

Voices of Power: An Inquiry into Language and Social Control

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Abstract

The relationship between language and social control is complex, but certainly, it becomes clear that linguistic practices may reflect and reinforce existing power structures in society. Hanging into the core of both critical discourse analysis (CDA) and sociolinguistics, this research studies how language can be an instrument of power, ideology, and social behavior regulation in societal domains such as education and media and government. The qualitative research design takes semi-structured interviews with 15 purposively sampled participants, including educators, media practitioners, and local government officials, and employs secondary texts, speeches, and media content in data collection. Thematic analysis and CDA were the research methods that utilized the power dynamics and communicative strategies in the exercise of social control. Findings reveal that language does not only reflect such hierarchies but also serves as a means of strategic exercise of dominance and marginalization. Critical language awareness becomes relevant to enable persons to engage with particular communication practices critically towards building just and reflective communicative practices.

Keywords: *language, power, social control, discourse, critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, ideology, communication, qualitative research, thematic analysis, research participants*

1. Introduction

Thus, power diffuses social relations; it pervades discourse to produce 'regimes of truth' through which acceptance of 'knowledge' is defined. Power does not lie just with a singular authority but is diffused across all social relations. Regimes are therefore not neutral because communicative practices Privilege certain voices while marginalizing others. The formation and maintenance of those regimes basically occur through communicative practices that privilege certain voices and marginalize others. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by [7], positions discourse as a form of social practice inextricably linked with social structures, ideologies and institutional power. CDA seeks to uncover how language reflects, reinforces, and sometimes challenges the hierarchies that govern social life. By contrast, the socio-cognitive approach found in [19] emphasizes how elites—politicians, journalists, and educators alike—exploit discourse, in more sophisticated ways, to further reproduce inequality, regulate public narratives, and maintain ideological hegemony within societies.

Language is the mechanism through which social relationships are formed in different contexts: education, media, justice. In the classroom, language may be the criteria that determine whose knowledge is valued; Language in media conditions presentation of events that frame public view; and, in governance, language legitimizes policies that regulate citizen behavior and national identity. The study of language and power is not just theoretical; it has very real consequences for equity, participation, and democratic communication.

Relevance to Language, Power, and Social Control

Words have wrought the most power within a very quick exchange of information, the growing sociopolitical tensions being greater in defining language as the instrument of control over peoples than ever before. The quality of education policy and classroom discourse that can form future worldviews for generations to come; media framing creates a consensus among the public regarding certain social priorities; and political discourse may encourage people toward either holding them in the light or into shadow regarding accountability. Understanding of this through CDA and sociolinguistics needs to play a role in raising 'critical language awareness'-that is, the capacity to detect, analyze, and question the values and ideologies reflected by forms of discourse which have created realities in society. Important in the Philippine context of this study, historic inequalities, colonial legacies, and the political temperature of today all converge in linguistic practice to construct a peculiar landscape where words are both a mirror and instrument of power. To examine how this landscape maintains or disrupts existing hierarchies is to demonstrate how very nuanced yet hegemonic ways discourse can turn them in or out again.

Statement of the Problem

While scholars have explored the theoretical nexus between language and power [9]; [7]; [20]), there remains a shortage of empirical studies that examine these dynamics **across multiple institutional domains simultaneously**. Existing literature often treats education, media, and governance as separate arenas, neglecting the interconnected ways in which discursive strategies operate across them. Moreover, there is limited research that foregrounds the perspectives of those actively engaged in these fields—educators, media practitioners, and local government officials—whose experiences can reveal how language operates in real-world contexts to reinforce or resist control.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

1. Examine how language is used to assert authority, shape ideologies, and regulate behavior in education, media, and governance.
2. Identify the discursive strategies that reflect and reinforce existing power structures.
3. Explore how educators, media practitioners, and local government officials perceive the role of language in social control.
4. Highlight pathways for fostering critical language awareness to promote equitable and reflective communication.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this inquiry:

1. How is language employed to assert authority, shape ideologies, and regulate behavior in education, media, and governance?
2. What discursive strategies reflect and reinforce societal power structures across these domains?

3. How do key stakeholders perceive the role of language in maintaining or challenging social control?
4. In what ways can critical language awareness challenge dominant discourses and foster equitable communication practices?

