the relation power negotiation with the assumed readers carefully and thoughtfully by leading them through his views with the help of purposefully chosen words in order to construct up the commonality between them: we need to stand united, true American Muslims deserve to be part of the fabric of America; and if we listen to the ‘demonization’, the wrongful judgments of certain U.S. elected officials, we are helping ISIS, not each other in the fight against

terrorism by driving away true American Muslim to the path of radicalization. Unequivocally, instead of imposing his views right away, the commentator dexterously draws up the approval of the readers to the right deeds done by true Muslims first, then shows that ‘the debunked claims’, ‘demonization’ ... are not right in the time when we actually need the unity, the solidarity among people so as to isolate and eradicate ISIS.

In another commentary ‘The sex freak-out of the 1970s’ [4], CNN political commentator, Sally Kohn, shows her views in favor of the effect of the sex revolution of the 1970s: she described the effect of this period with the words ‘*enduring and profound*’, and she called the songs of the 1970 which captured all perspectives on the sexual revolution being ‘*quintessential*’. When mentioning to the achievements in the sexual revolution of the 1970s, she employed the words ‘cultural triumphs’, ‘victory’, ‘the greatest legacy’, etc. According to the Advanced Learner’s Encyclopedic Oxford Dictionary, ‘*enduring*’ means ‘last for a very long time’; ‘*profound*’ means ‘very great; or felt, experienced very strongly’; ‘*quintessential*’ means ‘representing the most perfect or typical example of a quality or class’. We can easily notice that in convincing the readers to her views, the author readily opts for words which could speak her mind the best while influencing the ideal readers the most. And because the readers are not present in the scene, she does have to account for their positions with the presupposition that the extreme words might draw assumed readers’ views close to the author’s ideologically. Via Sally’s choice of words, we can come to realization that in making clear and prominent her stance she also wants to influence the readers ideologically by

bending their minds to her thoughts: the sexual revolution in the 1970s could be the freak-out of that time, but it has an enduring and profound impact onto the present; and the 'legacy' of that era also shows us that we're not satisfied yet, there are still a lot of things needed to be done to truly liberate us all.

In the seem-to-be-unequal relations (between present authors and absent readers) embedded in commentaries, the authors are in the position of manipulating while persuading the readers to their views. However, they do their ideological job implicitly, we cannot see it on the surface; only when digging deep into the layers of carefully chosen words might we unravel the ideological power of the discourse, especially the power relation negotiation between the readers and the author embedded in the discourse.

Undeniably the commentators do have to account for the readers' position because besides 'big' words and strong adjectives as listed in the above examples, we can see the appearance of some 'racist' words. The presence of such words truly shows the authors' negotiating their relationship with assumed readers, and very often, the authors assume commonality of values with them. The words 'terrorist', 'extremist' used in the article 'Help each other, not ISIS' by Dean Obeifallah help bring in negative connotations of evil and violence; the word 'addict' in the article 'Are you addicted to the internet' by Catherine Steiner-Adair also pictures in the readers' mind the image of a bad person; the same thing also applies to the words 'subjugation' (conjuring up the picture of a slave), 'racism' (depicting negative attitude of prejudice, discrimination or antagonism against someone of different race) and 'sexism' (discrimination against women) in the article 'The sex freak-out of the 1970s'.

Through such words, we would come to the understanding that there still exists racism, sexism, and subjugation based on gender, race and sexuality in modern time; thus, we still need the 'desire' from the legacy of the 1970s to keep fighting for a true liberation.

Moreover, richly ideology-woven words are very good tools for commentators in their showing power, while finding the common core with the target readers. Why is it so? We can see clearly that under the literal meaning of the word 'spew' (in 'Help each other, not ISIS'), for example, there exists a negative attitude of the writer towards certain U.S. elected officials, the professional anti-Muslim bigots, and some far right religious clerics:

'The hate spewed by certain U.S. elected officials, the professional anti-Muslim bigots and some far right religious clerics.'

In the meantime when listing out the saying of Antelpli – a chief representative of Muslim Affairs, a person that the commentator is in favor of, he used the word 'explain' instead of the word 'spew'. We can pick up this sentence just two sentences before the sentence containing the word 'spew':

'As Antelpli explained, the radicalization is not coming from mosques.'

