REPORTS OF DEATH IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The discourse of death spans across various disciplines and not limited to religion, philosophy, social sciences, and life sciences. As discourse analysis in linguistics aims at bringing out the features of language in a particular context, the context of death becomes all the more interesting as it is an inevitable reality closer to human beings, considered a taboo to talk directly about (in many cultures). Death is a social event and language is closely associated to the social processes. The language, in the given context, changes significantly when it comes to talking about it, writing about it or even at the mention of it. The present paper looks at how language features as an instrument with which the expressions are relayed at an event of death. The analysis of the paper adheres to the analytic paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) conducted on the corpus of reports published about death of three prominent persons, chosen based on the manner of their death, in five most-circulated English newspapers in India. While analysing the heading and the subheading, based on Fairclough's approach to CDA, the study would focus on how the prestige of the deceased affects the reporting of their death. The findings of the paper are preceded by the way CDA is defined, the theories of language included in CDA frameworks, the relationship of CDA and context, methodology, and finally a comparison between these reports.

Keywords: Death, Language, Critical Discourse Analysis, Prestige

1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical approach that examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology in social contexts. It recognizes language's non-neutrality and its role in shaping power structures. CDA is vital in linguistics for uncovering hidden meanings, power dynamics, and fostering critical engagement. It investigates language's form to reveal the influence of ideology on

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discourse, reciprocation to ideology, and how power shapes the emergence of meaning.CDA challenges and complements mainstream linguistics, breaking the boundaries of dualistic models like synchronic and diachronic, language and speech, referential and expressive. It connects language research to social function, making research dynamic. CDA focuses on the form of language to reveal homogeneity between implied meaning, power dynamics, and ideology. It explores how language is used in different contexts and replicated in socio-political settings.

The basis of CDA lies in theories like Gramsci's hegemonic theory, showing how ideology maintains systems with societal consent. Foucault sees discourse and power as dialectically linked, where discourse is part of power. CDA's foundation in systemic functional linguistics links language and social context, with various influences from social semiotics, cognitive science, psychology, and others. It explores language change in discourse due to social factors like age, sex, religion, power, and ideology. Instances of discourse become research topics in CDA, where changes in language are evident, and factors may be implicit. For example, CDA studies the discourse of death, how it is reported based on various social aspects. Drawing on theoretical foundations, CDA analyses language, power, and ideology interplay. Works by scholars like Fairclough (1995), van Dijk (1985), and Wodak (2001) have contributed to its development. Key concepts like power, ideology, discourse, and social practice help understand language within broader socio-political contexts. With a multidimensional approach, CDA reveals the intricate connections between language use, social structures, and political agendas.

Methodological Approaches in CDA

CDA employs various methodological approaches to analyse discourse, including textual analysis, discursive analysis, and social semiotics. These methods examine linguistic features like lexical choices, rhetorical strategies, and discursive structures to uncover power relations and ideological assumptions. CDA uses diverse data sources, such as written texts, speeches, images, and online media, for a comprehensive understanding of discursive practices. A central focus of CDA is the analysis of power relations and ideological constructs within discourse. Language is seen as a site of power where dominant groups exert control, marginalize certain groups, and shape social hierarchies. CDA reveals how discourse reproduces power by legitimizing dominant ideologies and marginalizing alternative perspectives. It exposes how language influences public opinion, maintains social inequalities, and perpetuates systemic injustices.

CDA provides tools to uncover hidden meanings, implicit biases, and rhetorical strategies in discourse. It explores intertextuality, metaphor analysis, and framing analysis to reveal the persuasive power of language. By examining discourse construction and framing, CDA uncovers underlying agendas and manipulative tactics that shape public opinion and social behaviours. The key contributions of CDA are fostering critical engagement with discourse, encouraging individuals to question dominant narratives, challenge oppressive discourses, and develop critical literacy skills for social transformation. It empowers individuals and communities to recognize and resist power imbalances in language use, shaping a more just and equitable society.