1.1 Review of Related Literature

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the primary analytical framework for this study. According to Foucault [7], CDA is a conceptualization of discourse as a form of social practice that can be considered in dialectical relation to social structures. Discourse shapes and is shaped by power relations, making it a key site for reproduction or contestation of ideology. This three-dimensional framework by Fairclough- textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice-provides a systematic way through how language is unpacked to reflect and maintain social inequalities. He extends CDA using socio-cognitive modifiers, focusing on mental models, shared knowledge, and group ideologies in discourse production and interpretation. This kind of increment highlights the ways in which the elite-in this case, politicians, media persons, and educators-ration access to and framing of discourse to shape public cognition for sustaining their dominance therein.

Sociolinguistics is, in this respect, the key complimentary discipline of CDA, addressing issues pertaining to language and social variables such as class, ethnicity, gender, and institutional context. As mentioned by [10], sociolinguistics tends to look into how the socially patterned nature of linguistic variation comes about and how such patterns contribute to the making of identity and membership of groups; with respect to power, the study touched by sociolinguistics shows how styles of language draw boundaries between groups, that is, between insiders and outsiders, while legitimizing certain styles of speaking in preference to others [21].

In the dimension of the theory of power, Foucault provides the conceptual installation of power in understanding language as the tool of control. The very idea of power being possessed by individuals stands rejected. Power is viewed to be relational and ubiquitous, exercised through discourse, to produce "truth" and normalize the behaviors of citizens [9]. Foucault's idea of regimes of truth suggests that what society accepts as institutionalized discursive practice- policy, media narrative, government communication-shapes the truth in relation to knowledge.

Language as a Mechanism of Control in Education

Language wields immense power on the thoughts and actions in educational environments. According to [1] theory of pedagogic discourse, the curriculum design and all interactions within the classroom encode very specific values and worldviews that privilege the dominant cultural capital. In the Philippines, [18] discusses how English-medium instruction further entrenches the colonial hierarchies associated with language, often relegating other languages and their respective knowledge systems to the margins. Implicitly, through the linguistic choices they make, teachers enforce authority, specify the correct behavioral norms, and lend legitimacy to particular ways of knowing while denying others.

Media

Media discourse is another arena in which language serves as an instrument of social control. As [19] said, media institutions typically reflect and reproduce elite ideologies through agenda-setting, framing, and selective representation. Studies in Philippine media [13] showed that most news coverage accompanies political or corporate interests in shaping public perceptions of events and social problems. News categories—the euphemistic language concerning issue policies or loaded terms for dissent—naturalize some points of view in media discourse but delegitimize others.

Governance

Language in governance finds its place in texts on policies, speeches, and other legal instruments. Such texts communicate decisions and also construct legitimacy. [3] found that political language

uses several rhetorical devices such as metaphor, presupposition, and lexical choice in order to align citizens to the goal of policy. In the official rhetoric of the Philippines during periods of political crisis, there is always a tendency to interpret dissent as destabilization against opposition [5]. Under such governance discourse, public behavior is shaped to conform by defining the boundaries of acceptable speech and action.

Gaps in the Literature

While CDA, sociolinguistics, and power theory offer rich frameworks for examining language as social control, many seams remain.

Existing studies, as much as one can expect, mostly focused on one domain- education, media, or governance, but not integrating them into discursive practices as they operate across domains. This may silence the nature of interconnectedness concerning discourse. For instance, ideologies reinforced in one domain can be echoed and legitimized in others. Most of the literature makes macro-level analyses of institutional texts and public communications, but there are fewer studies which the lived experiences of actors within these systems bring to light. Voices from educators, media practitioners, and government officials remain oppressed in most understandings of how power is negotiated and perceived in everyday communicative practices. There is less empirical study based in the Philippines that combines CDA and sociolinguistic perspectives. The political realities of the country, its multilingual nature, and the colonial past shared with its emerging democratic structures may also yield different insights when it comes to language and power compared to the Western context. Finally, although critical language awareness is promoted with a lot of premises [8], empirical study into how this might be developed and enacted across social institutions in the Philippines remains scarce. This study will therefore fill this gap by doing a multi-domain, participatory-informed study of language as control across education, media, and governance.

