

Language Choice and Women Representation in Magazines: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Female Students' Magazine, *The Royals*

This study critically examines the representation of women in a female students' magazine, *The Royals*. On the surface, *The Royals* serves as a guidebook and a source of entertainment to the female students. However, a critical analysis of selected texts reveals that the portrayal of women in the magazine resists traditional stereotypes by means of which women have long been described in the larger Ghanaian society. The study argues that, as a students' magazine, *The Royals* reproduces and sustains feminist scholarship on the conception of gender as a performative and a social construct.

Key Words: *Discourse, Ideology, Representation, Feminism, CDA*

1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse and ideology are intertwined: there is no discourse without ideologies. Discourse is a social practice, and it encodes values and beliefs which are underlied by ideologies and shared by a social group. As van Dijk (2004) notes, ideologies are abstract, and they only become manifest when expressed in discourse. In other words, discourse is an instrument that reproduces or resists asymmetrical power relations and processes of discrimination, categorization, dominance and power abuse. In contemporary World, one social institution which has become the most powerful and pervasive source of ideology is the media: it is the site where discriminations and gender stereotypes are perpetuated and reproduced or resisted. Anderson (1988 cited in Marthinus, 2011) observes that "the media frequently employs gender stereotypes to promote consumerism". Women representation in the media has and continues to gain attention of researchers; therefore, it has been examined in a wide range of disciplines: Anthropology (e.g., Jose & Omar, 2018), Media and Communication studies (e.g., Sarkar, 2014; Tamba, 2017), Applied Linguistics (e.g., Rostami, 2019) and Sociolinguistics (e.g., Evianda & Harun, 2019). The present study is a continuation of past sociolinguistic studies of women representation in the media as it examines female students' magazine, *The Royals*.

In recent years, linguistic studies of women representation in the media have been informed by the debate over the conception of gender as static and binary categories and as a social construct and performative espoused by Lakoff (1975) Butler (1990) respectively. The objective of these studies therefore has been to confirm a reproduction and perpetuation of the traditional conception of gender or resistance to it (see Talbot, 1999; Ehrlich, 1999).

For example, analysis of women's magazines and newspaper advertisements in Iran (Rostami, 2019), Thai (Siriporn, 2009), Turkey (Nazli, 2016), South

Africa (Marthinus, 2011), Pakistan (Batool & Ali, 2015), Taiwan (Wang, 2009) and Ghana (Mohammed, 2014) have all shown the reproduction of gender as static and binary categories. Recently, Ghanaian studies on Radio/Television advertisements (Tamba, 2014) and Akan proverbs (Gyan et al., 2020) have reported similar results. There have also been reports on contradictory positions of some women's magazines in respect of gender equality (e.g., Legge, (2006; Sharon, 1997; Evianda & Harun, 2019).

Few studies (Marisol, 2006; Naful, 2015; Ahmed & Al-Munsh, 2017) have shown contestation to dominant patriarchal ideologies. For instance, Marisol's study in American shows that certain words (e.g., woman, man or work), despite being frequent in all four selected magazines, are used in ways that reveal the magazines' positions towards women and femininity, especially regarding their emphasis on gender as an individual or social issues. Similarly, Ahmed & Al-Munsh (2017) study in Saudi Arabia shows contestation to portrayal of Muslim women in western media as uneducated, sexual objects and veiled.

So far, none of the above studies from Asian, American, European, Arabic and Ghanaian contexts have analyzed female students' magazine. Nunoo et al (2020) rather analyzed Ghanaian Basic school English textbooks which also revealed similar result. A significant insight from the review of the previous studies is the reproduction and sustenance of gender as binary categories by most women's magazines, while taking for granted the conception of gender as a social construct. In view of the discovered niche, it is worth paying attention to female students' magazines so as to establish its position on the ongoing debate on gender equality. Therefore, in the present study, while exploring discursive structures employed for constructing gender identities, I also seek to uncover feminist ideologies underlying these identities reproduced and sustained by the Royals magazine.