1.1 Literature Review

In the field of linguistics, discourse typically pertains to the examination of speech/text patterns and language usage, among other aspects. Comprehending speech/text patterns necessitates a clear understanding of the terms 'discourse' and 'text'. In its simplest form, discourse denotes structured collections of meaningful texts (Parker, 1992). A text constitutes a component of the discourse process, representing the outcome of communication by a writer or speaker. It encompasses indicators for the interpretation process and traces of the production process. According to Fairclough (1989), this process consists of not only the text itself, which serves as its product, but also the production process and the interpretation process, where the text acts as a valuable resource. The text haslexico-grammatical expressions of three types of meaning associated with three fundamental language functions (namely, ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions, as outlined in systemic linguistics). These lexico-grammatical indicators for ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings necessitate the assistance of external resources beyond the text for interpretation.

The concept of discourse finds frequent application in the works of notable social theorists (e.g., Foucault, 1972) and linguists (e.g., Stubbs, 1983; van Dijk, 1985). It denotes the utilization of language as a social phenomenon, consisting genres of thinking, communication, and interaction that are shaped by concurrent sociolinguistic conventions, ideological frameworks, and knowledge paradigms. Simultaneously, discourse is instrumental in the construction and formation of the following elements:

a. social identities

b. social selection

c. system of knowledge and belief (Fairclough, 1995)

Fairclough (1992) posits that discourse serves as a representation of the world and serves as a tool for individuals to exert influence on both the world itself and on one another. Furthermore, he contends that the connection between discourse and social structure is dialectical in nature. Discourse is both moulded and limited by social structure while simultaneously playing a role in the construction of said social structure. It is influenced, either directly or indirectly, by its own established norms, conventions, relationships, identities, and the institutions that underlie them. Ideology permeates discourse, and individuals consciously or unconsciously rely on it to make sense of the information presented. Readers employ mental schema and cognitive strategies, projecting these onto the data in order to interpret and comprehend it. Van Dijk (1995) discusses mental models as the bridge between the social and personal realms, as well as the connection between the general and the specific. He posits that individuals consistently construct and refine mental models in their daily lives, particularly through their engagement in communicative events. Consequently, he concludes that a text merely scratches the surface of what is contained within these models, and individuals typically comprehend far more from a text than what is explicitly expressed.

Discourse analysis involves the examination of structure and purpose within verbal communication. However, as indicated by the discourse analysis terminology, there exist varying perspectives on the focus of study, encompassing aspects such as individual sentences, communicative functions, semantic meaning, social or political dimensions, or a combination thereof. Consequently, the field of discourse analysis becomes expansive, overlapping with pragmatics and sociolinguistics, and incorporating diverse analytical methods from these domains. Harris (1952) presents a formal linguistic or structural perspective on discourse analysis in his influential paper titled "Discourse Analysis," providing one of the earliest comprehensive formulations of the concept. Stubbs (1983), another linguist, adopts a sociolinguistic viewpoint and defines discourse analysis as the study of language organization beyond the sentence or clause level, focusing on larger linguistic units such as conversational exchanges or written texts. Brown and Yule (1983) adopt a functional approach to discourse, viewing it as the investigation of language usage. They argue that discourse analysis cannot be limited to describing linguistic forms independently from the purposes or functions these forms serve in human activities. They embrace the

Hallidayan perspective, which encompasses interpersonal, experiential, and textual functions.

Gee (2004) introduces a socio-political dimension to functional discourse analysis. He asserts that language is intertwined with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies, and distinct ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing. According to Gee, language-in-action is always an active process of constructing meaning. Gee (2004) identifies various parameters from which discourse arises, including a network of relations between significant events, social activities, enacted identities and relationships, political implications, and connections of relevance between different pieces of information and sign systems (verbal and non-verbal). Widdowson (1995) conceptualizes discourse as a transactional process of generating meaning between the text and the reader. He suggests that discourse analysis involves the pragmatic process of negotiating meaning, where the text serves as the end product. In spoken interactions, the text is simultaneous and transient, leaving no trace unless recorded. The critical discourse analysts, such as Fairclough (1992, 2001), van Dijk (1991, 1997), and Wodak (2001), present an alternative perspective on discourse, considering it as a social and political entity infused with power and ideology. They argue that discourse plays a pivotal role in constructing social realities and that its comprehension reveals the asymmetry and marginalization experienced by specific individuals or groups. As a result, the concept of discourse emerges as multidimensional and characterized by multiple facets.

