

## A Critical Discourse Analysis of Summit Series: The representation of Social Actors

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### ABSTRACT

*This study takes a critical discourse analysis approach to investigate the linguistic representation of male and female social actors and construction of gender identities in the texts of Summit Series. The analytical models used are van Leeuwen's framework and Halliday's transitivity model. The analysis of texts is organized through the qualitative and to some extent quantitative procedures. To investigate the data, chi-square test is run to determine the distribution levels of these linguistic variables in the representation of social actor. Intra and inter-raters reliability estimate to verify the researcher's findings. The findings of this study indicated a differential representation of social actors in that males were portrayed as more prominent, successful, active, independent, expressive and assertive in comparison with females. Although a surface view reflects that female actors as active one, the underlying ideologies uncovered through the application of CDA proved to be different.*

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis (CDA), social actors, Ideological structures, textbook evaluation, discursive features.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Van Dijk (1993, p. 249), CDA 'is the approach to discourse analysis which attempts to uncover the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power'. As Van Dijk (2001, p. 352), mentioned "Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context". With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social equality. According to Fairclough (1992, p.28), within the framework of CDA, discourse is defined as something "more than just language use: it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice".

"Discourse is pregnant of the language users' ideology. Discourse and language can be used to make unbalanced power relations and to make portrayals of social groups appear to be commonsense, normal, and natural when in fact the reality is prejudice, injustice, and inequities. Actually, ideologically dominant groups, consciously or unconsciously, attempt to impose their ideology over less-powerful and non-dominant groups through their language. Therefore, their language includes a lot of hidden ideologies not observable for ordinary readers" (Hodge, Kress & Jones, 1979, p. 81). The analysis of language is a necessary part of any attempt to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words of our written and oral speech in order to resist and overcome negative power relations or ensure positive power relations (Macgregor, 2003, p.15).

One of the main aims of CDA is to highlight how language is utilized within texts to construct specific ideological positions that entail unequal relations of power. Because of this, CDA not only focuses on the linguistic dimensions of language, but also maintains a strong

political agenda in reference to how the language is used (Coffin, 2001, p. 99). Within CDA language is not neutral

and 'all texts are critical sites for the negotiation of power and ideology (Burns, 2001, p. 138).' Fairclough (1989, pp. 10-11 cited in Coffin, 2001, p. 100) states:

*"The relationship between social action and text is mediated by interaction: that is the nature of the interaction, how texts are produced and interpreted, depends upon the social action in which they are embedded; and the nature of the text, its formal and stylistic properties on the one hand depends upon and constitutes "traces" of its process of production, and on the other hand constitutes "cues" for its interpretation".*

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Considering the possible effects of textbooks on constructing learners' views and ideologies, this study examines the ways in which social actors are represented in the texts under study in order to uncover the hidden discursive structures. Hence attempts are made to clarify the way male and female social actors are represented in the Summit Series. The study draws on the work of van Leeuwen (1996) and Halliday's transitivity model (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) to formulate a framework which utilizes a socio-semantic inventory, in a systematic way. To further clarify the points under investigation the following two research questions are formulated:

1. Are social actors represented differently in the textbooks under study?
2. Is the female social actor dominated in the Summit series?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Data Collection**

The sole sources of materials in the present study are from four English textbooks of Summit Series that used in various educational institutions in Iran. Generally, Summit series consist of 4 textbooks in the high-intermediate to advanced level, written by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher, and published in the United States of America by Pearson Longman Incorporation in 2006. The focus of the present study is to analyze through critical discourse analysis on the conversations and texts in Summit series that consisting of the four textbooks of Summit 1A and 1B, 2A and 2B that containing 20 units on the whole, each unit includes 2 conversation and a reading part and an article related to the particular topic of that unit. All the sentences in reading texts and articles and dialogues were extracted and analyzed under the rubric of CDA and according to the features introduced by van Leeuwen (1996) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) transitivity model.