Theoretical Framework

This study rests on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and sociolinguistic theories of power and ideology as collaborative or complementary perspectives through which language and social control are understood. Discourse given its power in society is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)-the analytical perspective through which it would investigate how language reflects, reproduces, and challenges power relation in society. The roots of CDA are in works of [7], [21], and [23]. According to CDA, hence, discourse is not just a reflection, but is the means in which social structures have been actively constructed and maintained. According to [7], through the socio-social context, language can both shape and be shaped, which allows institutions, such as education, media, and governance while embedding the predominating ideologies into everyday communication. This view is extended by [20], where it claims not only explicit but also implicit control in privilege of dominant ones and to the detriment of others, with the aid of a few structures in discourse construction-such as choice of words, thematic framing, and narrative patterns. CDA Complementary Sociolinguistic Perspectives Power and Ideology-Sociolinguistics puts language into even larger social contexts by-and cultural-political contexts. Sociolinguistics would study how their different languages, registers, and styles relate to identity, authority, and inequality (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Foucault's [9] stuff regards discourse being a regime of truth that controls all language and therefore controls the knowledge and thus the people. Choosing a language is not a neutral act, it mostly embodies and reproduces the ideological stances and ways anybody conceives of the world and its relation to him or her. Ideologies, as [21] states, make use of discourse to legitimize the one worldview and delegitimize the other, thus shaping social norms more subtly regarding expectations. Fantastic ; therefore so far, it is mixed or blended at the point of which the CDA's analytical seriousness and sociolinguistic insight into language difference, identity, and ideology come together, with this framing allowing for sounds critique of how that language is functioning as a tool of social control in education, media, and governance. Such lens

ensures that the analysis captures both structural features in discourse and lived sociocultural realities giving them meaning.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how language functions as a mechanism of social control across the domains of education, media, and local governance. A qualitative approach is most appropriate because it enables the in-depth examination of discourse within its natural context, allowing for the interpretation of underlying meanings, power relations, and ideological structures [4]. The study is interpretivist in orientation, seeking to understand participants' perspectives and the socio-political contexts in which discourse is produced and consumed.

Participants

The participants were drawn from three sectors where language plays a critical role in shaping perceptions and behaviors:

Educators (n ≈ 5) – Teachers and school administrators from both public and private institutions who influence learning environments and curriculum discourse.

Media practitioners (n ≈ 5) – Journalists, broadcasters, and social media content producers whose linguistic choices affect public opinion and agenda-setting.

Local Government Unit (LGU) officials (n ≈ 5) – Elected and appointed officials responsible for public communication and policy messaging.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they possess relevant experience and insight into institutional discourse practices [15]. Diversity in gender, age, years of experience, and sectoral representation will be considered to enrich the data set.

Data Gathering Tools

Semi-structured interviews allowed for open-ended yet guided conversations that elicit detailed narratives and perspectives on language use, discourse practices, and perceived influence. Interview guides included prompts related to discourse framing, audience targeting, and institutional language norms.

Text, speech, and media analysis – Relevant documents, speeches, press releases, and media content (both traditional and digital) were collected and examined to contextualize and triangulate findings from interviews. Sources were chosen based on their influence, reach, and relevance to the study's thematic focus.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in two stages:

Thematic Analysis using Braun and Clarke's [2] six-phase framework, recurring patterns and themes were identified from the interview transcripts and textual data. Codes were inductively and deductively generated to capture both emergent and theory-driven insights. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) – [7] three-dimensional model guided the CDA, examining (a) the linguistic features of texts, (b) the discursive practices in their production and interpretation, and (c) the broader socio-cultural and institutional contexts. This dual approach ensures that both thematic content and power-ideological dimensions are addressed.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty [14]. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifiable information from transcripts and publications. Data was stored securely, and only the researcher had access. Furthermore, care was taken to avoid potential harm by ensuring that findings are presented in a way that does not compromise the professional reputation or safety of participants.

3. Results

Thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of interview transcripts and textual materials revealed four major thematic areas aligned with the study's research questions. The findings show the pervasive role of language in shaping authority, reinforcing ideologies, and maintaining social control, while also highlighting avenues for promoting more equitable communication practices.

