

RESEÑA / REVIEW

**Yusuf Kalyango Jr. and Monika Kopytowska (eds.):
*Why discourse matters: Negotiating identity in the
mediatized world***

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The present volume “Why discourse matters: Negotiating identity in the mediatized world”, edited by Yusuf Kalyango Jr and Monika Kopytowska, offers a new approach to discourse analysis using a combination of linguistics and journalistic media studies, which, in its turn, allows “readers to capture the complexity of discourse and the way it is mediated and constituted—linguistically and journalistically—in the public sphere” (2).

The book is divided into three main sections: *I. Discourse and Identity Revisited*; *II. Discursive Dynamics of Power, Gender and Ideology*; and *III. Theorizing Identity and Discourse across Disciplines*. All in all, eighteen chapters in this volume present a collection of research with the special focus on identity and its role in the mediatized discourse construction, as well as on the fact that “in the mediatized age, human societies now have the means to disseminate, by way of discourse, identity markers on a mass scale” (XIV).

The book starts with a preface by Paul Chilton, where he states that our society cannot be imagined without language, “whether it is mediated by sound, gesture or printed alphabet” (IX). When used in a certain social context, language becomes known as “discourse”; which in its turn, may be studied in many ways and from different social angles. One of these angles is the notion of “identity”, which this volume understands as “a matter of mind, or, more accurately of the interaction of minds in a certain way in social aggregates” (X).

With this in mind, the editors start their book with an introduction section entitled “Discourse, Identity and Public Sphere” (1-17), where they address two main questions about discourse: (1) why and (2) how it matters from an interdisciplinary scholarship of media studies, journalism and linguistics. The authors challenge mass media and political roles in shaping discourse through the transmission models, where “the source (media) was seen as the active decision-maker determining the content of the message, while the receiver (audience) passively absorbed information” (3). Moreover, in the era of the Internet and digital realities, the phenomenon of mediatization “has become an important stage in the construction of social reality blurring the boundaries between the global and the local, converging the private and the public, conflating the virtual and the real” (4). Finally, the editors list the book’s overview on the notion of discourse, identity and public sphere from multiple disciplines, such as “sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, culture studies, communication, psychology, and political studies” (5).

Following this, chapter 2, entitled “Media Discourse as a Double-Edged Sword in Ethnic Integration”, by Mei Li Lean and Maya Khemlani David (19-35), uncovers the role of language

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in the media to promote racial unity in Malaysia using methodological paradigms of Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 2013). The main outcomes of this study reveal that the media discourse towards Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups has an instructive-prescriptive character, “telling them what to do, or what they should do, or what they are like” (32) with an active participation of political leaders in this process.

In chapter 3 Li Zeng and Zhiwen Xiao discuss “Terrorism and Middle East Identity on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya Websites” (37-54) by looking into the identity construction of a terrorist and a victim in the English versions of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya news networks. The starting point of the chapter is centered around a “widely spread misconception that associates terrorists with Muslims” (37) promoted in Western media. However, the authors conclude that the fact that most of the terrorism victims are Arabs and Muslims is usually left behind.

As a continuation, in chapter 4 Laura Filardo-Llamas and Elena González-Cascos Jiménez reflect on the “Memory and Identity in the Public Sphere: Northern Irish Murals” (56-70). Using the combination of Critical Discourse Analysis and the cognitive domain, the authors study the identities in the (painted) murals in Northern Ireland. In particular, the chapter is focused on the murals that depict past historical events and honor civilians and fallen paramilitaries. The main findings of this research reveal that most of the republican murals positively represent prominent historical figures; while, loyalist murals are concentrated on legitimization of paramilitary groups. Finally, the common feature of both parts stands on two main strategies: “the emphasis of the self-victimhood trait and the need to remember the past” (68).

Chapter 5 “Identity, Discourse and Cultural Signifiers in Indian Game Shows” (71-86) by Enakshi Roy explicitly points out the complexity of one nation idea in India, a country with a strict division according to linguistic, religious and caste basis. In this context, game shows, created mainly with a foreign content, present a challenging opportunity to study nation and identity, claims Roy. Thus, the focus of analysis is concentrated on the Indian game show Kaun Banega Crorepati, which stands for the symbol of the modern Indian media. Based on the combination of Discourse Analysis and cultural signifiers, referred to as “glocalization” (Robertson, 2012), the author concludes that identifying these signifiers creates “a cultural proximity between the program and its audience” (84).

