

Multimodality in Literary Text
Lecture 9
Concealing and Taking for Granted: Nominalization and Presupposition
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Learning objective

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

1. Theory and practice of nominalization
2. Eight effects of nominalization
3. Theory and Practice of presupposition

This lecture eight 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 relatable sources.

This lecture is focusing on **concealment through two linguistic strategies**, which are: nominalization and presupposition. Simply explained, **nominalization** is to replace the verb process into a noun construction. This strategy can vague the agency and its action’s responsibility, including what and when it actually happened. **Presupposition** is they way authors convey meanings without stating them clearly, or present things as taken for granted and stable, while actually the fact is they can be ideological and contestable.

A. Theory and Practice of Nominalization

In the previous chapter about the representation of social action, it was discussed about the use of passive verbs to conceal the agents or participants. Let me refresh you with this example:

The New York Times
***2 Police Officers Killed in Connecticut
After a Suspicious 911 Call***

Figure 1 (Gold, M., et al., 2022)

The above headline is written in passive form. The actor who is responsible for the killing action is backgrounded as it is not overtly mentioned, it is just completely left out from the sentence. If the sentence wants to explicitly mention the actor, then it has to be modified into an active form. The active form would reveal the actor, for example:

“The black civilians killed 2 police officers in Connecticut.”

Here “the black civilians” are the actors who are represented by “killed” as the active material process, and “2 police officers” are the goal of the action.

Therefore, the use of passive verb can be utilized for backgrounding who is doing the action represented by verbal processes. Here is another example:

“New regulation of student tuition fee **has been decided and implemented.**”

The actors who decide and implement the regulation are not clearly stated with the above passive verb. The actors avoid to instead stating:

“**We have decided and implemented** the new regulation of student tuition fee.”

Furthermore, concealing the actor is not only by changing active to passive, it can also be done through nominalization. It is where a verb process is converted into a noun construction, which can even show the intention of ambiguity. Getting back to the previous headline, if it is changed into a nominalization then it would appear like this:

“**The killing** of 2 policeman after a suspicious 911 call.”

In this case, all sense of agency is removed as the act of killing is represented in nominalization. In the active form, the agent was revealed that it is the black civilians. In the passive form, there is possibility to also reveal the agent but background as it is placed at the back of the sentence. It could be also left out completely as stated in the news headline, no agent is mentioned. Lastly, in the normalization form, the one responsible for the killing becomes even more abstract and unclear than the passive form. Not only the agent is concealed, but the time, the place, and other important information are concealed as well.

Machin and Mayr (2012), give illustrations to show the significant difference between passive verbs and nouns:

“**The global economy was changed**” and “**The changed global economy**”

In this case, we notice a crucial difference between merely taking out the agent or actor and using nominalization. The first sentence uses a passive verb to hide who caused the change in the global economy, while the second turns it into a noun, simply like a thing. It does not suggest it was changed by someone; it just says it changed. For instance, “globalization” is often turned into a noun even though it is actually a process. This can make it seem like an indisputable fact rather than the outcome of political choices. Fairclough in Machin and Mayr (2012) highlights that in such structures, we do not specify who or what is causing the change. It puts less emphasis on how the changes happen (backgrounded) and more on what results from them (Foregrounded). By downplaying the processes, nominalization also makes us pay less attention to who or what is responsible for making these changes.

As CDA learners, it is important for us to evaluate the discourse which is presented as a thing occurs, rather than a process. Politicians, in their speeches, often mention “the changed global economy” to describe how

life is now changing in many ways. Yet somehow, they present it to hide the fact that they contribute to this changing process as well. They play a role in the decision making of global economy which affects so many people's life. The global economy we see today has come about intentionally because certain individuals and groups have pushed for it to serve their interests. The term 'the changed global economy' simplifies what this truly represents – a world economy where big companies expand into new markets to benefit from cheaper manpower costs and resources while leveraging their existing advantages in size and efficiency (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

To sum up, from the above explanation and examples, nominalization can be ideologically important. A text may provide participants who are responsible for the actions and the circumstances. There are also participants who are presented as they have no authority to act. On the other hand, by representing processes as things, the participants are instantly omitted. Therefore, the use of nominalization, which changing a verb into noun, can carry effects to the text interpretation itself. Machin and Mayr (2012) elaborated eight effects of nominalization which will be described one by one.

