Pronominalization of Social Actors on Universities' Websites: Effectiveness and Constitutiveness from a Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Abstract

Discursive construction of staff identities at universities' websites is deliberately created to categorically identify the staff according to their positions. The constructions of these identities are normally implicit in nature. The study attempts to identify the power relations with regard to the 'WE' and 'I' dichotomy in discourse from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. In addition, corpus techniques also aided this study to find the collocates of these two pronouns. Transitivity analysis was conducted to categorise processes associated with each pronoun. So, the processes associated with each pronoun are a way of identifying the role played at the institution level. The focus was on specific personal pronouns 'We' and 'I' for their use, mainly, as inclusive and exclusive strategies. The data was collected from international universities' websites. The text was selected from the 'welcome note/letter' by Rectors, Vice Rectors, Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, and Presidents. The universities selected for this study are from various geographical areas, namely; Universiti Science

Malaysia (USM) in Malaysia, Yarmouk University (YU) in Jordan, and University of Birmingham (UB) in the United Kingdom. The analysis indicates that the use of the pronouns has a social and administrative hierarchical significance. The social actors are represented according to the specified role to play in their respective institutions.

1. Introduction

Academic institutions have a pivotal role to play in societies. They are associated with development activities, policy making, research advancement, community service, among others. They are highly esteemed by people in recognition of their contribution to imbue societies with qualified graduates who can work in various positions to serve their countries. Within this academic milieu, academic staff are assigned to fulfil other duties besides academic research and classroom instruction. They assume administrative positions inside or outside their institutions. Societies are in need of their knowledge and expertise to keep abreast with the latest scientific developments. Thus, in order for the academic staff to cope with the requirements of their jobs; sometimes they are required to identify themselves personally and professionally to public. Nowadays, internet is widely used for that purpose. Academic staff tend to present themselves themselves on their personal homepages or universities' websites. Caldas-Coulthard (2007: 281) affirms that "In the corporate world of today's universities, there is a pressure on academics to communicate values, to advertise and 'sell' themselves. They have to recontextualise their self-identities in order to do this".

In this paper, the study focuses on the university senior management personnel like: Rectors, Vice Rectors, Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, and Presidents. Choosing only these two positions because of their decisive roles in policy making and decision making inside universities and outside universities to the local communities. The analysis will be done on their 'Welcome letters/notes/messages' at their websites. More specifically, will investigate the use of the personal pronouns 'WE' and 'I'. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and transitivity analysis to examine representation of social actors, the pronouns 'WE' and 'I' in particular, and their collocations. Fairclough (2003: 131) defines collocations as "patterns of co-occurrence of words in texts" which have a remarkable function in showing "the associations and connotations they have, and therefore the assumptions which they embody" (Stubbs, 1996: 172). CDA examines these representations linguistically in order to find the hidden versions of reality embedded in texts. Welcome letters are expected to cover his/her philosophy of administration, visions, policies, and his /her role in implementing them. They are important because they are articulations of his/her personal and professional character in relation to the broad atmosphere of work of the academic institutions. Caldas-Coulthard (2007: 292) writes "Self – presentation has to do with what we are, whom we deal with, and the choice we make in life."

In general "There is a widespread consensus that language is never neutral and texts are never innocent" Stubbs (1996: 235). The language used in these texts is not an exception. It is used to express an ideological work for the representation of the social actors meantime show power relations as Wodak (2001:11) states "Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures". The linguistic devices which are under investigation are the personal pronouns, as pronouns are significant in explicating the interpersonal relationship in texts. In other words, it determines the relationships among participants or the social actors in discourse. Bearing in mind that the roles of discourse are: constructive, perpetuating, transformational and destructive. In other words, discourse can be used to produce new social constructs, sustain, change, or dismantle them (De Cillia et al,

1999: 157). Of course "...identity is both a personal and a social construct..." van Dijk (1998: 118) .

Thus, the problem that we want to address in this paper is the oscillation in the use of the personal pronouns between 'WE' and 'I' as a way of showing power, differentiation, identifying roles and tasks at an institutional and discursive level. Thus, the major question to look into is: how are the social actors, personal pronouns 'WE' and 'I', represented in reference to the process types (transitivity analysis) associated with in the welcome messages? Hence, the paper is of value to the research of institutional discourse especially the academic institutions through the identification of power relations in discourse realised in the use of the pronouns 'WE' and 'I', and the task allocation expressed in transitivity system. Its significance is pertaining to the pioneering roles of the universities senior management in societies as policy makers and knowledge providers. Also, previous studies were concerned only with the dichotomy of 'WE' and 'THEY'. This paper examines the differentiation between 'WE' and 'I'.

