Nawar Golley and Aisha Sayidina

The Power of Discourse: Uncovering the Ideology of Gender Representations in Saudi Media

Abstract:

The investigators assume that the representation of women in official newspapers in Saudi Arabia parallel the current political process towards gender equity in the country. To ascertain this hypothesis, the project examines the linguistic representation of women in current official newspaper stories in comparison to representations of women in the same or similar media from the 1990s, the decade that preceded the beginnings of recent changes regarding women’s rights in the country. The analysis of these representation will reveal the ideology behind them. The project is interdisciplinary as it combines linguistic, media and gender studies. Relying on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which investigates the relationship between power, ideology, discourse and gender, the project applies Transitivity Analysis, a system within Systemic Functional Linguistics which contends that language performs social functions that can be understood by examining the linguistic system. Transitivity Analysis starts with the clause. Sentence in the news stories will be parsed at the clause level and analyzed in terms of their functional components, namely, Processes, Participants and Circumstances. Transitivity Analysis, the analysis of the three functional categories will reveal the choices made to enact a social function. At a second level, using the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, the interpretation of the choices in each clause will disclose the ideology behind the news story. As Saudi Arabia slowly opens up to debates on women’s rights, the project is significant because it deals with an important topic that governs the lives of women and men in a country that is witnessing great shifts in its present reality. The project is timely as it examines whether the ideology behind current official media representations of women correlates with the current positive legal and political endeavors regarding women in Saudi Arabia. The project is also significant as it deals with timely issues in an under-researched region.