B. Effects of Nominalization

1. Removing the responsibility of the action

The first effect clarifies that when people and responsibilities are removed, it simply allows the event to occur (Machin and Mayr, 2012). It can be seen through the following example: "She was sad about **the loss** of the house's key". In this case, the 'she' is the agent responsible for keeping the house key, but eventually, she loses it. By changing the process of 'she lost the key' into 'the loss', it is interpreted that she refuses to admit that she lost the key. It simply means that the removal of her responsibility is occurring.

2. Hiding the affected parties and things

The second effect, in which the agent and the affected are hidden, is applied to gloss the agent who takes the action (initiator) and who are the affected parties as a result of the agent's action (Machin and Mayr, 2012). This process means that both details of the agency and process are concealed (Fairclough, 2015). For instance, in "**The strike** against the decrease of wages", the noun 'the strike' acts as the subject of the sentence to gloss the agent of the action. Moreover, the affected of the action is also hidden as it is not mentioned in the sentence, which can be written as "The workers who are striking caused the traffic jam for hours."

3. Removing the setting of time

The third is that the sense of time is removed. This process clarifies that the use of time (when, how) is avoided. The following illustration says "The School Principal (SP) declined a call from the School Committee (SC) in order to discuss **the increase of tuition fee**". In this case, the reader is only presented with the event's details such as the action, rather than showing all sense of time. As can be seen, there is no specific time in the sentence, such as when the SP declined the call, or when the exact time decision was made by the SC. Yet, the sentence is shown with the action and event's details (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

4. **Setting aside the causality**

The fourth effect is the situation in which the action becomes a thing. In this case, the changing of action into a thing makes it can be counted, described, and classified. Linguistically, it is the process of shifting verbs into particular nouns to indicate action and process (Fairclough, 2013). A comparison of these two sentences would be the illustration:

“The student **fails** to submit the assignment on time”

“The regretful **failure** to submit the assignment on time”

Here, the word ‘fail’ is converted into ‘failure’ in which the responsibility and the fault of the student is set aside. Moreover, in the second sentence, an adjective is added in order to show the weight of regret and express the students’ apology without involving the fault.

5. **Appearing new participants in new constructions**

Nominalization also can function as a new participant in new constructions by changing the process into a participant. The illustration can be seen from the following sentence, mentioned by Machin and Mayr (2012):

“The Vice President stated that the demonstration regrettably caused disruption to the education”

“Demonstrations over the past month have caused extensive disruption to education”

The word ‘Demonstration’ in the first sentence, which stands as a process, becomes an agent or a new participant in the second sentence in new construction. This effect occurs to make a strong defense against the parties who have strong credit in the process of the demonstration itself.

6. **Occurring as stable entities**

Align with that, the use of nominalization itself has become common usage as stable entities that convert the process into a noun (Fairclough, 2015). For instance, the term ‘globalization’ has become a stable entity in society as it is commonly understood and accepted as a noun rather than the process of growing interdependence among the world’s economies, cultures, and populations (Kolb, 2022). As in the sentence “**Globalization** is a good opportunity for us to improve our skills” (Machin and Mayr, 2012), the initial process is consequently forgotten and replaced by nominalization.

7. **Accumulating the action through simplification**

Furthermore, in the process of nominalization, the agent is avoided while accumulating a sense of action in the text. In this case, the action is explained in more detail to deceive the reader’s point of view. Additionally, Machin and Mayr (2012) stated that this effect can be an excellent strategy to create a catchy headline. As an illustration, mentioned by Machin and Mayr (2012), the phrase “An **instant blitz**” emphasizes the action ‘blitz’ by adding the noun ‘instant’ in order to bring out the decisiveness of the action to the reader instead of the actor itself.

8. **Becoming a compressed text**

Lastly, nominalization is employed to reduce the story's details which the text becomes more dense or compressed and the reader is presented with an abstract story. One of the ways to reduce the

story is by omitting the actor, the process, or even the time (Billig, 2008), which is also emphasized in the second and the third effects. As an example, it is shown by the BBC News headline “Luxury hotel's 'monstrous' solar farm plan rejected” (Trehwela, 2023) in which the time when the offer was rejected, the actor who offered the plan and the actor who rejected are glossed. Precisely, it encourages the reader to go deeply into the complete version of the story.