Fairclough's (2003) approach to discourse analysis, which aligns with critical discourse analysis, is grounded in the belief that language is an integral component of social life. He argues that language and other elements of social life are dialectically interconnected, necessitating the consideration of language in social analysis and research. Consequently, one fruitful approach to conducting social research involves examining language through some form of discourse analysis. Fairclough's approach aims to bridge the gap between social theory-inspired research, which often overlooks text analysis, and research focused solely on the language of texts without engaging with social theoretical issues. While text analysis remains a crucial component of discourse analysis, Fairclough emphasizes that discourse analysis extends beyond linguistic examination of texts, encompassing broader social theoretical considerations. Fairclough (2001) proposed a three-layered model of CDA, in which he distinguished three stages of the analysis:

a) Description: focuses on formal properties of text; values, such as experiential, relational, expressive, which words have, the grammatical features, and textual structures

b) Interpretation: focuses on connection between text and interaction, considering text as by-product of production and a resource of interpretation; interpretations are generated via dialectical interplay of cues such as the topic of text, the subjects of text, power dynamics, and finally the role of language

c) Explanation: concerns the relation between interaction and the social context in which the text is placed; focuses on displaying that discourse is a part of a larger social process

Lastly, the significance of analysing mass media discourse lies not only in the abundant and easily obtainable data it provides for research and education, but also in its influence on language use and attitudes within a community. Mass media usage serves as a valuable indicator of societal meanings, stereotypes projected through language and communication, as well as the shaping and expression of culture, politics, and social aspects. Consequently, exploring media discourse offers insights into the interplay between language and social dynamics, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted relationships between media, language, and society (Bell & Garrett, 1998). Mass media plays a significant role in shaping and reflecting cultural values and ideas through various means. It involves the active participation of multiple stakeholders. In print mass media, producers and readers both play crucial roles. Cavalcanti (1983), referring to Widdowson (1979), characterizes reading as a non-reciprocal form of discourse. The reader exercises agency in the process of discourse, having the ability to pause, skip sections, or revisit specific parts according to their preferences. The reader is thus empowered and in control of the discourse. This observation about reader control aligns with the viewpoint expressed by Hodge & Kress (1993) regarding mass media discourse. The intended recipients within the targeted audience in the mass media tend to adopt the role of an ideal subject who shares the experiences and attitudes presented in mass media. Furthermore, the creators of mass media texts, unlike the recipients, are skilled professionals. Producers do not haphazardly assume the role of the audience; rather, mass media discourse is specifically structured for particular target audiences. These target audiences are identified through market research practices and discourse strategies, which influence and shape the subjects involved.

For the purpose of this study, Fairclough's three-layered model will be adopted. The researcher will examine the kind of language used in order to disseminate the information of death of these popular persons. The collected data will be examined for any indications of power relations and hegemony within the sample texts. Furthermore, the study will explore any discursive strategies employed to legitimize these power relations. These objectives have been chosen to uncover the underlying discursive practices, social practices, and social relations within society.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the present paper are:

  i. To look at specific vocabulary used in cases of different deaths,

 ii. To explore how the prestige of the deceased affect reporting in the newspapers,

iii. To identify similarities in different newspapers' reporting on the deaths of prominent individuals.

