

Multimodality in Literary Text
Lecture 7
Representing People: Language and Identity
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Learning objective

At the end of this meeting, you are expected to understand:

1. Representational strategies in language
2. Ten classifications of social actors

This lecture ten will be mainly sourced from the book Machin and Mayr entitled “How to Do CDA” in 2012. However additional references will be added from other books and journal articles. Examples will be made based on the topic discussed or taken from any reliable sources.

In this lecture seven, naming persons and visual representation of persons will be discussed. The persons who communicate has the rights to decide how they want to represent the other people or groups, just like the choices to use any linguistic and visual semiotic resources. In CDA, the represented people are usually called social actors or participants. Meanwhile, the semiotic resources are called representational strategies (Machin and Mayr, 2012). These semiotic resources help to define individuals’ positions in the society and emphasize certain aspects of their identity, while concealing or hiding the others. Similar to word and image choices in general, these strategies can hint at specific ideas, values, and sequences of actions that might not be explicitly stated. Therefore, this lecture will discuss about representing people through linguistic resources in discourse.

A. Representational Strategies in Language

There is actually no neutral language to represent someone because the choice to represent someone will lead to certain aspects of identity which will be associated with certain discourses. See the following example:

**Breaking the silence on Muslim men suffering
with mental health issues**

By Zena Chamas

Posted Sun 4 Sep 2022 at 2:19am, updated Sun 4 Sep 2022 at 7:36am

Figure 1 (Chamas, 2022, ABC News)

One of the readers’ attentions will go to ‘Muslim men’ when reading this kind of headline. Actually, there are many other ways to characterize the man. It could be an old man, a young man, an Indonesian man, a

local citizen, or even we can mention his name clearly instead of characterizing him into a certain label. However, Reisigl and Wodak said that each label above can represent either psychological, social, or political purposes for the writer and reader (2001 in Machin and Mayr, 2012).

If we change the above example into this one:

Breaking the silence on **unemployed men** suffering with mental health issues.

Second example above clearly shows different meaning compared to the first example. The first headline creates a frame to emphasize the 'otherness' of the man, as he is part of a problematic community. Also, the plural 'men' indicates that there are number of people dealing with the same situation. According to the news, there is a cultural stigma in Australia about men and mental health in the Muslim community. It is because these Muslim men who have been the victim of terrorism overseas, come to Australia and have been called a terrorist because they are Muslim, and denigrated and abused in public and at work. Annas Davids, one of the Muslim men with the mental health issue, said "I had people tell me that I should 'man up' or that I needed to pray more because my faith was low." Meanwhile, the second modified example, show a sense of humanizing the man as an employed person. This gives an opposite effect compared to the first one. Readers will be able to understand the man's situation. It is accepted that his unemployment that causes him to be suffered with mental health issue.

Van Dijk (2013), in his writing about Ideology and Discourse, stated about '**context model**' in discourse. It refers to how the language is written in a certain way to frame or shape a certain meaning about events, environments, and people. The choice of language in representing people serves its ideas and values in which the person is embedded to a certain identity that represent them. The identity of the represented people in a discourse relates with the events people talk about or to the environment people currently engaged. This context model becomes a crucial part in the media production. For example, a 20-year-old male can be mentioned as young man or adult, or, as student or employee, depends on the context of the discourse written. Each choice of these representing people would bring different interpretations to the readers or viewers.

For example:

A young man hangs out to a brand-new club downtown.

A student hangs out to a brand-new club downtown.

The participant in the above examples is the same, a 20-year-old male. The choice of language in representing him defines society perception about what they do. Readers can focus more on their representation, either as a young man or student, and socially interpreted whether it is okay for him to go to a club. Of course, 'a student' who goes to club can create a bad perception to his image as a student, no matter how old he is. On the other hand, 'a young man' sounds more general and neutral in which he is free to go to the club.

B. Classification of Social Actors

Van Leeuwen (2003) elaborated the representation of social actors in discourse which he summarized in a system network chart as we can see in figure 2 below.