The writer, in this case, presumably assumes that the word 'spew' would constitute negative evaluations for the readers, and the word 'explain' would constitute a more positive evaluation. Thus, when choosing this word to talk about this person and that word to mention to another, the author is expecting the readers to have that common ground with him, and by doing so, he is negotiating the power position with the readers implicitly.

Similarly, the word 'hard truth' appeared in 'Are you addicted to the Internet?' bears the

similar value. Catherin would know that she is bringing up the issue which to most of us is normal one, and there would be many saying: it is not necessary to make a fuss about it, for she already predicted in the article: 'Some of us could feel powerless in our relationship with it. But addiction?'. Employing the word 'hard truth', the author puts a lot of her ideologies in that: we all know the truth, that we all love our tech, and we are falling into the bad habits of excessive and compulsive use of the internet; but it is not easy to accept the fact we are turning to be slaves to it, becoming addicted to it, we are denying our present problem by hiding behind the beautiful excuse: we just love our digital devices too much. With the word 'hard truth', the commentator would like to show and to share, not to impose the views (on internet addiction) on readers: it's time to face the truth, though it is hard to accept it, yet we need to cope with it, deal with it and find solutions to it.

What is more, the formality of word using is also related to the relational value. In the commentaries, writers create their own writing with 'ideal' readers in their mind; they do not know exactly who would read their products: some people may get access to them, or maybe many would view the discourses online. This formality of the situation demands the formality of social relations; thus, they often opt for formal choices of words and phrases with the aim to demonstrate their position, their status and at the same time to express their politeness and concerns for the assumed readers. We can find words and phrases such as:

... poses to children ...; ... treat the phenomenon as ...; ...as requiring further study...; ...experts rightly debate ...; come to terms with ..; we ... would be wise; ...the extremes merit our attention; ...we ...acknowledge the problems ... (in Are you addicted to the Internet)

I would predict that; local Tennessee Muslim community leaders ... condemned ...; religious services, which were to celebrate ...; ...the reality was that ...; ... who claimed; who stated; (in Help each other, not ISIS)

...saw the convergence of ...; Cohen ...noted that...; ...helped pave the way; the '70s ...brought ...into the spot light; ... what became known as ...; yet, the fact that ...; ... empowerment hasn't ... translated into ...; (The sex freak-out of the 1970)

However, the text producers sometimes do adopt the strategy of using informal ways of writing to draw readers close to their views though most of the time they resort to the formal choices. This is evident in such examples as: 'But addiction?' (Are you addicted to the internet?); 'Let's ...', 'Why the increased action on this front?' (Helping each other, not ISIS); 'Are there more women running major companies, transgender men and women starring in Hollywood productions, parents nurturing their children's healthy sexuality and now the nationwide right to marriage equality? Yes! But ...' (The sex freak-out of the 1970s).

If the formality is used mostly through the media discourses to express politeness, concern from the writers for the readers' face, position; the informality has its own value in bringing the readers closer to the author's stance. They help the discourses sound like the talks among 'friends' where we have the same values and same ideas. Obviously, we can see that in commentaries the authors do have to pay attention to the assumed readers' position.

3.2. *The use of pronouns*

Another prominent feature that shows clearly the writer's negotiating the power

relation with assumed readers is the use of pronouns *I, we, you* in the commentaries.

Table 1. The occurrences of *I, We, You* in CNN commentaries

	OCCURRENCES			YOU
	I	WE		
		Inclusive	Exclusive	
Article 1 (Catherine)	2	10	0	1
Article 2 (Dean)	9	8	2	3
Article 3 (Kohn)	1	4	0	2

As mentioned above, at the beginning of any commentaries we see the line ‘The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the authors; and thus, we would expect the pervasive use of ‘I’ meaning the author’s point of view throughout the discourse. However, in all three commentaries, the use of ‘we’ accounts for the highest level of frequency (as shown in the above table). Let’s take out some examples:

‘We love our teach – our smart phones, tablets, social media and the internet – and increasingly more of us are confronting the hard truth: that we love it too much’ (Are you addicted to the Internet);

‘If there ever was a time we need to stand united it’s now – just like we saw Friday in Chattanooga, when Christians, Muslims and Jews came together at a vigil to mourn the five servicemen killed.’ (Help each other, not ISIS);

‘Wherever we are now, with respect to women’s rights and LGBT rights and sexual freedom, is a direct result of the 1970s. And the fact that we’re not satisfied yet is also the legacy of that era.’ (The sex freak-out of the 1970s).