Finally, section 1 finishes with Monika Kopytowska’s chapter “Pictures in our heads: Crisis, Conflict and Drama” (87-107), where she reflects on media representation of Africa through “a new theoretical, “proximization-centered” approach to news discourse and its potential effect on global audiences” (88). In other words, she seeks to discover how news media construct images in our minds and “bring closer” selected aspects of represented reality with a view to making them relevant and emotionally involving for the audiences” (88). Using Darfur conflict as an example, the author demonstrates how proximization works in practice, how

newsmakers “create a particular context for the audience, within which they invest facts with meaning and erect boundaries of relevance” (105).

Section II. *Discursive Dynamics of Power, Gender and Ideology* opens with chapter 7 “Media Discourse of President Obama in Sub-Saharan Africa” (111-127), where Godwin Etse Sikanku and Margaret Ivy Amoakohene conduct a comparative analysis of media frame of Barack Obama’s 2009 visit to Ghana. Relying on framing (in media studies) as the theoretical approach, and content discursive analysis as methodology, the authors determined five recurrent themes of media framing of Obama’s visit to Ghana: globalization, democracy and good governance, history and memory, responsibility and empowerment, and soft news (125). In this respect, non-African media concentrated mainly on the responsibility and democracy frames, while their African counterparts covered this visit referring to its celebratory and historical nature. Finally, in terms of favorability, most of the stories were reported as neutral.

Chapter 8, by Yusuf Kalyango Jr. and Jared Henderson, focuses on “New York Times Rhetorical Discourse Framing of Two Gadhafian Protégés” (129-149). More in particular, the authors examine the New York Times coverage and news framing of Colonel Muammar Gadhafi’s and the former and current presidents of Uganda reigns, referred here as his two protégés, also characterized as the leaders of “tyrannical eras”. With the help of rhetorical discourse analysis, the research determined the prosody of the news framing as positive, neutral or negative. After a substantial analysis of Gadhafi’s political identity rhetoric and the discourse of unity, the authors conclude that the NYT news frames were presented mostly in negative tones, leaving aside their (if only scarce) positive events. Thus, these results prove the previous research findings stating the “news coverage of the Third World is dominated by the stories that deal with negative discourse” (141).

As a continuation of African studies in this book, Kate Azuka Omenugha presents her research in chapter 9 “Reading Images: African Women in the British News” (151-168). Based on the assumption that many British newspapers portray African women through “victimization, dependency, hunger, and servitude” (151), this chapter seeks to uncover the positions adopted by the women in Nigeria and Britain while they read these images. The author departs with the statement that “most of the stories about Africa in the Western press are negative”, and “African women appear mostly in photos as “specimens” (152), put into the slave discourses. After her research based on the interviews with British and Nigerian women, Azuka concludes that an African woman is portrayed in the media as a strong individual, “exploited by patriarchal societies” (166).

Chapter 10, entitled “Agent of Change or Compromise? Jesse Jackson’s 1988 Presidential Campaign” (169-188) by Bryan McLaughlin and Hemant Shah presents a case-study of Jesse Jackson, “given his success as a presidential candidate, strong civil rights credentials, and reputation as an effective advocate for blacks in America” (170) in order to “show how Jackson

(implicitly) constructed racial discourse in the context of a political campaign intended to capture votes” (171). In addition, Jackson’s presidential speeches are contrasted with Obama’s racial discourse during his 2008 presidential campaign to determine the changes / similarities in approaching racial issues by black politicians over the time. Unlike Jackson, who put a post-racial discourse at the top of his presidential campaign, Obama employed it “not because it reflected his personal beliefs, but because it was the only way he could be elected president” (175). Finally, the authors conclude that black candidates cannot expect to win the political campaign by only appealing to their black voters; rather, they have to shift the explicit importance of race from the political narrative.

The following chapter 11 presents a piece of research on “The Ideology of Sexuality in Media Discourse and Text” (189-204). Authored by Jared Henderson and Yusuf Kalyango, Jr., the chapter discusses media frames and ideologies behind the debates about rights and marriage equality for Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer individuals (LGBTQs) in America. More in particular, the authors depict a positive trend in the presence of homosexuality in television series and films from *Star Trek*, where it did not exist, to the ones where homosexual actors and / or characters have become common as in *Will & Grace*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *How I Met your Mother*, and *Modern Family*. As a final remark, the authors depict an increasing presence and challenge of homosexual ideology in the US media, which is then seen as more inclusive in terms of LGBTQs.