2. AIM OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that the female students' magazine, The Royals, unlike most women's magazines, reproduces and sustain the conception of gender as gradable or social construct; while serving as a guidebook and source of entertainment to its broad audience, its portrayal of women contests or resist the dominant patriarchal ideology in the larger Ghanaian society. My argument will proceed as follows, in the first part of the study, I present the research questions on which the study is predicated. The second section presents discussion on discourse and ideology, representation and feminism. The next section deals with the methodological approach. This will be followed by data for analysis and procedure for analysis and follow it up with results and discussion. The final section will present the conclusion and recommendation for further studies.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What discursive and pragmatic structures are employed in the magazine text?
- ii. What gender identities do the discursive and pragmatic structures reproduce?
- iii. What ideologies underlie the identities reproduced by the discursive and pragmatic structures?

4. DISCOURSE, IDEOLOGY AND REPRESENTATION

4.1. Discourse

Discourse (text) is a product or written record of communicative act which is made available for recipients to use (see van Dijk, 1998). Fairclough (1992) defines discourse is both a mode of representation and a mode of action. This implies that there is a complex relationship between discourse and the social structure it represents. On the one hand, the norms and the conventions of the social structure constrain the production of the discourse. Thus, discourse constitutes part of social event; often influenced by ideologies of social actors because group members either speak or write in the course of social events (Fairclough, 1995 & 2003). On the other hand, discourse is constructive; that is, it contributes to constructing, perpetuating or reforming the dimensions of social structure. This is reflected in the choice of certain linguistic features of a particular discourse at all levels, and this accounts for expressions like racist discourse, feminist discourse, political discourse etc.

4.2. Ideology

Fairclough (2013) defines ideology is “ways of representing the aspect of the world, which may be operationalized in ways of acting and interacting and in ways of being or identities, that contribute to establishing or sustaining unequal relations of power”. Ideology, according to van Dijk (1993), is the foundation of the social representations (values, beliefs, norms, ideas etc.) shared by members of social groups. It forms the basis of the discourse or social practice of all members of a social group, and also affect the linguistic features which express the social practice of the group members at all levels (lexical, grammatical, semantic and rhetorical structures). For instance, a discourse that resists or contests gender stereotypes against women is underlied by a feminist ideology, and this will make the linguistic features at all levels of discourse ideologically marked.

4.3. Representation

According to Fairclough’s (1992) social theory, discourse production is about representing individuals or members of a social group; hence, discourse producers depend on schemata (group mental representations or shared knowledge and experience about actions, situations or events) that help readers to interpret and understand discourse. Stereotypes are a type of group mental representation or categories which help them to interpret reality (van Dijk, 2004). As a shared property, stereotypes form part of the mental

representations of group members, and are also underlied by specific ideologies since they are about only the norms and values acceptable to social group members.

For instance, in most magazines, women have been represented as housewife, wife, mother etc. The reproduction of these gender stereotypes helps to sustain the traditional social roles of women which are seen as natural ones. As Fairclough (1989) observes: “conventions routinely drawn upon in discourse embody ideological assumptions which come to be taken as mere commonsense and which contribute to sustaining existing power relations”.

5. FEMINISM

Talbot (1999) defines feminism as the belief that women are treated inequitably within a patriarchal society. According to her, “within this patriarchal paradigm, women become everything men are not or do not want to be seen to be: where men are rational, they are emotional; where men are active, they are passive etc.”

Feminism is motivated by the goal of social emancipation and transformation and therefore sees discourse as a site of struggle where forces of social reproduction and contestations are played out (Lazar, 2007). Feminists are concerned with the traditional conception of gender as binary categories. For instance, Lakoff (1975), sees men’s linguistic behaviour is a norm to which women’s does not match up. She argues that the way women use particular linguistic structures (e.g., hedges and euphemisms), indexes uncertainty, lack of confidence and weakness.