The table also indicates that commentators often use inclusive personal pronouns. By resorting to inclusive ‘we’ to express ‘their own opinions’, partly, the writers would like to show their authority to speak for others; yet largely and conversely they also want to show their identification with the readers, serving the aim of invading their ideologies on target readers: I (the author) raise up the problem, and the problem is not just yours, but mine too; and so we should stand together or together we can solve it. That is the inclusive strategy employed by commentary writers in order to create solidarity and commonality with their readers; and at the same time make the readers themselves be convinced that they are not left alone, and then would go along with the writers’ views voluntarily and unconsciously.

In comparison with the degree of frequency of ‘inclusive We’ in commentaries, ‘exclusive We’ is far less favored by commentators. ‘Exclusive We’ means the author excludes the readers out of the discourse temporally, and ‘we’ here consists of the author and possibly the media agency, or some colleagues who work with the author on some deed, etc. However, in the case of media discourse the media agency always tends to shirk the responsibility to the writers only (the opinions expressed in the discourses are of the author’s, and he/she has to be responsible completely for their products) in their move to make their information channel be seen under the audience’s eyes as being trustworthy and respectful to the writers’ views and thus to the readers as well. Hence, the writers, if needed they often wield the use of ‘I’, instead of ‘exclusive We’. That could bring out the just explanation for the very few occurrences of ‘exclusive We’ in commentaries, and as seen from the table, out of three commentaries, just

one witnesses the two occurrences of 'exclusive We':

'As we were making "The Muslims Are Coming!" we spoke to people of all different backgrounds and discovered that ...' (Help each other, not ISIS)

Another case where it pays to work out the power relations which are being implicitly claimed is when the pronoun 'you' is used. If compared with the use of 'we', pronoun 'you' has much less level of frequency in media discourses; yet it does show up occasionally:

'That moral ground you feel shifting below you?'; (The sex freak – out in the 1970s.).

'... it is easier for ISIS to convince a young Muslim American that people in the United States hate you, hate Islam and don't want you there when there's a continual drumbeat of ant-Muslim bigotry being served up.' (Help each other, not ISIS). And,

'It's different for everyone and you need to understand your own wiring' (Are you addicted to the Internet?)

'You' shows the authors' intention of bringing into the discourses the 'real presence' of the assumed readers; and by actually drawing readers into the scene, the writers want to involve them into the matter – the matter that truly concerns 'you' (the moral ground you feel shifting below you), belongs to 'you' (... hate you, don't want you) and therefore, it should fall into your responsibility (you need to understand ...), so the reader should be part of the authors' ideology work, and on the same side with them. Besides, the pronoun 'you' also implies a relationship of solidarity between the authors and the people in general, as in mass media discourse there are many actual and potential addressees whose identity is unknown

to the producers; and 'you' can be all people in general.

In terms of the pronoun 'I', actually it does show up in commentaries though not too much as in the articles by Catherine and Sally. Though rarely being present in the discourses, it has a great effect on how power relation is negotiated between readers and authors as seen in some examples below:

'I've noticed the trend when I hear people of all ages describe the impact of tech and Internet habits on ...' (Are you addicted to the Internet?);

'But now the sexual revolution has deepened into a more permanent kind of power for women. Or, more accurately I think, at least a sense of personal power.' (The sex freak-out of 1970s);

In the case of the commentary written by Dean, we see many occurrences of 'I': nine times; as the author explained right from the beginning of the article: 'he felt compelled to write after what he'd heard'; thus, logically when he talked about his own experience, he would use 'I' to stress his own past doings and witnessing: 'I spoke to people...', 'I saw it firsthand...', etc.

Definitely, commentary writers know clearly the power of the readers, that is why they involve them ubiquitously in the discourse via the use of inclusive 'we'. However, they also know when to set them aside, and that is when they employ the use of 'I'. Being in 'we', one seems to lose their identity. Thus, the commentators though knowing very well that they need the support, the solidarity from the readers, they should be sometimes in the lead, separating them from the 'we'. The management of this indexical term 'I' is a strategic move of asserting their power, their

authority, and position: I think, I've noticed, I would predictwhile projecting their image in the public eyes as responsible writers: I see the problem, I witness it, I hear it and now my responsibility is showing it up to you, and I am of worthy source of information to you.