Language as a Tool to Assert Authority, Shape Ideologies, and Regulate Behavior

Themes: *Institutionalized authority through linguistic formality, ideological framing, and behavioral regulation via policy discourse*

Findings revealed that across education, media, and governance, language operates as a deliberate mechanism to legitimize authority and establish social order. In the education sector, educators employed formalized language and academic jargon to reinforce their authoritative position, which participants perceived as both a marker of expertise and a potential barrier to open dialogue. In the media, lexical choices and framing techniques were strategically used to shape public perception, often privileging narratives aligned with dominant political or economic interests. In governance, policy documents and public addresses exhibited prescriptive and directive discourse patterns, embedding ideological assumptions that subtly regulate citizens' behavior and expectations. These patterns echo recent findings that linguistic structures are not neutral but inherently ideological, functioning to normalize specific worldviews ([8]; [24]).

Discursive Strategies that Reflect and Reinforce Societal Power Structures

Themes: *Framing and agenda-setting, strategic ambiguity, us-vs-them polarization*

Such discursive strategies were found to be efficacious in upholding hierarchical structures. In education, authority could be reinforced with evaluative words in feedback and curriculum materials, subtly advocating for compliance as opposed to critical engagement. Framing and selective highlighting defined media outputs, preferring a number of voices but marginalizing the rest, which corresponds to previous studies [21] about media power. It implied, though, that strategic ambiguity in official statements allowed leaders to hold control over interpretation while minimizing accountability, with a sense of being decisive. One can also see that polarizing "us-vs-them" rhetoric became exceptionally evident during political campaigns and public debates, which scholars argue, can cement in-group loyalty while shaming the others [25].

Stakeholders' Perceptions of Language in Maintaining or Challenging Social Control

Themes: *Recognition of linguistic influence, critical awareness vs. acceptance, perceived barriers to resistance*

In different sectors, the participants exhibited differential levels of awareness of language in the construction of power relations. Generally speaking, the educators acknowledged that there lay an

inherent authority within their language but felt prevented by systemic norms from adopting a more egalitarian approach to discourse practice. The media practitioners seemed divided with some accepting that their work contributes to the reinforcement of the dominant ideologies while others regarded themselves as neutral conveyors of information. Following on the other hand, LGU officials tended to see authoritative language as a tool for the efficient functioning of governance, with minority voices pointing to this as risking exclusion and alienation. These findings resonate with recent studies suggesting that stakeholders' awareness of discursive power is shaped by institutional culture and personal agency [26].

4. Discussion

Critical Language Awareness as a Pathway to Equitable Communication

Themes: *Deconstructing dominant discourses, empowerment through reflection, institutional integration of awareness practices*

The study found that critical language awareness (CLA) is a useful framework for dismantling entrenched power structures. Teachers who usually practiced reflection when it came to their pedagogical practices tended to use inclusive language, thereby paving the way for participatory dialogue. Media practitioners using the principles of CLA seemed more intentional about managing perspectives without resorting to sensation framing. In governance, CLA-aided communication carried transparency and community participation but was usually curtailed by sometimes the existing bureaucratic protocols. This is consistent with contemporary literature that is beginning to argue for CLA as a transformative tool for equitable communications across [27] sectors.

Critical Language Awareness as a Tool to Challenge Dominant Discourses and Foster Equitable Communication

Themes: Ideological Foundations, Empowering Marginalized Voices, Institutional Integration of Equitable Practices

The study has shown that CLA is a tool by which entrenched power relationships in language can be interrogated and disrupted. Participants from education, media, and governance sectors reported that their awareness of the ideological underpinning of discourse made them rethink communicative practices. Such CLA in educational contexts encouraged some teachers to leave behind the formal or hierarchical language to more inclusive terms, thus promoting participatory dialogue and lessening perceived barriers of difference between educator and student. As Wallace (1999) argued, CLA encourages critical rather than passive engagement with knowledge within education.