2. Research Methodology

The articles for the study are taken from highly circulated English newspapers (selected on the basis of number of circulation) in the mainstream media in India. These popular persons are chosen on the basis of similarities in the kind of death they suffered, i.e., natural cause and complications which arose post Covid-19. The popular persons are singer Lata Mangeshkar, former president Pranab Mukherjee, and actor Irfan; they are picked among other popular persons due to their familiarity among major population of India. The headline and subheading, from the articles, are the ones which were printed on the next day of the occurrence of their death i.e., 07 February 2022, 01 September 2020, and 30 April 2020. The selected articles are chosen only for the next day in order to capture the first reporting of death of these well-known persons. Further, the data was analysed on the basis of Fairclough's theory of CDA.

3. Analysis

The analysis is divided into two parts. Firstly, a detailed analysis will be done for each celebrity for all the five newspapers and then a combined analysis will be undertaken to elaborate on how the deaths of popular persons is covered in Indian English newspapers.

Pranab Mukherjee

In Hindustan Times paper, the headline immediately captures attention and sets the tone for the article. It employs the honorific "Pranab da" to show respect and familiarity, while also emphasizing Pranab Mukherjee's connection to the Indian nation. The use of "Bharat's bipartisan Ratna" positions him as a revered figure who transcended party lines, suggesting that he was esteemed and respected across political affiliations. This framing highlights his importance and legacy, shaping readers' perceptions of his impact and significance in Indian politics. The article does not have a specific subheading. The absence of a subhead in this article limits the additional information available to the readers. However, the absence of a subhead can also be interpreted as a deliberate choice to allow the hed to carry the main message and impact. Without a subhead, the headline bears the responsibility of summarizing the key points of the article and capturing the readers' attention.

The Indian Express presents the news by mentioning a positive and respectful depiction of Pranab Mukherjee in the headline, emphasizing his versatility and ability to navigate different situations. The use of the term "gentleman for all seasons" implies a figure who is adaptable, skilled, and dependable. Similarly, in Deccan Chronicle, the headline announces the death of Pranab Mukherjee, using the phrase "man for all seasons" to describe him. The choice of words again suggests Mukherjee's versatility and adaptability, indicating that he had the ability to handle various roles and situations throughout his life. The subhead here informs the readers that a seven-day national mourning period has been declared following Pranab Mukherjee's death. It also mentions that his funeral will take place on the same day in Delhi. The use of the term "national mourning" implies a widespread recognition of Mukherjee's importance and the impact of his passing on the nation. The provided analysis focuses on the language used in the headline and subheading to convey information about Pranab Mukherjee's death. It reveals how the choice of words, such as "man for all seasons" and "national mourning," contributes to the framing of his legacy and the significance attributed to his passing.

In case of The Tribune, the headline informs the readers about the passing of Pranabda, who was previously the President. The use of the term "Ex-Prez" abbreviates "Ex-President" to provide a concise identification of Pranab Mukherjee's former role. The inclusion of his age, 84, signifies the length of his life and adds a factual detail to the announcement. The headline demonstrates a straightforward presentation of the news, primarily focusing on Pranab Mukherjee's

death and his former presidential status. The language used provides concise and factual information without presenting any particular framing or narrative. On the similar lines, The Statesman straightforwardly announced the death of Pranab Mukherjee at the age of 84. The language used is again concise and factual, delivering the news of his passing without any additional elaboration or framing. The analysis of the headline reveals a straightforward presentation of the information, focusing on the fact of Pranab Mukherjee's death and his age at the time of passing.