2. Literature Review

Languages furnish their users with a wide array of linguistic devices which can be used for any communicative or discursive purposes. Meantime, the choosing of linguistic form in preference for another serves as a pure ideological purpose. Using the word 'ideological' here in this context does not refer to its disputable political sense. It is used from a CDA perspective, which is a rather different, and in an ad hoc basis. From a cognitive perspective, van Dijk (1995: 18) states that "Ideologies mentally represent the basic social characteristics of a group, such as their identity, tasks, goals, norms, values, position and resources". Whereas Fairclough (2003: 9) defines ideologies, form a social perspective, as "representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation", or in Wodak's (2001) words "unequal power relations" (p. 10). Informed by these definitions, the way we use language is ideological as long as we choose from the options available. Thus, for van Dijk (1995) discourse analysis is an "ideological analysis" (p. 22).

Of course this ideological process doesn't mean that all ideological work is of negative implication and orientation. Fairclough (2003) divides the evaluation of statements into "desirable and undesirable" (p. 164). He illustrates this division by giving examples of the evaluative statement as "`this is a good book', `this is a bad book'" (p. 172). However, this evaluation process is not as simple as it appears most of the time. There are certain linguistic forms which should not be taken on 'as is' basis. This why "we should be alert and willing to engage in mental exercise to get beyond the seductive simplicity of the final form" (Hodge and Kress, 1993: 22). A refinement process is called for to de-naturalize/de-normalize discourse. A very potential candidate for this process is CDA.

Scholars of CDA have been engaged rigorously to develop frameworks to examine real-world issues through linguistic analysis (see Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 1993). Social issues targeted by CDA includes: power abuse, discrimination, hegemony, manipulation, among others.   Wodak (2001: 2) points out that CDA is:

fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse).

Despite the diversifications of these frameworks, they all share an overarching aim which is to unravel ideologies expressed in discourse, like: media discourse, political discourse, or any other discernible discourse. Lately internet discourse has gained currency in CDA studies. In fact, discourses in CDA are considered as ways of representations of the world which "comprise participants, values, ideas, settings, times and sequences of activity" (Machin and Mayer, 2012: 219).

CDA researchers can choose from the various linguistic devices available that serve well the purpose of their studies. They can examine social actions, social actors, modality, lexical choices, etc. Of an interest to this paper is the representation of social actors. Fairclough (2003: 222) points out that "There is a number choices available in the representation of social actors (participants in social processes)". Van Leeuwen (2008: 23-54) proposes an inclusive work of processes of the representation of social actors based on his socio-semantic approach for discourse analysis. These representations are based on the participant's role in the discursive event. Processes include: inclusion/ exclusion, role allocation, genericization and specification, assimilation, association and dissociation, indetermination and differentiation, nomination and categorization, functionalization and identification, personalization and impersonalization, overdetermination. Indeed, social actors or agency (see van Leeuwen, 1996: 32) have been examined extensively by sociologists and linguists. De Cillia et al (1999: 157) assert that "Through discourse social actors constitute knowledge, situations, social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between various interacting social groups". Fundamental to this study is the focus on the representation of social actors through pronominalized structures. The importance of pronouns, in addition to their basic function to avoid repetitions, they identify interpersonal relationship in a discursive act, i.e. they reveal identities. Thus, the critical analysis of the use of the pronouns illuminates its social dimension, mainly the interpersonal relationship.

The discursive strategy of pronominalization is examined under identity construction or the social actors' representation, mainly the inclusion and exclusion processes. For Pennycook (1994: 175) "pronouns are deeply embedded in naming people and groups, and are thus always political in the sense that they always imply relations of power". Power is one of the major concepts in CDA. According to Wodak (2001: 11) "Power is about relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures". Furthermore, (Chilton, 2004:56) argues that   pronouns "can be used to induce interpreters to conceptualise group identity, coalitions, parties, and the like, either as insiders or as outsiders". The role pf pronouns in language is vital thus they "can be analysed in any linguistic method, but that they are crucial for CDA" (Meyer, 2001:16). They can be employed discursively for making differentiation/discrimination between 'we/self' and 'they/other'. In fact, there is a wealth of literature on the study of pronouns in discourse.