### **Procedures of the Analysis**

In order to achieve the goals of the study, all of the sentences in the reading passages and articles and dialogues were read critically, focusing on each phrase, clause, and sentence separately and in conjunction with the neighboring phrases, clauses and sentences. The features introduced by van Leeuwen (1996) were considered as a basis for the analysis of the textbooks under investigation. Clauses were counted and analyzed critically through discursive features of the framework. Furthermore, in order to analyze the type of activity male and female social actors are represented with, it is very much necessary to draw on Halliday & Matthiessen's work on the transitivity system. In addition to the above features of analysis, types of processes introduced by Halliday (1985) were scrutinized. Through the processes including material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential, the

representation of social actors and the sort of activities they were involved in were identified. In line with the purpose of critical discourse analysis and also to identify the representation at work, the current study was concerned with language used in the texts.

To analyze the discursive strategies utilized in the textbooks under question, both inter-coder reliability and intra-coder reliability were estimated to verify the researchers' findings. In this respect, to assess the inter-coder reliability of the data, 20 percent of the whole data was given to two friends who were familiar with the procedures of the study. The results of the friends' analyses were in accordance with the researchers' point of view; they showed high agreement with the researchers. In terms of intra-coder reliability, after gathering the data, the researchers checked 20 percent of the whole data once more within an interval of three weeks. The time interval for eliciting two sets of data enabled the researchers to double check the data to avoid any uncertainty.

### **DISCURSIVE FEATURES OF THE FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework for this study is based on "socio-semantic inventory" which is introduced by Van Leeuwen (1996). Van Leeuwen draws on a socio-semantic inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented in discourses verbally. Three discursive features of this framework such as, deletion, rearrangement (role allocation) and substitution were considered in the process of data analysis. In other words, the framework shows whether the social actors were excluded or included; whether through rearrangements different roles were assigned to different social actors; and whether any substitutions were used in their representation.

In terms of "deletion", the included social actors could be represented in the form of activation or passivation. It means that the doer of the action is the subject of the clause in activation rather than passivation. Regarding exclusion, when the social actors involved in an action are excluded the exclusion does leave a trace. In this case the excluded social actors are back grounded, otherwise they are suppressed. Put another way, in terms of suppression, there is no trace of excluded social actors in anywhere in the text.

As the name implies, "role allocation" or "rearrangement" is concerned with the roles assigned to the social actors in representations in discourses. The term "transitivity" in Van Leeuwen's framework refers to the identification of the activities, activation and passivation, that are related to the roles at issue.

The "transitivity system" draws on Halliday (1985, p. 101), 'specifies the different types of process that are recognized in the language and the structures which they are expressed'. It consists of 6 types of processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. Material processes are processes of "doing" and mental processes express sensing, and relational processes are those of being. As the fourth type, "verbal processes are processes of saying and behavioral are those of physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, dreaming, smiling, and coughing. Grammatically, they are between material and mental processes". "The behavior is typically a conscious being, like the senser: but the process functions more like one of "doing" (Halliday, 1985, p. 128). The processes represented something as existence or happening are called existential. The clauses in existential processes typically have the verb be, or the verbs indicate existence, such as exist, arise and followed by a nominal group functioning as Existent.

Substitution as the third main types of transformation contains some discursive structures which are as follows: objectivities/ abstraction, personalization/ impersonalization and categorization/ nomination, etc., through which the representation of social actors is identified.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Deletion

Deletion, as an important part of critical discourse analysis, can be used to indicate the process of inclusion/ exclusion. As Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 28), mentioned “representations include or exclude actors to suit their interest and purposes in relation to the readers for whom they are intended”. Some exclusion may be “innocent”, details which readers are assumed to know already, or which are deemed irrelevant to them; others tie in closely to certain ideology which should be considered. Table 1 summarizes the inclusion and exclusion of males and females:

**Table 1. Chi-square Results for Inclusion of Male and Female Social Actors**

	No	$\chi^2$	df	sig.
Male	268	17.286	1	0.00
Female	180			

From Table 1, it can be concluded that Summit Series included male actors with considerably more frequency than female actors which is in contrast with more excluded female actors. The difference is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 17.286$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) for inclusion.

