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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Investigating the Role of Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions in Conveying the Discursive Meanings of Discourse

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to answer the question, "To what extent do proverbs and idiomatic expressions convey the embedded meanings of discourse between the addressers and addressees?" to bring to light that proverbs and idiomatic expressions convey the embedded meaning of discourse. Therefore, the analysis concentrates on such linguistic means as nominalization and lexicalization. These means have been chosen as primary tools for the analysis due to the fact that they are closely related to the two kinds of constraints, such as nouns and words, that are used in the context. The critical discourse analysis is used to respond to such situations. Language is stated to deliver messages between the audience, namely addressers and addressees. The approach is concerned with the analysis of how ideologies mediated through context are embodied in linguistic production and reception perspectives. The result of the analysis has proved that the proverbs and idiomatic expressions were used metaphorically to convey the embedded meaning of the discourse as a highly sophisticated communication of language.

**KEYWORDS**

Critical Discourse Analysis, Embedded Meaning of Discourse and Critical Linguistic Approach.

**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 12 January 2024

**PUBLISHED:** 03 February 2024

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2024.7.2.2

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### 1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a kind of analytical research that primarily studies the way social embedded meanings covertly use dominance and are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social context. With such dissident research, critical analysts take an explicit position and thus want to understand and expose discourse.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) state that CDA sees 'language as social practice' and considers the 'context of language use' to be crucial. We quote one definition which has become 'very popular' among CDA researchers. CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) that frame it: both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and positions people.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) state, "CDA understands discourses as relatively stable uses of language serving the organization and structuring of social life". Within this understanding, Wodak (2006 a,b) states that the term 'discourse' is, of course, used very differently by different researchers and also in different academic cultures.

In the German and Central European context, a distinction is made between 'text' and 'discourse', relating to the tradition in text linguistics as well as to rhetoric as stated by (Brünner and Graefen, 1994; VASS, 1992; Wodak and Koller, 2008 for summaries).

In the English speaking world, 'discourse' is often used both for written and oral texts, as said by (Gee, 2004; Schiffrin, 1994). Other researchers distinguish between different levels of abstractness: Lemke (1995) defined 'text' as the concrete realization of abstract forms of knowledge ('discourse'), thus adhering to a more Foucauldian approach (JÄGER in this volume).

The discourse-historical approach elaborates and links to the socio-cognitive theory of Teun van Dijk (1998) views 'discourse' as structured forms of knowledge and the memory of social practices, whereas 'text' refers to concrete oral utterances or written documents. The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people.

On the contrary, discourse may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear normal and quite acceptable.

## **2. Aim and Scope of the Study**

This study returns to the acknowledgement that there is a direct link between a linguistic option and a certain ideology maintained by relations of addressers and the addressees as a phenomenon as manifested in a variety of linguistic structures that have not yet been explored. The extracts are drawn exclusively from common proverbs and idiomatic expressions, which are analyzed as essential genres of embedded meaning of discourse.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how proverbs and idiomatic expressions convey the embedded meaning of discourse between the addressers and addressees. Discourses are analyzed as a particularly important genre of the embedded meaning that affects the social construction of reality. As Bourdieu (1994:26) stated:

*"The social field is ... the site par excellence in which agents seek to form and transform their visions of the world and thereby the world itself; it is the site par excellence in which words are actions, and the symbolic character of embedded meaning is at stake. Through the production of slogans, programs and commentaries of various kinds, agents in the social field are continuously engaged in a labor of representation by which they seek to construct and impose a particular vision of the social world while at the same time seeking to mobilize the support of those upon whom their embedded meaning ultimately depends".*

This study aims to analyze the textual mode of discourses in mind from two perspectives: firstly, an ideological aspect they carry and secondly, as an endeavor employed to address and confirm hearers' interests, concerns, and points of view by relations of embedded meaning. This study, therefore, aims to specify the system of linguistic forms that are set into the service of the expression of embedded meaning and that shape a system of particular values and beliefs.

Hopefully, this study will also provide some insight and practical help in decoding discourses, evaluating linguistic aspects of the ideas conveyed, and the way the more embedded meaningful employ language in order to impose their ideas on the common members of society.

### **2.1 Theoretical Background**

There are different ways in which linguistic expressions can express relations of embedded meaning. As competent speakers, audiences are sensitive to variations in accent, intonation and vocabulary; most of these features locate language users at different positions in the social hierarchy.