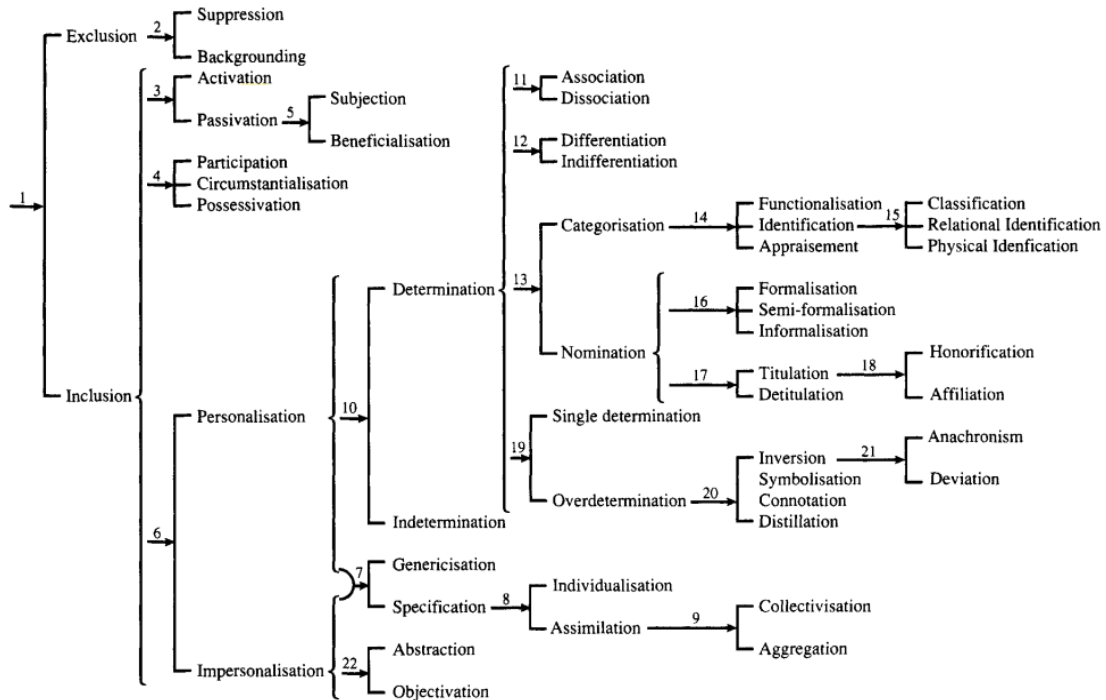


Figure 2 (Van Leeuwen, T. in Coulthard C.R.C., Coulthard, M., 2003)

From the idea above, Machin and Mayr (2012) made a comprehensive explanation about these classifications which they divided into ten. Along with the ways to classify people and the effects they may have, there will be examples made or taken from the literary works.

1. Personalization and Impersonalization

United States

United States tells citizens: Leave Russia immediately

Figure 3 (Faulconbridge, 2023, Reuters)

The news headline above is an example of impersonalization. It is a news written by Guy Faulconbridge in reuters.com. From this headline, it is seen that impersonalization is used to

emphasize a statement by attributing it to a country than individual. Instead of stating a participant (or more) who needs something, it is framed as if the entire country requires it. This impersonalization sentence tries to conceal certain issues. This article is written due to the war in Ukraine and the risk of arbitrary arrest or harassment by Russian law enforcement agencies to several US citizens. However, the whole article does not reveal the exact actor or participant who authorize it. It is represented by the US Embassy which stated:

"Russian security services have arrested U.S. citizens on spurious charges, singled out U.S. citizens in Russia for detention and harassment, denied them fair and transparent treatment, and convicted them in secret trials or without presenting credible evidence," **the embassy said.**

(Falconbridge, 2023, Reuters)

The change of US into US Embassy does not change it into personalization because it still does not specifically refer to a certain authorized person. To make it as personalization we have to change it into, let's say, "**US Minister of Foreign Affairs** tells citizens: leave Russia Immediately." Stating a specific person shows the transparency of who is responsible for the action. There is nothing to conceal.

2. Individualization and Collectivization

JAKARTAGLOBE

Police General Ferdy Sambo Charged with Ordering Murder of Subordinate

Figure 4 (Aulia, 2022, Jakarta Globe)

In representing the social actor, it also important to consider if the actor is portrayed as an individual or as part of a certain group or community. The above headline shows the definition of individualization because it mentioned the police's name. Starting from his status as a police general then his full name. If the sentence only mentions, for example "senior police officer" then it becomes very general which could refer to anyone.

The sentence can be modified into this one too, "Police general Ferdy Sambo, a former Head of the National Police's professional and security division, charged with ordering murder of subordinate." Eventhough the sentence becomes longer, but it serves a different effect to the readers. The focus is not only to Ferdy Sambo as an individual suspect but also his previous position. The reader can interpret that his former position could give him more access and power to murder his subordinate. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention which actor is individualized and which one is collectivised in a discourse to see what it is trying to emphasize.