Although the texts tend to represent both actors equally to reflect a gender neutral bias, the qualitative analysis reveals the case to be different. The text which introduced famous social actors included male actors in action verbs and excluded female actors from being involved in social actions. Stated in another way, the woman’s life was described through passive agent deletion while the man himself was the doer of the action. The Examples displays the point properly:

Example 1: Beethoven *could play* the piano so beautifully that some listener cried (Summit 1A, p.20).

Example 2: Many young women *are left feeling* either invisible or fat and unaccepted (Summit 1A, p.46).

In Summit 1A, page 34 the actor and philanthropist Paul Newman, was included as an example of being a successful and famous male actor, while the famous female actor was excluded. More to the point, the textbooks included famous male actors such as Adolf Hitler, Beethoven, Mozart, Howard Gardner, Jules Verne, Sigmund Freud, Bill Gates, Kofi Annan, James Joyce, Henry Ford and the like, but famous females were not included so much.

Considering the exclusion as an important aspect of critical discourse analysis, Summit Series excluded both social actors in some passages too. It is a common phenomenon in newspaper texts and political speech. In this way both social actors and their activities and in some cases just the actors involved in actions are excluded. The following examples make the point clear:

Example 3: *Cities will have been built* on the moon by the end of the century (Summit 2B, p. 100).

Example 4: In the future, *appliances will be linked* to each other and to the internet as well (Summit 2B, p. 100).

### Role Allocation (rearrangement)

Role allocation as a discursive structure has a significant role in Critical Discourse Analysis. Van Leeuwen (1996) has discussed the roles allocated to different social actors under “rearrangement”. In this respect, the current study examines the type of roles given to social actors since they were inextricably related, especially considering the nature of actions in relation to which social actors were activated and passivated. The findings of the analysis are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2. Comparison of Male and Female Role Allocation (Passivated)**

Role Allocation	Activated	Subjected	Beneficialized	Total
Male (96.2%)	230 (2.5%)	6 (1.2%)	3	239 (100%)
Female 154	145 (94.1%)	9 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	154 (100%)
Total	375 (95.4%)	15 (3.8%)	3 (0.7%)	393 (100%)

The above Table indicates that in textbooks both males and females as social actors were most frequently activated in activities (96.2 % and 94.1 % respectively) and rarely passivated in subcategory of passivation (3.7 % and 5.8 % respectively). As can be seen, Summit Series activated both social actors in more than (95%) of the cases. This could indicate that the books in questions are prepared for EFL learners whose knowledge of English is supposed to be low or average. That is why the strategy of hiding which needs better linguistic skills, is not accomplished frequently. In order to explore the difference between males and females in Activation a chi-square test was run on the components. The results appear in Table 3 below:

**Table 3. Chi-square Results for Male and Female Activation**

	No	$\chi^2$	df	sig.
Male	230	19.267	1	0.00
Female	145			

As can be seen in Table 3, the activation of male actors is greater than that of females and the difference is statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ). So, it can be concluded that Summit Series represented males as active and dynamic actors in their social context. Activity can be more elucidated by analyzing the verbs in relation to social actors in light of Halliday & Matthiessen’s (2004) transitivity model.

### Transitivity

The main concern of transitivity is to show the activities in which social actors are involved. As Table 4 indicates the analysis of different types of processes revealed that material processes were the most frequent ones (42.1 %) which was followed by mental processes (25.8%), verbal and behavioral processes (13.5% each), relational processes (0.04%) and the least one existential processes (0.008%). (see Table 4).

As it is shown in the Table 4, although both males and females were mostly activated in relation to material processes, the nature and sense of their actions were represented differently. It can be concluded that the books in question appeared to represent male and female actors differently; that is, males are the actors of material processes about (60%) of

the time and females (40%). Furthermore, in mental processes males (65.2%) were more active than females (34.8%).