Audiences are aware that the proper use of language helps them to speak with different degrees of authority; therefore, their words can be loaded with different degrees of weight. Accordingly, the language can be used as an instrument of coercion and constraint. Briefly, language is an integral part of social life, and it is regarded as a part of an individual's social life that consists of daily communications of linguistic expressions, which are tacitly adjusted to relations of embedded meaning.

However, rarely do audiences differentiate the direct link between a linguistic option and a certain ideology; the meaning conveyed by linguistic expressions is taken by them, for instance, as normal and unequivocal. Fairclough (1991:1) stated:

*"The acknowledgement of embedded meaning as an implicit and pervasive phenomenon in all communicative situations is a crucial issue for a competent speaker. It has to be mentioned, however, that 'these studies have*

generally set out to describe prevailing sociolinguistic conventions in terms of how they distribute embedded meaning unequally".

## **2.2 Forms of Embedded Meaning Manifestation**

Embedded meaning is practiced and enacted in discourse. Fairclough (1991:46) believed " embedded meaning in discourse is to do with glorious participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-glorious participants". Each, maintaining its ideology, dictates the situations of what kind of text to produce, what meanings to convey, and what perspectives to impose. Accordingly, he stated there are three kinds of constraints which derive from the conventions of the kind and within which the writer or speaker is positioned when producing texts.

## **2.3 Constraints Operate on Contents, Relations and Subjects.**

Hence, embedded meaning is manifested if one is capable of constraining content, that is, to favor certain interpretations and 'wordings' of events while excluding others. The kind of embedded meaning practiced here is the embedded meaning to disguise embedded meaning: the favored interpretations and wordings are those of the embedded meaning-holders in a society.

Another form of embedded meaning is related to constraints operating in social relations; it determines to what extent embedded meaning will be overtly expressed. Interestingly, the embedded meaning-holders have been recently forced into less direct ways of exercising and reproducing their embedded meaning.

Fairclough (1991:71) stated, "More recently, however, there has been a shift towards a system based upon solidarity rather than embedded meaning".

Thus, Fairclough (1991:193) claimed an established relationship of solidarity should be treated with alarm:

*"Versions of the solidarity or authority mix are now conventional for political leaders, but their effects in terms especially of solidarity upon the actual social relationship between politicians and the rest of the population cannot be taken for instance. The solidarity of the politicians is with constructed and fictional 'public'; they do neither claim solidarity with all the diverse sections of the actual 'public' nor one imagines would such a claim be reciprocated! There is a spurious and imaginary quality about this 'solidarity'".*

Finally, embedded meaning is associated with the construction of a subject position, the presupposition of an ideal reader who will make the 'right' inference from what has been stated and, consequently, will accept the attributes that the embedded meaningful wants them to be attached to.

## **3. Research Methodology**

This part is made to give a brief account of the detailed picture of the most relevant research methodology, tools and a sample of the study, which is exclusively drawn to pursue this study.

The researchers used the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, namely, the Critical Linguistic Approach (CLA). It was adopted to analyze the Role of Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions in Conveying the Embedded Meaning of Discourse by investigating the following hypothesis: "To what extent do proverbs and idiomatic expressions convey embedded meanings of discourse between the addressers and addressees?".

### **3.1 Research Methods, Tools and Sample of the Study**

The extracts were exclusively taken from the common proverbs and idiomatic expressions. For more verification, this site can be checked ([100 Idiomatic Expressions That You'll Use All the Time \(+PDF\) – Just learn](#))

The analysis of the common proverbs and idiomatic expressions was centered around nominalization and lexicalization to investigate the hypothesis " To what extent do proverbs and idiomatic expressions convey embedded meanings of discourse between the addressers and addressees?".

Accordingly, the researchers depended on their analysis of the extracts, which had been taken from common proverbs and idiomatic expressions, so as to identify to what extent addressers can use the embedded meaning of context. For more verification, this site can be checked ([100 Idiomatic Expressions That You'll Use All the Time \(+PDF\) – Just Learn](#)). These were used as tools of analysis, which were aimed to convey the use of context by the above mentioned holders, namely the audience who are using contextual meaning of discourse in a hidden way.

### **3.2 Critical Linguistic Approach (CLA)**

A brief account of the Critical Linguistic Approach (CLA) was made for the sake of definition. The approach was defined as critical linguistics, which was concerned with the analysis of how ideologies mediated through discourse were embodied in linguistic expressions. The Critical Linguistic Approach (CLA) was used in response to such problems as a fixed, invisible ideology permeating language. Fowler (1991:67) states:

*"It is the main concern of critical linguists to study the minute details of linguistic structure in the light of the social and historical situation of the text, to display to awareness the patterns of belief and value which are encoded in the language ..."*

The Critical Linguistic Approach (CLA) was developed by Kress & Hodge (1979) with the appearance of the book *Language as Ideology*, which was used successfully by Van Dijk (1987) and Fairclough (1991). This study focused on the discourse as a social phenomenon; as Kress (1990:1) states, "all social interactions involve displays of power".