3. Specification and Generization

Similar with the previous social actor classification, this part also differentiates between a specific individual and a generic type. Mentioning a clear name means showing the specific individual. On the other hand, the person can also be identified as a certain type. Here is the example:

A man, **Mazar Hussein**, challenged a policeman today.

A black man challenged a policeman today.

The man is associated as part of a black community in the second sentence. He is represented to a certain type. It can be also assumed that the police is a white because only the actor is mentioned as a black. This generic label of 'black' could lead to a racist interpretation. It generalizes the rebellious attitude of black community toward the law enforcement.

4. Nomination and Functionalization

Social actor in a discourse can be presented not only as individual, but also how they function based on their role in the society. For example:



North Korea tells South Korean president to 'shut his mouth' after offer of aid

Figure 5 (Roh, 2022, Reuters)

The representation of country in the above statement brings huge effect, as well as unclear effect. It is not specifically mentioned who the social actor is. By using the functionalization, the sentence appears to be more official, while the nomination is more personal. Functionalization can decrease or even hide the actor's responsibility to his or her action as it is shown to be more legitimate (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

To see the real social actor of the above headline, we have to read the full article that stated "North Korea's **Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un**, said on Friday South Korea's president should "shut his mouth" after he reiterated that his country was willing to provide economic aid in return for nuclear disarmament." The journalist declares Kim Yo Jong's role as a powerful sister of the North Korea's president. She is described to have more power than the president itself. The way the journalist mentioned the country instead of her name in headline, serves as if she is protected and supported by the country to make such kind of statement. Here we can see what is being concealed in the headline.

5. Use of Honorifics

Similar with functionalization above, the use of 'functional honorifics' can also be used to define the representation of social actor through what they do. The terms used suggest the degree of seniority that requires respect and honor. Usually, it refers to the official position, such as President, Judge, or Minister. The use of honorifics emphasizes the importance of the social actors and their capacity.

For example:

A government spokesperson said yesterday that there was no official involvement in the affair.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs said yesterday that there was no official involvement in the affair.

The use of functional honorifics in the second sentence makes the person appear to be more official and authoritative. Her level of authority is automatically lower by changing the honorifics which makes her appear to be more general as stated in the first sentence.

6. Objectivation

Machin and Mayr (2012) said in Objectivation, the social actors are represented through features. In Indonesia we have '*kupu-kupu malam*' term which is associated to a female commercial sex worker. This term cannot be associated to male. By using this objectivation, the social actors are reduced to this feature. Many articles in mass media use this term when they write about prostitution. The term '*cantik*' or beautiful in Indonesia refers to a certain society standard. *Cantik* in Indonesian version might be described differently from *cantik* in other countries. Standard of beauty is identified by long black hair, long neck, sensual lips, body fragrant, white-toned-smooth-skin, and slim body (Julian, 2016). In this case, a physical appearance of woman defines her womanhood and who she is. This definition matters a lot in the social society in Indonesia. Van Dijk explains that this implies moral judgments can be associated with what society considers appropriate behavior for women, as opposed to men (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

7. Anonymization

Social actors can be anonymized in text as usually happen in mass media. For example:

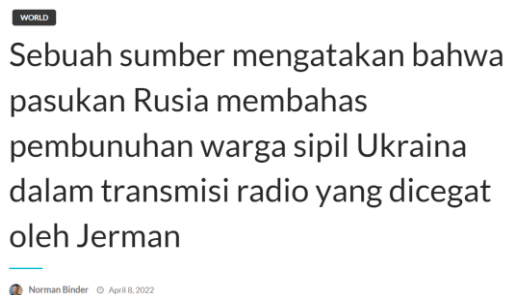


Figure 6 (Binder, 2022, Kabartotabuan)

Taktik Rusia bantah kekejaman terhadap warga sipil Ukraina: 'Ini dilakukan profesional, mungkin oleh Inggris'

Jenny Hill
BBC News, Moscow
8 April 2022

Figure 7 (Hill, 2022, BBC News)

The above two headlines are taken from Indonesian news media websites. Here are the English translations:

Figure 6: A source said that Russian troops discussed killing Ukrainian civilians in radio transmissions intercepted by Germany.

Figure 7: Russian tactics deny atrocities against Ukrainian civilians: 'this was probably done by professionals, perhaps by the British.'

The phrase '*sebuah sumber*' in figure 6 means 'a source.' As stated by Machin and Mayr, that 'a source' frequently used in mass media when the journalist wants to conceal the social actors even though they have the details of official sources. It usually refers to certain organization, institution, or community. Meanwhile the word '*profesional*' in figure 7 means 'professional.' Through such representation, the informants can avoid providing specific details while they are constructing a comprehensive argument. This allows them to easily introduce arguments that can subsequently be easily dismissed due to the unclearness identity.