**Table 4. Transitivity in Representing Male/Female Actors**

Participation	Material process	Mental process	Verbal process	Behavioral process	Relational process	Existential process	Total
Male	93 (60%)	62 (65.2%)	25 (50%)	30 (60%)	10 (66.6%)	2 (66.6%)	218 (60.4%)
Female	62 (40%)	33 (34.8%)	25 (50%)	20 (40%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	143 (39.6%)
Total	155 (100%)	95 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	15 (100%)	3 (100%)	361 (100%)

Males were represented as actors in material processes 93 times while females participated in the process in 62 cases. Moreover, the proportion of mental process referring to males to females was almost 2:1. The Chi-square results in Table 5 show that the difference is statistically significant in both processes.

**Table 5. Chi-square Results for Transitivity Processes in Males and Females**

Participation	Male	Female	$\chi^2$	df	sig.
Material process	93	62	6.200	1	0.013
Mental process	62	33	8.853	1	0.003

Examples below verify the different representation of males and females as actors in material processes. Both males and females were activated in relation to music playing, but they were depicted differently.

Example 5: He's *played* with their band for almost ten years (Summit 1A, p.17).

Example6: Ladysmith Black Mambazo *hasn't been playing* many concerts lately (Summit 1A, p.17).

Example 7: Caetano Veloso *has made* dozens of recordings. (Summit 1A, p.17)

With regard to material processes, Summit Series show the activity of male and female very differently in working, scientific activity, and financial matters:

Example 8: Dan forgot to prepare his report for the sales meeting. He didn't want to admit his mistake, so he decided to make up an excuse (Summit 2A, p. 25).

Example 9: Jane has really poor manners. For example, she never thinks to make up for it when she does something wrong (Summit 2A, p.25).

Moreover, in terms of mental processes, the activation of males was almost twice as much as female activation (65.2%, 34.8% respectively). More to the point, males were more activated in relation to verbs like "think" and "believe" than females. Interestingly, the writers of the book intend to present a gender neutral text. The same phenomenon was demonstrated for both social actors and represented them as the "thinker" of liking something. However, the realization of the same phenomenon has been statistically and linguistically different and the underlying ideology represented in these textbooks reveals something else. Here are some examples:

Example 10: The woman thinks that Peter is a tyrant (Summit 1A, p.6).

Example 11: The man thinks that Paul is a people person (Summit 1A, p.6).

Example 12: Female: I think I'd like to pick up a few souvenirs (Summit 1B, p. 76).

Although the same phenomenon was expressed by both actors, males were activated in relation to actions more than females. Moreover, they had different effects on readers or listeners.

Marginal roles were assigned to women as caregivers at home which shows the traditional role of women represented as housekeepers:

Example 13: Suzy Tanaka say's "I've just opened up my own graphic design business. I'm also a full-time mom. Balancing work and family is really challenging (Summit 1B, p.113).

Example 14: She has to take care of her younger brother because her mother is away on a business trip (Summit 2A, p. 43).

Example 15: Simone Duval is a busy mother and housewife with three young children (Summit 2A, p. 41).

**Substitution**

Social actors are represented through different discursive features under substitution. They are as follows: personalization, impersonalization, functionalization, classification, relational identification, nomination, individualization, assimilation, and association.

Social actors can be either represented as personalization or impersonalization. In the former, they are represented as human beings but in the latter they are not. It can be noticed that male and female social actors are almost always personalized. As two types of impersonalization, abstraction and objectivation, only in three cases males are objectivated. The example below verifies the point further:

Example 16: Verne's great writings deal with contemporary scientific innovation (Summit 2B, p.100).

Concerning Functionalization and Identification as two types of categorization, males and females were not equally functionalized. Out of 108 instances of functionalization, 70 cases referred to male actors and 38 cases to female actors (64.8% and 35.1% of the total respectively).