Among these is Mulderrig's (2012) study of the inclusive 'we' used by the New Labour Government in the UK. Her findings indicate that the pronoun 'we' was used differently in three ways to fulfil certain ideological work. It was used as an inclusive, exclusive, or ambivalent. With the inclusive function, the government was able to legitimate its education policies as if all the citizens are involved in the making of such policies. Another study of the inclusive 'we' in a British newspaper conducted by Fairclough (1989: 127-128). He concludes that 'we' is used to this newspaper with its referent the British society at large. Evidently, pronouns have discursive functions besides their linguistic functions for referencing and avoiding repetitions. The discursive function is concerned with the interpersonal relationship in texts. How social actors are identified in texts in relation to each other.

Language is also used to (re-)present and construct identities, to convey ideologies as well as its main function as communication through certain discursive practices (see Wodak, 2012). Hodge (2012) asserts that "Identity does not represent a quality, it points to elements in the world, in a primal act of classification" (p. 5). Caldas-Coulthard (2007: 292) adds that "Identity construction is a complex phenomenon and people project in public spaces, idealisations of what they 'think' they are". Identity is a 'way of being' in discourse (Fairclough, 2003:26). Koller (2012) identifies linguistic devices that are used to examine collective identities in discourse "These include social actor representation, process types, evaluation, modality, metaphoric expressions and intertextuality" (p. 19). In other words, the discursive strategies used as forms of identification. Of relevance to this study is construction of professional identity in general and in online universities discourse in particular. Some of the previous literature was concerned with narratives as a form of identification process through discourse (see Caldas-Coulthard, 2007; Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000). Of particular relevance is Caldas-Coulthard's (2007) study of the personal web pages of academics at University of Birmingham website. She explored how the academic staff are identified themselves on the internet. Her study was concerned with narratives and multimodal aspects on the personal pages. She concludes that the academic staff use their web pages "to communicate values, to advertise and 'sell' themselves" (p. 281). However, interest in academic discourse was directed towards classroom interaction and narratives by the academic staff as a way of self-identification, etc. Pronominalization in online academic institution discourse is an area which needs to be investigated to study the representation of social actors. Notably, web discourse has become a target for researchers owing to the status of the internet in our contemporary time.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

It is a qualitative, computer-aided, internet-based study aiming to investigate the effectiveness and constitutiveness of the use of personal pronouns 'WE' and 'I' on the websites of the universities. In other words, how the social actors are represented in the selected websites. The websites were selected randomly form various geographical areas worldwide. By doing so, the study will include diversified socio-cultural backgrounds. The universities are: Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) from Malaysia, Yarmouk University (YU) from Jordan, and University of Birmingham (UB) from the United Kingdom. The data for the study was

chosen from the 'welcome letter/note/message' pages, and saved on a text file so that it can be uploaded to AntConc, the software used for corpus analysis. The corpus was used to obtain the collocates of the pronouns 'WE' and 'I'. The analysis of these results was conducted using CDA perspectives. Collocates are significant because "You shall know a lot about a word from the company it keeps" (Firth, 1957, cited in Baker, 2006:96). The analysis of these results was conducted using CDA perspectives.

Hallidyan functional grammar is widely used in CDA for the linguistic analysis. For Halliday, language has three metafunctions that operate simultaneously. First, the ideational, which looks at the text producer's experience. Second, the interpersonal which looks at the relationship between participants or 'social actors'. The third is called the textual which looks at the coherence and cohesion in texts. This study will be investigating the ideational function with main focus on process types in transitivity system. This function is related to our experience. How we render our experience into texts. The significance of this function is its rigorous analysis of the processes prior to representing our ideas. Within these processes we choose our linguistic devices. The selection of device is based on ideological work. In other words, any particular choice is meant to serve certain function at the interpersonal level. This process of choosing one linguistic choice in preference to another is known as transitivity system. Transitivity "shows how speakers encode in language their mental picture of reality and how they account for their experience of the world around them" (Simpson, 1993:82). Transitivity system subsumes different processes: material, mental, verbal, behavioural, relational, and existential (Butt et al, 2000).

In fact, choosing only process types associated with the pronouns 'WE' and 'I' is significant to understand the roles assigned to the social actors under examination. Meyer (2001: 16) points out that "CDA in no way includes a very broad range of linguistic categories: one might therefore get the impression that only a small range of linguistic devices are central for CDA studies". In other words "critical linguists get a very high mileage out of a small selection of linguistic concepts" (Fowler, 1996: 8).