Lata Mangeshkar

The headline in Hindustan Times immediately captures attention and sets a mournful tone for the article. It bids farewell to Lata Mangeshkar, referring to her as the "Nightingale," a title bestowed upon her for her captivating music. The language used in the headline evokes a sense of loss and acknowledges her significant contribution to the Indian music. By addressing her as the "Nightingale," the headline reinforces her iconic status and establishes a tone of reverence and remembrance. The subheading succinctly captures the emotional impact of Lata Mangeshkar's death. It emphasizes the nationwide mourning and acknowledges her immense influence as the "greatest voice." The phrase "falls silent" conveys the sense of loss and finality, while the mention of her legacy shaping Independent India's journey highlights her enduring impact. The subhead encapsulates the collective grief and recognizes Lata's significant contribution to Indian culture. Despite its brevity, it effectively conveys the profound loss and the lasting imprint Lata Mangeshkar left on the nation's music and identity. The mention of thousands of people lining the streets further emphasizes the scale of her influence and the collective mourning. This framing positions Lata as a revered figure and underscores her lasting legacy. In Indian Express the headline suggests the continued existence and significance of Lata Mangeshkar, emphasizing her enduring presence and impact. It implies that her legacy and influence persist beyond her physical existence. The subhead whereas provides a concise summary of Lata Mangeshkar's remarkable career, highlighting her extensive musical contributions over seven decades and the enduring nature of her legacy. The use of the phrase "25,000 songs" showcases her prolific output and underscores her significant contribution to the field of music.

The Deccan Chronicle article conveys the news of Lata's death while also emphasizing her enduring presence through her songs. The juxtaposition of "dead" and "she lives" creates a contrast that

highlights the immortal nature of her musical legacy. It implies that even though she is physically gone, her songs continue to resonate and live on. The subhead informs the readers that the nation is paying homage to Lata Mangeshkar, referring to her as the "Bharat Ratna" (India's highest civilian award) recipient. It highlights the extensive duration of her career, spanning 79 years, which signifies her long-standing impact and contribution to Indian music. The use of the term "nation" suggests the collective admiration and reverence she garnered throughout the country. The analysis of the headline and subheading reveals how the language used constructs an image of Lata Mangeshkar as an iconic figure whose songs transcend her physical existence. It emphasizes her enduring influence and the recognition she received from the nation for her exceptional career.

The headline in the Tribune bids farewell to Lata Mangeshkar, referring to her as the "melody queen." The use of the term "farewell" suggests a sense of departure or ending, while "melody queen" emphasizes her exceptional talent and influence in the world of music. The language used conveys a tone of reverence and respect for her. The subhead highlights the emotional farewell and adieu given to Lata Mangeshkar. The term "tearful adieu" signifies the sorrow and deep sentiment associated with her departure. Additionally, it mentions the participation of the President and Prime Minister in leading the tributes, indicating the high esteem and recognition she received from prominent figures. The words chosen evoke emotions and highlight the significance of her departure. The inclusion of esteemed personalities participating in paying tribute further underscores her importance and impact. Writing on the similar lines, the headline in the Statesman conveys the sentiment of national mourning following the death of Lata Mangeshkar, referring to her as the "Melody Queen." The use of the term "mourns" evokes a sense of collective grief and sadness, while "Melody Queen" emphasizes her exceptional status and influence in the realm of music. The language used constructs an image of reverence and respect for her and highlights the impact of her passing on the nation. The subheading provides specific details regarding Lata Mangeshkar's death, stating her age and the cause, which was multiple organ failure following complications from Covid-19. The mention of the Mumbai hospital establishes the context of her passing and also places the image of the place where she breathed her last. The language used remains factual and neutral, primarily focusing on providing the necessary information without presenting any particular framing or narrative.

The detailed analysis of the data surfaces the similarities between the kind of language being used in case of a popular known figure in all these newspapers. Few newspapers report in a similar fashion, even the vocabulary used is same with a little change in the phrase structure. Looking at the data with Fairclough's theoretical lens, it is evident that in both the cases honorific words are used to showcase the familiarity between the people. In some cases there is no direct mention of their passing but only about the legacy which they left behind, be it songs or the kind of politics they were engaged in. There are repetitive mentions of their achievements. Metaphors such as "falls silent", "farewell", "tearful adieu" are used to relay the information of their death. It is the phases like such which evoke a sense of national grief and mourning among the readers of these newspapers.