From Table 6, Summit Series functionalized ordinary females more often, mostly in terms of their occupation as low-status jobs (take caring of the children, take away the dishes and washing them) than males. Out of 25 low-status jobs, 16(64%)belonged to females and 9 (36%)to males. On the contrary, as high status persons, ordinary male actors were more functionalized as professors, authors and lawyers. Out of 30 high-status jobs, 20 (66.6%) belonged to males; whereas females functionalized as having high-status jobs 10 times (33.3%). Moreover, Chi-Square results indicate that the difference is statistically significant (p< 0.05).

**Table 6. Functionalization of Ordinary Male and Female Social Actors**

	High-status job	Low-status job	Total
Ordinary male	20	9	29
Ordinary female	10	16	26
Total	30	25	55

$\chi^2=5.145$  ,  $df=1$  ,  $p=0.023$

As can be seen in Table 7, famous males and females were functionalized differently too. The proportion of functionalization referring to famous males to famous females was almost 3:1. The difference is statistically significant ( $p=0.00$ ).

**Table 7. Functionalization of Famous Male and Female Social Actors**

	No	$\chi^2$	df	sig.
Male	35	13.889	1	0.00
Female	10			

The different functionalization of male and female social actors indicates that females were not associated with high-status activities. Stated in another way, although females were not shown as housewives, only very few instances of functionalization of females concerned high-status jobs. The underlying ideology of such a representation ensures the construction of a male-dominant society.

In the case of classification, males were mostly classified in terms of age, provenance and gender than females (69.6 % and 30.3 % respectively). Males were classified by provenance in 15 cases, by age in 4 cases and also by gender in 4 cases. Here are some examples:

Example 17: Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher, wasn't fully recognized and honored until after his death (Summit 2B, p.85).

Example 18: Born in 1770, Germany, Ludwig Van Beethoven started playing the piano before he was four years old (Summit 1A, p.20).

Considering relational identification in terms of their kinship and personal relations, both males and females were rather equally identified in terms of their kinship, personal, or work relations to each other (45.8% and 54.1% respectively). So, the difference was not statistically significant. The relational identification of both social actors indicates that there was no mutual dependency to either of the social actors.

Example 19: She and her husband, anthropologist Kim Hill, has been educating people about the influence of biology and ecology on human life (Summit 2A, p.7).

Example 20: Leakey told her wife the research might take ten years (Summit 2A, p.8).

As Van Leeuwen (1996) considered nomination as one of the important factors in representing social actors. According to Table 8, out of 214 instances of nominations 123 cases (including 22 formal, 62 semiformal, and 39 informal) refer to males and 91 cases (including 15 formal, 33 semiformal, and 43 informal) refer to females. Moreover, in 11 cases the males and in 10 cases the females had titles, mostly "Mr." and "Mrs." In this respect males and females were equal and the difference was not statistically significant.

**Table 8. Types of Nomination**

Nomination	Mal	Female	Total	$\chi^2$	df	sig.
Formalization	22	15	37	1.3241	1	0.250
Informalization	39	43	82	0.1591	1	0.659
Semi formalization	62	33	95	8.8531	1	0.003
Total	123	91	214	4.785	1	0.029

From Table 8, male social actors are more frequently nominated in semi-formalization than females (65.2% and 34.8% respectively). Clearly, as the Table shows, the difference is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). More to the point, Summit Series nominated famous males more than famous females (57.4% and 42.5% respectively). The underlying ideology of nomination shows that male actors were represented as unique and independent characters.

With regard to individualization and assimilation, both social actors can be individualized and assimilated. In other words, social actors can be referred to as individuals or as groups. From Table 9, Summit Series textbooks tend to individualize famous male actors more frequently than female actors (78.8% and 21.2% respectively). Put another way, elite male actors were more frequently represented as specific, identifiable individuals than elite females. As can be seen in Table 9, the Chi-square results show that the difference is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 9. Individualization of Famous Social Actors**

Individualization	No	$\chi^2$	df	sig.
Famous male	63(78.8%)	26.450	1	0.00
Famous female	17(21.2%)			

It can be concluded that the individuality of elite male actors has been emphasized and also they are referred to as more independent individuals than elite females.