### **3.3 Nominalization as Part of the Ideational Function (NPIF)**

When searching for ideological meanings, critical linguists become particularly concerned with the strategy of transformation as a syntactic variation. One specific transformation that is particularly worth looking at in the critical analysis is nominal. Nominal, according to Longman (1999:232: 318) states:

*"Are noun phrases, which 'normally play key roles as clause elements ... [and] specify who and what the text is about'. Moreover, he stated, 'New nouns can be formed by derivation and compounding. Derived nouns are formed through the addition of derivational affixes, such as prefixes and suffixes. Compound nouns, on the other hand, are formed from two words combined to form a single noun. Via zero derivation, or conversion, adjectives and verbs may be converted to nouns'."*

However, compared with a full clause, a derived nominal leaves much of the information unexpressed. Such clauses, instead of reporting concrete actions in time, are transformed by the speaker into abstract entities or concepts out of time and mystify all those processes and their participants. As Longman (1999:325) states:

*"Derived abstract nouns are essential in academic discussions, where frequent reference is made to abstract concepts and where actions and processes are often referred to in general terms rather than in relation to a specific place and time. For such reference, it is convenient to use nominalizations, where the content of a clause (stripped of tense specification and other deictic elements) is compressed into a noun phrase."*

Fowler (1991:80) states, "Nominalization is, thus, an important linguistic tool which has extensive structural consequences and offers substantial ideological opportunities. Hence, nominalization is a form of power relations that constrains content".

### **3.4 Lexicalization as Part of the Textual Function (LPTF)**

Ideologically, there are different schemes embodying different meanings in different discourses, and they are coded in vocabulary. The selection of vocabulary plays a crucial role in the decision of what meanings and attributes are attached to the audience and which subject positions are set up.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The researcher will use the critical linguistic approach by using nominalization and lexicalization in terms of analyzing extracts which are taken from the common proverbs and idiomatic expressions to investigate the following hypothesis:

"To what extent do proverbs and idiomatic expressions convey embedded meanings of discourse between the addressers and addressees?"

### **4.1 Nominalization as Part of the Ideational Function**

#### **4.1.1 Bought a lemon = Bad bargain**

A lemon is a kind of plant. It can be eaten, but it is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is a bad bargain. If something you bought is a "lemon", it is a bad product. In a sense, you wasted your money on it. This kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.1.2 Packed like sardines = Crowded**

Sardines are a kind of fish, but it was given a negative connotation by attributing human guilt “crowded” to non-humans. The embedded meaning is crowded. If the audience is “packed like sardines” in a venue, they are standing very close together in a small space. This kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.1.3 Make waves = Change things.**

Attributing human guilty “movement” to non-human “waves”. The embedded meaning is to change things. When you “make waves”, you change a situation dramatically. This can also mean that you caused trouble. This kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.1.4 Up in the air = Uncertain**

Simply, if it is up in the air, it means not in your hand. The embedded meaning is uncertain. When you say something is “up in the air”, you are saying that you are not sure that an event is happening. This kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.1.5 Sticky fingers = Thief.**

Fingers are part of hand balm, but it is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is a thief. If you accuse someone of having “sticky fingers”, you are basically calling him a thief. This kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.1.6 Born with a silver spoon in their mouth = Born wealthy**

Silver spoon is used metaphorically to express the positive connotation of “richness”. This idiomatic expression “a silver spoon” is used to describe someone who was born into a wealthy family.

**4.1.7 Kicked the bucket = Died**

A bucket is a kind of vessel, and it can be used to fetch water. It is used metaphorically to express the negative connotation of “died”. This is an irreverent phrase, “Kicked the bucket”, to say that someone has died. It is stated to someone who died, but he had a bad reputation.

**4.1.8 Over the moon = Very happy**

It is used metaphorically to express the positive connotation of “happy”. You can use this “Over the moon” to describe the feeling of getting something you’ve been looking forward to for a long time.

**4.1.9 Under the table = Secretive**

It is used metaphorically to express the negative connotation of “secretive”. The embedded meaning is known by a small audience group. When you do something “under the table”, you are trying to do something so that only a small amount of the audience is aware of it. It’s commonly used to describe something that is possibly unscrupulous. For example, bribes are given “under the table”.