Feminist sociolinguist, Butler (1990) has refuted the conception of gender as binary categories. According to her, gender is a performative and social construct; implying that the affective, cognitive and behavioural patterns associated with female and male are not determined by biological sex (see Talbot, 1999; Marthinus, 2011). Lazar (2007) has recently proposed a critical approach (Feminist CDA) for contesting the social status quo in favour of a feminist humanist vision of a just society, in which gender does not predetermine or mediate womens’ relationships with others, or their sense of who they might be become.

In attempt to accomplish social transformation and just society, different feminist ideologies have emerged. Jose and Omar (2018) has recently reported on three feminist ideologies whose impact on society, according them varies: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and social feminism. “Liberal feminism aims at achieving full equity of opportunity in all spheres of life without radically transforming the present social and political systems” (Weedon, 1997 in Jose & Omar, 2018). The present study seeks to denaturalize feminist assumptions embedded in the students’ magazine, *The Royals*.

6. METHOD: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

While majority of studies adopt Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach for analyzing magazine texts (e.g., Olowu, 2015), others adopt

Discourse Analysis (e.g., Jatiningsih & Habibah, 2018). The present is situated within the framework of CDA for one reason: ideologies are always hidden in text, and analysis of ideological discourse such as a magazine requires a critical approach. Critical Discourse Analysis studies the way social power abuse; dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social context (Van Dijk, 1998). CDA focuses on the way discourse structures enacts, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of power and dominance in society. In other words, CDA analysts aim at uncovering injustice, inequality, and make mechanisms of manipulation and discrimination explicit and transparent (Wodak, 1989 & 2002). Using CDA, my objective is to unmask the underlying feminist ideologies and beliefs that contest the patriarchal ideologies in the selected magazines, *The Royals*.

6.1. SOCIOCOGNITIVE MODEL

6.1.1. Basic Concepts of Sociocognitive model

Given the different methodologies and approaches to CDA (e.g., Fairclough, 1995 & 2001; Wodak (1996, 2001), this study is grounded in van Dijk's (1993, 2006) sociocognitive framework which is concerned with the cognition dimension to the study of ideologies. As Ferguson (1983 in Marisol, 2006) observes, "the very existence of magazines for men and women betrays the power of a binary gender ideology in the societies that produce them" The choice of this framework stems from the fact that it has proven to be an effective analytical tool for detecting ideological structures and categories that underlie discursive structures in discourse. Its basic concepts are discussed as follows:

6.1.2. Ideologies

First, ideologies are systems of beliefs. This implies that they do not contain the ideological practices of social structures that are based on them. again, it implies that a theory of ideology needs a cognitive component that is able to account for the notions of belief and belief systems. Second, the belief systems are socially shared by group members. Ideologies consist of social representations that define the social identity of a group; that is, its shared beliefs about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproduction.

Third, ideologies are not any kind of socially shared beliefs such as sociocultural knowledge or social attitudes, but more fundamental and axiomatic. They control and organize other socially shared beliefs. Thus, a feminist ideology may control attitudes about abortion, or knowledge about gender inequality in society. One of their cognitive functions is to provide ideological coherence to the beliefs of a group and thus facilitate their acquisition and use in everyday situations. Ideologies also specify what general cultural values (freedom, equality, justice etc.) are relevant for the group.

Finally, ideologies as the sociocognitive foundation of social groups, ideologies are gradually acquired, and changed over time. One does not become a feminist overnight, nor does one change one's basic ideological

belief in a few days. Many experiences and discourses are usually necessary to acquire or change ideologies.

As part of their social functions, ideologies organize and ground the social representations shared by the members of the group. Second, they are the ultimate basis of the discourses and other social practices of the members of the social groups as group members. Thirdly, they allow members to organize and coordinate their actions and interactions in view of the goals and interests of the group as a whole. Finally, they function as part of the sociocognitive interface between social structures of groups on the one hand, and their discourses and other social practices on the other hand. Some ideologies may function to legitimate domination, but also to articulate resistance in relationships of power as is the case for feminist ideologies.