To sum up, the study examines the collocates of the pronouns 'WE' and 'I'. The focus will be on words that follow the pronouns because these two pronouns are subjects/agents and their positions are at the beginning of a clause. Below are the findings of the search terms 'WE' and 'I' in the corpus. The results are grouped for each pronoun respectively according the process type with which they are associated.

Process types collocate with 'I'

Relational processes

1) ...I <u>am therefore both happy and honoured</u> to

2) ...I <u>am grateful</u> because we are able to

3) ...I <u>am determined</u> to build on our well-

Mental processes

4)   ...I <u>wish</u> you all a Happy New Year 2015.

5)   ...I <u>believe</u> we and all Malaysians are still

6)   ...I <u>wish</u> everyone Happy New Year 2015. I pray

Verbal processes

7)   ...I <u>pray</u> that the Almighty Allah swt will

Process types collocate with 'WE'

Material processes

8)   ...we <u>are implementing</u> quality management that

9)   ...we <u>could contribute</u> effectively to the

10) ...we <u>have achieved</u> through research and innovation,

11) ...We <u>have all gone through</u> 2014. No doubt, it

12) ...we <u>have put together</u> in the APEX University.

13) ...we <u>have carried out</u> so far and start

14) ...We <u>Lead</u>. APEX means that we are fully

15) ...we <u>make</u> the best use of every resource

16) ...We <u>will also strengthen</u> the efforts of the

17) ...We <u>will strengthen</u> all the initiatives that we

Mental processes

18) ...we <u>aim</u> to combat this challenge by offering

19) ...We <u>hope</u> to inspire our young students by

20) ...we <u>look back</u>, what really matters most are

21) ...We <u>need to realise</u> the meaning of APEX

Relational processes

22) ...We also <u>have</u> 11 centres for research and career

23) ...we <u>are able</u> to continue to strengthen our

24) ...we <u>are fully committed</u> to elevate our institution

25) ...we <u>are proud</u> of. In fact, I am

26) ...We currently <u>have</u> 27850 students, 936 faculty

27) ...We <u>have</u> a bold strategy to take us

28) ...we <u>have</u> and mobilise all our efforts in

Behavioural   processes

29) ...we and all Malaysians <u>are still mourning</u> and

The linguistic patterns achieved with the aid of corpus techniques will be analysed qualitatively using CDA perspectives. The study will not consider the statistical significance in my discussion, for it is just a small corpus. It will be restricted to qualitative analysis in the following section.

4. Discussion

The data reveals that the prevalent use of inclusive 'WE' and material processes associated with this pronoun. 'WE' refers to the university administration, academic staff, administrative staff, and sometimes to students. Koller (2012) states that "Collective identities are theorised as conceptual structures comprising beliefs and knowledge, norms and values, attitudes and expectations as well as emotions, and as being reinforced and negotiated in discourse" (p. 19). The inclusive 'WE' is a used a discursive strategy to achieve certain ideological purposes. Among these purposes are solidarity, distancing, collective, etc. Meanwhile, material process are realized to express activity, doing, and goings-on. First, I will discuss the process types associated with 'I'. Relational processes are present in the corpus more than other processes. It is used mainly to relate a social actor to an identity or role. For Blommaert   (2005: 207), analyzing identities using CDA helps to clarify relationship between discourse and identity as well as identity and inequality. Below is the analysis of only the process in each clause:

1) 'am happy' is used to describe a state as a result of achievement. This achievement which is your effort made me happy, and I want you to be happy as me.

'honoured' is used to indicate higher self-esteem and dignity gained by the position I have including the staff I'm working with. Also, to get closer to the staff.

2) 'am grateful' is used to acknowledge the staff efforts to motivate them for more efforts and achievements. Your efforts are not unnoticed.

3) 'am determined' indicates a high level of confidence and certainty that I want you to help me through.

4) 'I pray' is used as an Islamic way of ending speeches.   I beseech help from Allah to bless our university. Besides your efforts and work, still, we are in need of the help of Almighty Allah.

5) 'I wish' used two times at the beginning and at the end of letter to establish a friendly and warm atmosphere. The relationship between you and me is friendly. We don't bother about posts and designations.

6) 'I believe' used to mean that there is no doubt about it. We all should agree on that; to mourn for the two Malaysian airplanes.

Second, the process types associated with 'WE' will be discussed.