Both social actors were represented in two forms of assimilation, that is, aggregation and collectivization. The former treats social actors as statistic, but the latter does not. Here are the examples of aggregation:

Example 21: In China today, the elderly make up about 11 percent of the population (Summit 1B, p.94).

Example 22: It might not surprise you to read that 75 percent of women in the United States think that they are "too fat" (Summit 1A, p.46).

Collectivization was also frequently used:

Example 23: It seems like there's a lot more rebellious among teenagers today (Summit 1B, p.97).

Example 24: Parents should include their children in family decision-making (Summit 1B, p.91).

And also association, groups of social actors, either generically or specifically was also common:

Example 25: Rodney and Carolyn believe parents don't need to be so concerned about their children (Summit 1B, p.97)

## CONCLUSION

The one element of CDA by which it is differentiated from other forms of discourse analysis lies in its attribute of 'critical'. "Critical 'implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 9). It is important to expose the hidden things, since they are not evident for the individuals involved, and, because of this, they cannot be fought against. So, among different approaches to CDA, Van Leeuwen's

framework (1996) was utilized to analyze Summit Series textbooks. The employed model comprises various discursive features to analyze and determine the ways social actors are represented through the texts. Based on the analysis, the discursive structures such as deletion, role allocation and substitutions provided a distinct representation of social actors in the textbooks. As Van Leeuwen (1996) maintains that since the represented ideas or actors are not easily approachable, the CDA works through to uncover the intended or hidden messages. Then the presented ideas or events may be invisible and have some social outcomes. The proponents of CDA believe that the ways social actors are represented in the media including textbooks contribute to gender-role differentiation and gender inequality in society.

From the findings of the analysis of Summit Series textbooks, the different representations of both social actors were revealed in some discursive features. On the surface, Summit Series reflected female actors as active social actors but the underlying ideologies uncovered through the application of CDA proved to be different. Such representations indicated that Summit Series represented female actors as less crucial to social functions than male actors. Belonging to more ordinary jobs, female actors did not play more central roles in society. More to the point, a female subordination can be implicitly understood from the textbooks. This analysis suggests that there may be some powerful and profound strategies to see such differences as well as underlying ideologies. Since at first sight the norms and values which underlie texts cannot be understood, it is the aim of Critical Discourse Analysis to make these ideological systems and representations clear and display their relations to the broader social order. In this sense, Van Dijk (1998, p. 17), essentially perceives discourse analysis as ideology analysis, because according to him, “ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies”. Therefore, It is worth noting that the most common use of textbooks is to convey certain types of knowledge to learners, they are also considered as effective means of constructing social members’ identities and also imposing certain normative identities on its members. So, a critical analysis needs to investigate such effects which are imposed on learners and they accept the messages reflected in particular texts without any resistance.

One of the most central and pervasive concepts in conveying ideologies is power which is concerned with the group or persons who have the capability to use linguistic means for proper disputation. But, some powers are observed to be more powerful than others. In this case, the dominant groups with having this ideology feel superiority over others. Then, the power relations and its inherent ideology is exercised and reinforced through text and talk with the aim of shaping people’s unconscious thought. So, fundamental to the development and use of CDA is being able to identify and explore such issues as gender, hidden ideology, identity, and power structures and their reflection in particular texts. Moreover, to expose and unmask the social inequality which is stated through the language, such analyses can also provide a wealth of additional information, including insights into both the curriculum developer and the teachers to interpret and respond to the propositional content of discourse. In this way, learners find out how to read critically and understand the underlying ideological structures of the texts and comprehend better. As a matter of fact, CDA can provide language practitioners with new perspectives and attitudes towards language by delineating the problematic and questionable nature of language use, and its underlying social and ideological processes. At a more practical level, CDA can be capitalized on as a means for critically analyzing the type of instructional materials that are chosen for teaching and learning a given language throughout different instructional settings. This possibility requires language teachers to assume an educational undertaking besides imparting sheer linguistic

knowledge to their learners and work more toward developing their learners and their own critical thinking capacities.

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