Micro vs. Macro

Linguistic structures (sentences, phrases, lexical items, semantic structures, rhetoric etc.) belong to the micro level of social order whereas power, dominance, inequality belong to macro level of analysis. For instance, a feminist statement is a discourse at the micro level of social interaction, but may enact feminist ideology or feminism at the macro level. This implies that the relationship between discourse structures and social structures is indirect. A cognitive interface is therefore needed to bridge the gap because ideologies are expressed in discourse by individual group members when their mental models apply to specific communicative events.

Context and Event Models

Context models are subjective definitions of the situation or context. They control many aspects of discourse processing and make sure that a discourse is socially appropriate. They may be ideologically biased by underlying attitudes that are themselves ideologically biased. Biased context models may have biased discourse as a result.

In contrast, event models subjective interpretations of the situations or events the discourse is about which control the meaning of discourse. People understand a discourse if they are able to construct a model for it. Like the context models, event models may also be ideologically biased on the basis of underlying socially shared attitudes and ideologies. Ideologically biased event models typically give rise to ideological discourses in which events or actors described more or less negatively or positively depending on the ideological bias of the mental model.

7. DATA: THE ROYALS MAGAZINE

Royals is a magazine for the only female hall, 'Adehye Hall', at the University of Cape Coast. It is produced annually during the hall week celebration. I focused on Royals for two significant reasons: it covers a wide range of issues about women: advertisements, reports, articles, and interviews. Marisol (2006) notes: women's magazine is constructed as an expert on femininity as a whole, and as a guiding companion for all women". I focused on Royals for one significant reason. It is the only female magazine produced in academic setting where feminism is taught. It is thus likely to reproduce the distinction between

gender as a gradable scale or social construct and sex as a biological category taught in social sciences, humanities and others.

7.1. ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

I focused on two editions of Royals magazines: 2009 and 2010. Given the heterogeneous composition of the magazine, I selected articles, interviews and reports. Only the relevant parts of these texts were selected and labelled as categories. Guided by van Dijk (1993 & 2006) CDA; first, I analyzed each category to detect the discursive/pragmatic structures and their underlying meanings. Each category was coded with initials of the identified discursive structure. Finally, the categories were converted into themes for analysis and discussion to commence. Though the study is purely a qualitative one, I used table to show the number of feminist ideologies reproduced through various discursive structures. Again, though the magazine is multimodal, the present study focused on the linguistic structures. Analysis commenced with the cover followed by the content.

8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Though the magazines are multimodal, the present study is concerned with only the linguistic structures. I present a brief linguistic analysis of the cover of the 2009 edition of 'The Royals' as the 2010 edition is made up of only visuals. My approach is triangular: first, I identify the discursive structures in the text and analyze to discover the ideological structure or categories underlying them. Finally, I detect the meaning conveyed by the text at the macro level.

8.1. Ideological Categories and Discursive/Pragmatic Structures

The present study applied van Dijk's (1993 & 2006) CDA to detect the discursive/pragmatic structures employed for the reproduction of feminist ideologies in 'The Royals'. This framework has shown that discourse processing and production are controlled by mental models: context and event models. If these models are polarized, the discursive structures used will also express polarized ideas or opinions. In contrast, if the ideological categories underlying the discourse are norm, identity, aims, actions, values, and group relations, discursive structures will reflect these categories. The results showed that seven dominant feminist ideologies were reproduced using various discursive/pragmatic structures as shown in the table below:

| | Female identity | Discursive / pragmatic structure |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Women are unique | Topicalization, lexicalization |
| 2. | Women's beauty is physical appearance | Implication |
| 3. | Liberated women | Syntactic feature |
| 4. | Women as exceptional leaders | Argumentation, implication, authority |

| | | |
|----|--|-----------------------------|
| 5. | Gender is for women and men | Implication |
| 6. | Women as agents of development | Argumentation |
| 7. | Domestic chores is a shared responsibility | Implication, presupposition |

The Cover: Brief Linguistic Analysis

My interest in the analysis of the cover of the Royals lies in the fact that it serves as a summary of the discourse of the magazine. The cover is the beginning of the magazine and therefore strikes readers, signifying a certain kind of discourse produced in the magazine. My observation is that, in the layout of the cover page, the title 'Royals' is placed at the top. Elements placed at the top of the cover page often draw attention to the idealized or salient information (see Kress & Van Leeuwen, 19998).