8. Aggregation

Aggregation means that the social actors are represented in **numerical statistics** (Van Dijk, 2013). Aggregation is significant in various contexts, especially because our society works based on the principle of majority rule. We often find it in various democratic processes such as opinion polls, surveys, and marketing research. In mass media, the use of aggregation can also intend to exaggerate or minimize the effect. As a result, it is frequently employed to shape practices and create consensus. It is concealing the facts by appearing to be as neutral as possible.

For example:

Iran protests: BBC identifies many more people killed in demonstrations after Mahsa Amini's death

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Figure 8 (Owen, L., et al., 2022, BBC News)

France protests: More than 100 police hurt in May Day demonstrations

© 1 May

Figure 9 (Greenall, May, BBC News)

The above two headlines are taken from BBC News. The phrases 'many more people' and 'more than 100 police' are the examples of how mass media use aggregation in the news articles. The journalist tries to give an objective impression based on the credible statistical calculation. In fact those phrases do not state the specific data on those headlines, unless we refer to the full article. 'Many more' in figure 8 can be interpreted as dozens, tens, hundreds, or even thousands. 'More than 100 police' in figure 9 is also not specific. 101 as well as 1000 are both more than 100 but of course they show a big gap. Readers might criticize why the specific numbers not mentioned in the text? What or who is the text trying to conceal? In these kinds of cases where aggregation involved,

where the real social actors are substituted with such abstract representations, we can always question about the ideological purpose behind it.

9. Pronoun and Noun

The use of pronouns in the text, such as: we, our, us, and them, are employed to associate the readers with or set the readers against certain idea. That kind of texts can make their own notions appear as if they are shared by us and establish a collective “other” opposing these common ideas (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

For example:

*“Mari **kita** teruskan perjuangan Bung Karno di era yang lebih modern ini.”*

*“Kenaikan harga BBM ini tidak adil untuk **mereka** yang berpenghasilan UMR.”*

*“Program MBKM ini akan membawa manfaat yang baik bagi **kalian** para mahasiswa di seluruh Indonesia.”*

Fairclough in Machin and Mayr (2012) pointed out that the use of ‘we’ can be biased. Journalist, editors, and even politicians use this term as which make the statement unclear and hide the power relations in it. Who does ‘we’ refer to? To themselves and their community? Are the other participants really included? The social actor can be included and excluded in these pronouns. The use of pronouns can also define the first three classifications of social actors we have discussed earlier (personalization-impersonalization, individualization-collectivization, specification-genericization).

10. Suppression

The last classification of social actor is called suppression. Literally, suppression means *penekanan* in Indonesian. Fairclough (2003) once said that **what is concealed in a text could be as important or even more important that what is shown**. Please refer to the nominalization in the following sentences:

Globalization is now affecting all national economies. (Machin and Mayr, 2012)

Wildlife Protection helps species thrive in Europe. (BBC News, 2022)

The nominalization of ‘globalization’ and ‘wildlife protection’ conceals the agent. Globalization has no power to change things, rather, it is a theory aiming to explain an observed process or phenomenon caused by certain social actors. This process is primarily driven by major corporations and global economic organizations such as WTO and World Bank (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Consequently, this portrayal makes globalization seem like a natural and unavoidable occurrence. Something to be accommodated and adjusted, instead of something to be questioned.

Summary and Conclusion

In this lecture, we have discussed how people are named and represented. When communicators represent a person, they have various ways to do so. However, the ways are never neutral. The choices are based on how the communicator wants to show what kind of person they are representing and how they want to depict them as social actors taking part in activities. These choices help us position individuals in the social world and emphasize particular aspects of their identity while leaving out others. Just like general lexical and visual choices, these decisions can suggest certain ideas, values, and sequences of actions that might not be explicitly mentioned. Whether through language or visuals, these choices also position those being represented in relation to the audience. These choices can implicitly validate or invalidate the actions of participants because representational choices imply broader associations of ideas, values, and motives. In society, certain types of classifications tend to dominate at any given time, and those in power will try to promote the classifications that serve their interests best, whether related to national or ethnic identity or consumer lifestyle categories. We must also carefully consider how linguistic and visual representations of social actors relate to each other.

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Sources of Figures:

Figure 1

Chamas, Z., (2022). Breaking the silence on Muslim men suffering with mental health issues. Abcnews

Figure 2

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

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Figure 5

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Figure 6

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Figure 8

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Figure 9

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Figure 10

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