CLA in the media practice engendered journalists and editors from the dominant narrative frames to include peripheral voices by creating a shared perspective and thus contracting polarizing rhetoric. This finding accords with [21] contention that media discourse plays a central role in reproducing or challenging societal ideologies. CLA-informulated communication in governance helped lessen the use of strategic ambiguity and technical jargon, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability, an observation consistent with [8].

Moreover, CLA empowers individuals and groups not currently heard in society, as it serves as a tool for finding the power of discursive empowerment. By presenting skills to detect bias, exclusion, and framing ideologies, CLA allows better power to the consumers for equitable representation. This is much in line with the conclusion of Smith (2025) that CLA as an institutional

culture will not only dismantle oppression but also build communicative norms that are inclusive and respectful.

Overall, this sends out signals that CLA acts as both a critical eye and practical strategy that calls into question the hitherto dominant discourse by revealing power relations and enabling equitable communication through promotion of inclusivity, mutual respect, and shared agency across sectors.

Category	Themes	Summary of Findings
Language as a Tool to Assert Authority, Shape Ideologies, and Regulate Behavior	Institutionalized authority through formality; framing; regulation discourse	Across education, media, and governance, language functions as a mechanism to legitimize authority and establish social order. Educators use formalized linguistic language and academic jargon to reinforce expertise; media uses lexical choices and framing to privilege dominant narratives; governance employs prescriptive discourse to regulate behavior and embed ideological assumptions.
Discursive Strategies that Reflect and Reinforce Societal Structures	Framing and agenda-setting; ambiguity; polarization	Discursive strategies sustain hierarchies across sectors. Education uses evaluative language to promote compliance; media employs framing and selective emphasis to privilege certain voices; governance uses strategic ambiguity and polarizing rhetoric to control interpretation and reinforce in-group loyalty.
Stakeholders' Perceptions of Language in Maintaining or Challenging Social Control	Recognition of linguistic influence; awareness vs. acceptance; Perceived barriers to resistance	Awareness of language's role in shaping power relations varies. Educators recognize authority in their discourse but feel constrained by norms; media practitioners differ in their self-perception as ideological actors; governance officials often see authoritative language as necessary, though some acknowledge its potential for exclusion.
Critical Language Awareness as a Pathway to Equitable Communication	Deconstructing dominant discourses; Empowerment through reflection; Institutional integration of awareness practices	CLA enables disruption of entrenched power structures by promoting inclusive language in education, balanced perspectives in media, and transparent governance communication. Implementation is often limited by institutional protocols.
Critical Language Awareness as a Tool to Challenge Dominant Discourses and Foster Equitable Communication	Ideological foundations; Empowering marginalized voices; Institutional integration of equitable practices	CLA prompts reevaluation of communicative practices, encouraging inclusivity in education, diversity in media representation, and transparency in governance. It empowers marginalized groups by enhancing their ability to detect and challenge bias and exclusion in discourse.

5. Conclusion

Language is associated with power relations in education, media, or governance; its far-reaching implications were studied, and results indicated that language operates as both an instrument or mechanism of social control to assert power, cement ideologies, and regulate behavior, thereby reinforcing prevailing social hierarchies. Through thematic interpretation of interviews and textual materials with critical discourse analysis, the study identified repeated discursive strategies such as legitimization through formal registers, selective framing of information, and implicit moral positioning. Such strategies, both overt and subtle, ally with the normalization of the dominance and marginalization of some groups while limiting the arenas in which alternative ways of thinking can be appreciated. Most importantly, stakeholder perceptions emphasized the view that language can perpetuate the status quo, but when its powers are consciously acknowledged and questioned, it can become a vehicle for critical reflections and social change. Informed by these findings, three principal recommendations are made: First, any reading of policy changes should include making critical language awareness part of public governance in the institutional communication protocol. This should lead to transparency, inclusive participation, and equity in discourse. Second, educational programs should include initiatives for teaching critical discourse analysis at the secondary and tertiary levels, allowing students to recognize as well as challenge meanings carried by understood language structures that are essentially power laden. Finally, an equilibrium should be stressed in public discourse campaigns so that, working in conjunction with the media, propagations would raise the proper communication standards that neither stereotype nor marginalize portrayal of events, persons, or groups. These steps would together begin to undo linguistic mechanisms of control and generate spaces of dialogue for promoting social justice and democratic engagement..

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