Within the context of the present study, 'Royals' is used as topicalization, a discursive structure that defines or summarizes the discourse of magazines. In other words, it reveals the reactionary or argumentative nature of the discourse produced in the magazine at the global level of analysis. Therefore, the writer uses the nominal 'Royals' to portray women as unique and relevant which is an implicit reproduction of a feminist ideology. with this denaturalization of the title of the magazine, we presume that the portrayal of women in the magazine seeks to contest dominant patriarchal ideology in the sociocultural setting where the magazine is produced.

Analysis: Content

Analysis of the content focuses on the interviews, reports and articles published in the magazine. First, I state the feminist ideology reproduced by the magazine and proceed to provide textual evidence from the data to support it as follows:

Women are unique

Anytime women are played down and there is an impression that women are gullible, I laugh. I am happy that you are called 'Adehye' meaning **Royals**. You are **Royals**! You are the **last born** of God and therefore **perfection** into **imperfection**. I believe that every last born is **an improvement** upon the former which means we are the **ultimate** (2010 ed., P. 36).

The above text uses lexicalization (style) as a pragmatic structure: is the selection of strongly negative or positive words to describe people's (in-group and out-group) actions depending on the position, role, goals, or opinion of the speaker. This pragmatic structure is used to reproduce a feminist idea that women are not second or inferior to men, but they are unique. The lexical items

Royals, perfection, perfection and improvement portray women as unique. The clause *I laugh* signals a contestation of traditional stereotypes about women:

Women's Beauty is not Physical Appearance

Beauty coupled with brains and talent is the ultimate one can ask for in a woman (2010, P. 24).

These days, the idea of beauty transcends the physical outlook of the figure of a person (2009. P. 17).

A woman is given credit for who she is. Most of the time, a woman is commended for her beauty not her brain (2010, P. 36).

The above texts use implication (meaning): is a semantic strategy or means to convey meanings whose explicit expression could be interpreted as bias or giving implicit information whose meaning may be inferred by recipients from shared knowledge or attitudes. The above expressions seek to redefine beauty, rejecting the traditional conception of beauty as signaled by the use of the deictic *these days* in the second clause.

Liberated Women

Gone are the days when women were relegated to the kitchen and made her seem unproductive. This torment challenged the integrity of women and has over the years rid lots of women of strong will power and greater self-esteem (2009, p. 8).

Most sporting activities around the world are dominated by men so there is the need for women to increase their participation. Because of the changes that have occurred, many nations now allow women to participate in a variety of school and community sporting programs (2010, p. 19).

The above texts use argumentation as a discursive/pragmatic strategy to remind readers of discrimination against in the past.

Positioning women at agency position is to draw attention or make prominent the disrespect and discriminations against women in Ghanaian society. In contrast, the goal position of women in the main clause of the second text signals a cultural revolution that has taken place across the globe, and has given women freedom. According to (van Dijk, 2006), negative properties attributed to outgroups are enhanced by focusing on their responsible agency. The goal becomes subject and topic of the sentence. While in-group is made agent for the positive actions, their agency for negative actions is hidden by the use of passive sentences, and their role dissimulated by agentless passives or nominalizations.

Women as Agent of Development

Education is a catalyst in any nation's development and the educated woman is a strong agent of change. The opportunity you have by virtue of your education puts you in an excellent position to bring about the sort of change that can bring positive development (2010, p. 21).