Irfan Khan

For Irfan, in Hindustan Times paper, the language used employs evocative and metaphorical terms, elevating his significance in Indian cinema. This attribution of greatness and possession implies power relations, raising questions about authority and hierarchy within the film industry. The framing of the event as a theatrical performance romanticizes Irfan's life, potentially overlooking complexities and controversies. Moreover, the focus on ''Indian cinema's greats'' reflects cultural values and national pride, but also reinforces traditional views of success and existing hierarchies. In case of Indian Express, the headline evokes powerful imagery of seamless integration into Irrfan's role. The absence of residue suggests a complete transformation, portraying the actor as a skilled professional. The phrasing implies Irfan's influence on the audience, with the essence lingering beyond his performance, potentially impacting public perception and reinforcing social and cultural norms. This celebration of artistic immersion reflects cultural values that appreciate creative expression and storytelling. Moreover, it highlights the emotional and psychological connections between actors and audiences, emphasizing the role of entertainment in shaping collective consciousness and shared experiences.

The language used in the Deccan Chronicle employs vivid imagery, characterizing Irfan with an "infectious charm", evoking a strong positive impression of his captivating and charismatic demeanour. This portrayal positions him as a figure with the power to influence and captivate others, potentially elevating his status within social and professional circles. The metaphorical phrase "struck a chord with all" reinforces Irfan's universal appeal, transcending

boundaries and connecting with people from diverse backgrounds. Such linguistic choices celebrate the significance of charm and likability, reflecting cultural values that appreciate interpersonal skills and the ability to foster emotional resonance. In this light, charm is portrayed as a compelling trait that spreads to those who encounter Irfan, suggesting a sense of admiration and authority surrounding him. Moreover, the phrase underscores the potential social implications of likability, as it fosters a sense of collective unity and shared experiences."

In the Tribune, the headline, employing informal and colloquial language, conveys a sense of amazement and admiration for Irfan. By using the term "wowed", the discourse positions him as possessing exceptional talent and skill, capable of impressing both critics and fans alike. This portrayal bestows a level of authority and esteem upon Irfan, potentially elevating his status within his profession or domain. Moreover, the inclusion of "alike" in "critics & fans alike" implies a sense of egalitarian appeal, suggesting that his impact transcends the traditional divide between discerning critics and a broader audience of fans. This universality of appreciation aligns with cultural values that venerate widespread acclaim and recognition of excellence. The phrase celebrates Irfan's exceptional talent and its ability to bridge the gap between two distinct groups, implying a shared experience of appreciation and validation that contributes to his broader influence and popularity. Finally, in the Statesman paper, the headline conveys essential information with directness. The metaphorical expression "loses battle with cancer" portrays Irfan's vulnerability, evoking sympathy and admiration for his courage. The mention of the "Mumbai hospital" adds immediacy to the news. The mention of Mumbai, a prominent city associated with the film industry and advanced medical facilities, may carry social and political implications. It can draw attention to issues of healthcare infrastructure, resource availability, and the experiences of those seeking treatment in urban centres. The headline also reflects the significance of his life and contributions to the film industry while shedding light on the broader impact of cancer and healthcare challenges.

4. Conclusion

The primary objective of CDA in linguistics is to highlight the intricate relationship between language, power, and ideology. Its significance lies in uncovering hidden meanings, exposing power dynamics, and fostering critical engagement with discourse. By analysing discursive practices, CDA contributes to a deeper

understanding of how language shapes social structures, influences public opinion, and impacts social transformation. In the context of the present study, the headlines can be regarded as a quintessential example of media reporting on the deaths of popular personalities. It is observed that these headlines blur the boundaries between the private and public lives of individuals through their narrative, effectively making readers feel more intimately connected to the deceased. The use of emotionally charged words like "grief" and "mourning" profoundly impacts the readers, eliciting a strong emotional response. As a result, framing headlines in a way that directly connects with the readers through words that align with their pre-existing mental schema becomes crucial, especially in cultures where direct mention of death is still considered taboo. When a prominent figure passes away, the emotional experience of sadness, grief, and mourning is evoked in the readers, creating a shared sense of collective mourning. These headlines are strategically constructed using the cultural, political, and shared knowledge of the readers, thereby intriguing and awakening their interest while simultaneously reinforcing their sense of belonging to a particular community.

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