**4.1.10 Once in a blue moon = Rare**

It is used metaphorically to express proportional phenomenon connotation. The embedded meaning rarely happens. This implies something that either won’t happen or rarely happens.

**4.2 Lexicalization as Part of the Textual Function****4.2.1 Bad apple = Bad person**

An apple is a kind of fruit, but it was used metaphorically to mean a person. The embedded meaning of a bad apple is a bad person. You can use this idiom to describe someone who is not nice and maybe even criminal.

**4.2.2 Barking up the wrong tree = Pursuing the wrong course**

A tree is a kind of plant, and it is useful to the human being. It is used metaphorically to mean problem. When you “bark up the wrong tree”, you are pursuing the wrong solution to your problems.

**4.2.3 Be cold-hearted = Uncaring.**

A cold heart is used metaphorically to express the negative connotation of “uncaring”. The embedded meaning is careless. If you decide to be “cold-hearted”, you are making a deliberate decision not to care about someone or something.

**4.2.4 Be on solid ground = Confident.**

A solid ground is used metaphorically to express positive connotations. The embedded meaning is confidence. When you are "on solid ground", you are confident in your position or feel that you are safe.

**4.2.5 Between a rock and a hard place = Facing difficulties**

Between a rock and a hard place is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is you are in trouble. When you have to choose between two options, neither of which are ideal or "good".

**4.2.6 When it rains, it pours, = Trouble comes.**

It is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is facing problems. This expression "When it rains, it pours" refers to the fact that sometimes, different bad things happen to the audience at one time.

**4.2.7 Build castles in the sky = Daydream.**

Building castles in the sky is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is daydreams when you wish something to happen or achieved in your life.

**4.2.8 Clear as mud = Hard to understand**

Clear as mud is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is confused when making a decision. When you are confused about something or a situation, this kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.2.9 Cool as a cucumber = Calm**

Cool as a cucumber is used metaphorically to express someone who is able to control his nerves. The embedded meaning is calm. This idiomatic expression is meant to describe someone who is calm and relaxed.

**4.2.10 Dead-end job = No more opportunities**

A dead-end job is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is no progress. When you are stuck in a "dead-end job", you are in a career situation where there is no more room for advancement.

**4.2.11 Down to earth = Practical**

Down to Earth is used metaphorically to express positive connotations. The embedded meaning is serious. This describes someone who is known for being sensible and practical.

**4.2.12 In hot water = In trouble**

In hot water is used metaphorically to express negative connotation. The embedded meaning is in trouble or critical situation. This idiomatic expression can be used to say that you are in a less than ideal situation. This kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.2.13 Let the cat out of the bag = Spoiled the secret.**

It is used metaphorically to express the person who is not trusted. The embedded meaning spoiled the secret. You "let the cat out of the bag" when you accidentally let someone in on a

**4.2.14 Lost at sea = Confused**

It is used metaphorically to mean someone in a dilemma. The embedded meaning is confused. When someone is confused, he cannot make a decision. This kind of generalization is used when someone does not want to put himself in a critical situation.

**4.2.15 Not your cup of tea = Not something you like**

It is used metaphorically to express the person who is not interested in something. The embedded meaning is something you do not like. If you say that something is "not your cup of tea", you are saying it's not something you particularly like or enjoy.

**4.2.16 Sitting on the fence = Neutral**

It is used metaphorically to express negative connotations. The embedded meaning is neutral. When you "sit on the fence", you are avoiding making a decision. Often, this is a decision between two audiences with different opinions.

It seems clearly after the analysis of the extracts which are taken from the common proverbs and idiomatic expressions that the discourse has been used in different ways; for instance, sometimes, human quality is attributed to non-human as well, as

generalization is made in terms of non-identifying who or what, for example, when someone addressed something or someone as such:

You bought a **lemon**.  
They packed like **sardines**.  
It is up in the **air**.

## 5. Executive Summary

The analysis of the common proverbs and idiomatic expressions has demonstrated that the meanings which people convey by writer or speaker actually do not correspond to what they claim to be saying. As well as the values, ideas, and beliefs he communicates, there are new meanings that, on the surface, are explicit to readers or listeners but are fully encoded by efficient writers or speakers.

The meaning should be illustrated as it was intended, and this requires not only the knowledge of grammar but also the knowledge of the world. Accordingly, it is essential for the intended audience to understand the context in which a sentence is said. This kind of knowledge is needed for the interpretation of the real meaning that the writer or speaker sets out to convey to the audience.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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