The above text uses argumentation as a discursive /pragmatic strategy. Argumentation is the expression of views or making self-serving arguments more explicitly or prominently, while concealing or making unfavorable views and opinions implicit. It presupposes that women should be given the opportunity to acquire knowledge if society wants to progress. In other words, it is only when women are allowed to seek knowledge that society will witness development or positive change.

Women as Exceptional Leaders

The tragic failure of leadership is because one group of people have been elevated over the other. That is, men have been elevated over their women counterpart. Leadership can only function best when standards are set and these standards should not be bent because one is a woman or man (2010, p. 42).

Like the previous text, this one also uses argumentation to draw attention to discrimination against women, resisting gender inequality.

In an interview with new African magazine on women and leadership, President Ellen Johnson Sir Leaf of Liberia opined: "I think when a woman is equally qualified, competent, committed and courageous, she excels, she performs better than men because women bring an extraordinary dimension to the task" (2010, p. 42).

The above text uses authority: it is making references to individuals or institutions as sources of information. It is often used as a face-saving strategy to avoid being judged as having bias mental representation of a communicative event. So, the speaker is hiding behind an authority to justify or legitimize a position. That is, the believe that women are better leaders than men, is assumed to be commonsense or a known fact, yet women do not get leadership positions.

women and men have a common dressing style

The Mzbellion fever spirited the entire hall on the eve of Thursday. Friday was massive. But for the physical features of the ladies, they could hardly be recognized as women since they dressed like men and looked every inch like men. They actually gave a pictorial meaning of the idea of “what men do, women can do better” (2009, p. 5).

The above text uses presupposition (meaning): Presupposition is a well-known semantic device often used to assume the truth of some proposition when such truth is not established at all or properties assumed to be known as if they were common sense and need not be specifically asserted. feminist conception of gender as a social construct and performative is articulated through evident in the above text. The above text sustains feminist conception of gender as a social construct and performative. The text presupposes that women can dress the same way men dress because the decision to be male or female depends on the individual, and not biological sex of the individual.

Cooking is not for women alone

The art of good cooking is not innate and it does not associate itself to any particular gender as many wrongly think. It is an art and skill that can be learnt or acquired through practice and observation (2010, p. 28).

The wake-up call for our men to realize their domestic notes is clearly resounding make your mind to respond ((2009, p. 37).

The above texts use both implication and presupposition. The use of the phrase *wake-up call* in the second text presupposes that it is a known fact that cooking is not the duty of only women, but it is the duty of men as well. It means that it is wrong to associate cooking with only women when it is the duty of both.

9. CONCLUSION

The study critically examined how female identities, discourse and ideology interact in text. The study was informed by the view that language is an instrument for reproducing and resisting power abuse, inequality, and discrimination. Through a multidisciplinary approach, I sought to denaturalize gendered assumptions embedded in the text and uncover feminist ideologies underlying the discursive/pragmatic structures. The results showed that ‘The Royals’ reproduces four dominant female identities: *women are unique, women*

are exceptional leaders, women are agent of development and cooking is not for women alone. These were reproduced through various discursive/pragmatic strategies and structures: implication, argumentation, presupposition, topicalization and lexicalization.

The results of the study reflect Gill's (2007 in Tiainen, 2009) observation that women's magazines contain some feminist ideas: women are naturally presumed to have the right to work and compete with men in the work place. Admittedly, the data I analyzed is too narrow, and does not allow for generalization of the results. However, the study does provide a significant insight: it has shown that, unlike other mainstream women's magazines, the language of 'The Royals' shows a translation of the feminist scholarship on the conception of gender as performative and a social construct as envisioned by Butler (1990).

10. FURTHER STUDIES

I have attempted to fill a gap in research of gender identity and its reproduction in texts. I believe that the study opens avenues for further studies. A comparative study of mainstream woman's magazines and students' magazines is highly recommended. Further, since magazines are multimodal, it is worth conducting multimodality studies of female students' magazines is worth conducting.

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