4. Conclusion

There are still many other aspects relating to power relation between authors and assumed readers embedded in commentaries such as modes, modality, euphemism, etc; however, because of the small-scaled study, just some features are drawn up to show the negotiation of this unequal relationship.

As discourse is considered 'a stake' where the struggle of power relations and ideology take place, one would find the relation of struggle occurs throughout the discourse. In the case of commentaries, the authors are expected to lead the unequal relation with the assumed readers by showing out their 'own' opinions; however, while asserting their position, their power, the text producers do have to put into account the position of their target readers. Obviously, they do their ideological work in a skillful way. That is to say, they do negotiate with the 'ideal' readers in the writings; and often assume commonality of values with readers; and readers, though being absent from the scene, do have a part, a position in the discourses and definitely are pictured up in the power relation negotiations with the authors.

In the area of knowledge-based and mass media discourse – driven society, language, in general, becomes a genuine part of social life. Its increasingly important role is marked by an aestheticism of language to make it more 'attractive' and 'appealing' to readers or

viewers. The interests which are served in this process are not only economic, social, but also political with the objectives of persuading people, swaying their points of views to the writers', of getting writers' ideology across and accepted by the mass, and at the same time exerting power over them. Via the study of analyzing some commentaries under the light of CDA, we can in part establish a justification and the need for a critical analysis on mass media discourses in order to peel out the nature of this type of discourses.

Furthermore, a widespread understanding of critical language analysis and the power dimension, power relation negotiation hidden in the language in general and in mass media discourses could be an important first step in contributing to a more informed, critical awareness of the realities of the social order, contributing to the opening of opportunities for dominated groups and individuals in our society to access and participate more fully in various decision-making power forum, as Fairclough once claimed, the first step in such social emancipation is the awareness gained through an analysis of discourse in contemporary society.

Speaking of discourses that are crafted for the masses, it is believed that the ultimate aim is to garner support for the writers. Commentary is a journalistic genre which blatantly has its own hidden power. Hence, language awareness can help us stay awake, get the true and intelligible meanings out of a culture of linguistic lullabies, and enhance our critical thinking in the area of openly shared information.

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Thương thuyết quan hệ quyền lực giữa người viết và người đọc trong một số bài bình luận trên CNN

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Tóm tắt: Quan hệ quyền lực luôn tồn tại giữa các nhóm, các thể chế xã hội, trong mỗi quan hệ nam nữ, già trẻ, hay giữa các nhóm sắc tộc khác nhau...; và trong các diễn ngôn trên các phương tiện thông tin đại chúng, nó được thể hiện trong mối quan hệ giữa tác giả với người đọc, người nghe hoặc người xem. Bên cạnh đó, quan hệ quyền lực cũng được xem như quan hệ đấu tranh – thuật ngữ này được Norman Fairclough dùng theo nghĩa chuyên môn của nó ám chỉ đến quá trình mà trong đó các nhóm xã hội với những lợi ích khác nhau tham gia tương tác với nhau. Áp dụng quan điểm này của Fairclough trong nghiên cứu các bài bình luận trên CNN, chúng ta có thể thấy các diễn ngôn là nơi tác giả, người sản xuất ra văn bản thực thi quyền lực của mình thông qua ngôn ngữ được viết một cách rất cẩn trọng; và do vậy, họ đang tham gia vào một cuộc đấu tranh (hay một cuộc thương thuyết quan hệ quyền lực) với người đọc giả định – đối tượng mà rõ ràng là họ muốn gây ảnh hưởng, áp đặt quan điểm của họ lên. Bài viết này muốn chỉ ra rằng trong loại hình đấu tranh này, người viết thực thi quyền lực của mình thông qua các phương tiện ngôn ngữ, trong khi quan tâm, cân nhắc cẩn trọng đến vị thế của người đọc lý tưởng. Cũng có thể khẳng định rằng, thể hiện xuyên suốt trong các diễn ngôn trên phương tiện thông tin đại chúng, nhà bình luận thực sự phải đàm phán, thương thuyết quan hệ quyền lực với đối tượng người đọc giả định.

Từ khóa: Người đọc giả định, người đọc lý tưởng, diễn ngôn truyền thông đại chúng, quan hệ quyền lực, thương thuyết quan hệ quyền lực.