7) Clauses (8-17) are all material processes: Implementing, contribute, achieve, gone through, carried out, put together, lead, make, strengthen (two times). They have peculiar functions to do:

    a. Material processes are related to action and doing as the nature of development process. Also to gain public confidence in his policy.

    b. He cannot use 'I' because it is a collective effort, so the inclusive 'WE' will be more realistic.

    c. 'WE' means that it is my vision and our collective work. Ideation is mine and implementation is ours. As Pennycook (1994) states 'WE' serves a dual contradictory function. It is used for 'solidarity and rejection' and 'communality and authority'. In fact, this is one of management concepts: managing through people. A work cannot be done without collective efforts, solidarity, inclusion, etc.

    d. Distancing the 'I' from sole responsibility. In case of failure, it is our responsibility.

18) 'aim to' is used in institutions' objectives. We should work together to achieve this

19) 'hope' there is nothing for sure, still, we have to find out ways to do this.

20) 'look back' a reminder of success so that it keeps you motivated to keep it up. Keep doing the good job

21) 'realise' we should be aware of the responsibility of having APEX award. We have to maintain such a level of excellence. (USM)

22) 'have' also (26-27) it used four times. It is a shared responsibility of what we have. Cannot use 'I have', it will be deemed as personal belonging/ possession.

23) 'are able' our ability is permanent. We believe in our capabilities. We can challenge difficulties.

24) 'are fully committed' This is our way of doing things and achieving goals. This way shall not be compromised. Our commitment is a key to our success.

25) 'proud' To increase enthusiasm among staff.

29) 'are still morning' because of the tragic death of passengers and crews of the two Malaysian airplanes. Used for solidarity and inclusion.

It is noteworthy that there are some processes are not used with each pronoun. They are material processes with 'I' and verbal processes with 'WE'. For the former, I only manage through people, for the latter: I can speak for you as long as you are part of this institution.

Finally, the study will discuss the roles assigned to each pronoun and the way they are employed to represent the social actors according to their roles. The use of the inclusive 'WE' is instrumental in processes that are meant to get people involved in the action and

commitment to achieve the institution goal. Also, to share something common and to encourage staff to maintain certain level of dedication to work. Whereas the use of 'I' has proven useful in expressing special privilege and emphasizing subordinate relationships. Thus, 'WE' is used as an inclusive and objective pronoun, i.e. to avoid using the subjective pronoun 'I'. They are academic and apparently cautious in being subjective in their discourse. Hitting two birds in one stone: avoiding being subjective and including others in their responsibilities. It is our success and failure together, not only me.

Indisputably, language can be used to indicate power relation and to reflect personal and professional characters, etc. In other words, it is effective in shaping and maintaining power relations and identities, and constitutive in establishing boundaries among people. In response to this "Critical linguistics...challenges common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance." (Fowler, 1996: 4)

5. Conclusion

Through qualitative analysis of the selected texts, power relation in the use of pronouns 'WE' and 'I' was identified. The findings indicate that differentiation of power is expressed through the processes associated with each pronoun. The pronominalization discursive strategies employed in the selected texts, 'Welcome letter/message/note', are effective in assigning a special privilege to the senior staff and constitutive in emphasizing subordinate relations. CDA perspectives have proven useful, based on functional grammar, to investigate the discursive strategies of using pronouns in three universities websites. The top academic institutions management discourse was chosen purposefully, i.e. presidents and vice-chancellors, because they are part of the intelligentsia or the influential class in societies. However, it is true that power differentiation has been spotted in the texts, but we will look at the other side of the coin. Power relations should be acknowledged at institutional level because anyone who disagrees with general policies of the institution can leave the job, but when it comes to societies or communities the picture is different. 'I' is distinguished from 'WE' to prove qualification for the position assumed. Being qualified or 'Up to the position' can be defined as if a person does justice to work and staff, no discrimination, no abuse of power, etc. As the role of CDA is to raise awareness among people, this can be considered a good example of that. Power in its political sense has negative connotations, but power in managerial/hierarchical sense is something required to organize and prioritize work. Speaking on behalf of small institution is different from speaking on behalf of society at large as done by politicians. Power relation is considered undesirable when there is widely disputable topics discussed in public and on behalf of the public. As such, the use of power relation in discourse is contentious and causes doubts. In terms of these academic institutions, most of the verbs/epithet are required by the staff to do. Examples: contribute, encourage, etc., these are part of their jobs. Regarding the use of 'I' and 'WE', it is kind of task allocation, job description so to speak. So, this differentiation in the use of pronouns, , accordingly in power, is meant to charm not to harm.

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