Chapter 12 “Framing Discourse and the Collective Memory of College Athletics” (205-226) by Ashley D. Furrow wraps up Section II of this book. The chapter also employs framing discourse as the main method of analysis to explore the coverage of (the importance and benefits) college athletics in popular American magazines from 1896 to 1916. Initiated by President Theodore Roosevelt as a way to promote discipline and interest in Protestant culture, college athletics and organized sport in the United States resulted in the formation of Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Boys Scouts (206). This movement, also called Muscular Christianity was highly promoted in the national press mostly from its positive point of view leaving aside negative issues of sports participation. Nowadays, Muscular Christianity is still highly covered in the popular press under a modern definition stating that “sports participation can be used as a form of religious witness” (221).

The last Section III “*Theorizing Identity and Discourse Across Disciplines*” starts with chapter 13 “Soft” and “Hard” Theories of Identity: Orientalism, Aryanism, and Race” (229-245) by Christopher Hutton, where he studies the rise of race theory starting with the biblical model and finishing with modern European days.

Further on, in chapter 14 Piotr Cap reflects on “Proximization, Threat Construction, and Symbolic Distancing in Political Discourse” (247-259). The study concentrates around the notion of proximization and the internships between the inside (speaker, addressee) and outsi-

de entities of a deictic center on the discourse stage. Using the US political discourse on the Iraq War as a set of examples, the study demonstrates the shifts in the proximization pattern from spatio-temporal (i.e., more local) to axiological proximization in order to broaden geopolitical spectrum of the war conflict and plead for its legitimization on a more global scale.

Chapter 15 “Religious-Ethnic Identities in Multi-Cultural Societies: Identity in the Global Age” (261-282) by Padmini Banerjee and Myna German underpins the importance of the process of self-identification and re-definition in modern multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. More in particular, the idea stands in favor of the process of integration, rather than assimilation or submerging, while speaking about the identity in multicultural settings. Finally, the authors conclude that nowadays the focus “is less on how we are seen by others and more and more on how we perceive and define *ourselves*” (277).

As a continuation, Majid Khosravinik in chapter 16 “Critical Discourse Analysis, Power, and New Media (Digital) Discourse” (283-302) draws our attention to the role of Critical Discourse Analysis in “meaning structure”, “which in turn constructs social, political and cultural realities in society” (283) in the era of new media communications, as “multifaceted, multi-functioned systems with pluri-directional flows of content” (287). The main outcome of this chapter claims the importance of new media in discourse production and perception in our society; however, this being true, their most important role is still attached to the language itself, and not on its “wrapping”.

Chapter 17 “Discourse Analysis and the Challenge of Identities” (304-320) by Bob Hodge reflects on the notion of engaged discourse analysis in the context of three key terms: discourse, identity and media. Thus, the author argues that the modern world with its constantly increasing media is producing “more dispersed discursive manifestations of identity” (304). As a consequence, the chapter proposes to rethink the whole nature of discourse analysis to better fit it into the new scenarios of new media and new identities.

Finally, the last chapter 18 written by Monika Kopytowska, draws bottom line in this discussion series. “Conclusion: Discourse Matters: Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries” (321-331) underpins the importance of interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis, i.e., the approach that integrates skills from various disciplines, that Gibbons (1994) and colleagues called “a framework of action”. Taking into account all contributions to this volume, Kopytowska summarizes the notion of discourse by defining it as 1) multimodal; 2) both the process and the product; 3) dialectically linked to social cognition; 4) an important symbolic resource through which people exercise power; 5) a strategic and, finally as a 6) historical unit. All in all, the main outcome of this chapter is the discourse role in public sphere, its penetration and interconnection with media as a powerful weapon to “construct, transform, and preserve social order and social relations” (330).

The main assumption of discourse studies lies in the fact that humans have a privilege to possess language structured according to the norms and rules. This language then depends and varies according to social changes. The social changes, in their turn, very often function as sort of “modifiers” that shape language, govern its use and, consequently, its perception by the others.

In the light of these effects, *why discourse matters* indeed is a question worth reflecting on. Moreover, why it matters in the modern society, where the discourse platforms are blurred and interconnected between each other; where the time of discourse production and consumption is reduced to the minimum; and where the authorship is not the main issue anymore, becomes even a more challenging question.

Having these in mind, the volume presents an interdisciplinary collection of studies on discourse from linguistics, journalism and media studies points of view. This, in my opinion, gives a comprehensive overview on the matter of discourse and the approaches to deal with it from a multi-facet perspective.

One of the main features of this book that caught my attention as a researcher was its ample illustrative material—the authors managed to embrace studies from various languages: English, Indian, African, to name but a few, with the main concern to demonstrate the identity construction. As a result, a reader finds the vivid proofs of the Universal identity in discourse importance.

Finally, this volume is of primary interest to the students and researchers of linguistics, as well as those connected to the field of communication studies.

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