C. Theory and Practice of Presupposition

Presupposition is **about the assumed meanings in a text, what we consider as given or already known** (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Essentially, the use of language has presuppositions. For instance, in the sentence “the bag is heavy,” that I declare, I assume that you understand what ‘a bag’ is and what ‘heavy’ means. In analyzing texts, it is important to identify these assumed meanings that are presented as something already known, even though it could be debatable as well. The way we produce or absorb a text is a matter of subconscious. We do not always check what it means, is there any hidden meaning or not, why it is written that way, and other critical question about discourse. Sometimes we could be aware of any differences appear in text, something different than the common practice. Naturally, people use presuppositions to refer to the common knowledge. It is not normally used like this: ‘I will put this in my bag. What I mean by a bag is ...’ because we all have the basic common knowledge of what bag is. Unless, the speaker refers to a certain type of bag that not everyone familiar with.

In some cases, especially the cases we discussed in this lecture, the things presented as common knowledge are tightly connected to certain beliefs or ideologies. The common knowledge means things that does not require any further explanation. There have been couple times of discussions that language is employed to foreground certain things while background the others. Therefore, analyzing what a text assumes as ‘the known’ can be revealing and enlightening. It helps the readers or viewers to understand what the text takes for granted.

We can take the example of presupposition from the political situation that currently happen in Indonesia. Since 2024, next year, will be the national election year for Indonesia, the vibe has been started from the end of this year. From this current political there is a term “political dynasty” occurs. In Indonesian, we call it “politik *dinasti*”. According to the official website of Indonesian Constitutional Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*), political dynasty is about the political power exercised by a group of people who are related by family ties. Related to presupposition, this term “political dynasty” has now become a common knowledge in Indonesia when people talk about Jokowi and his family. Jokowi, the president of Indonesia, is said to be building a political dynasty with his children and son-in-law. There are many digital media publish this news, such as:

1. Jokowi and Political Dynasties **Through Their Children** (voi.id, 2019)
2. What political dynasty? Jokowi’s **son-in-law** says bid for Medan mayor is for development (thejakartapost.com, 2019)
3. Could Jokowi’s Family Become Indonesia’s **Newest Political Dynasty?** (thediplomat.com, 2020)
4. ‘You Can Vote against Me’: Jokowi’s Son Responds to **Political Dynasty Allegation** (jakartaglobe.id, 2020)

5. Jokowi political dynasty: Kaesang **hints** at political ambitions (thejakartapost.com, 2023)
6. What It means for Indonesia's Democracy That the **President's Son** Now **Leads Another Party** (time.com, 2023)
7. Indonesian president **brushes** off talk of political dynasty (reuters, 2023)

Sources of the above news headlines are attached at the end of this lecture notes.

In their book, Machin and Mayr (2012) stated that presupposition is used to create certain ideologies in order to direct to certain interests. It can also be used to build a basic logical argument in the society by serving the text as it illustrates what is to be known or to be shared. Finally, the presupposition in text is no longer just a public opinion but unconsciously accepted as a given knowledge.

The above seven news headlines give a systematic presupposition's thread of "political dynasty" of Jokowi's family. Each number serves its own key words(s) that is related to political dynasty which taken from year 2019 to 2023.

1. This first article shows the first stage of public assumptions that Jokowi is building a political assumption through his son (Gibran) and son-in-law (Bobby) involvement in 2020 regional elections (*pilkada*). The phrase "... **Through Their Children**" is the presupposition. Public knows that it refers to Gibran and Bobby which has been a common knowledge in Indonesia, especially those who are political enthusiast.
2. The second article shows the second stage which is also related to the first one. The phrase "... **son-in-law**" is the presupposition that every knows it refers to Bobby Nasution, the one and only son-in-law of Jokowi. Without mentioning name in the headline, people know it is talking about Bobby. He is registering himself in the 2022 regional election to be the mayor of Medan, Sumatera Utara.
3. The phrase "... **Newest Political Dynasty**" indicates that this is not the first time, there was a previous one. It recalls the readers to the previous presidential period where the family members also existed in government positions. This is also a form of presupposition as shown in the third article.
4. The fourth article shows the respond of Jokowi's son to the political dynasty issue as the headlined stated "... **Political Dynasty Allegation.**" This also becomes the public's assumption. As the issue spreading in the society, readers can predict how Jokowi's family would respond to it. In their own way, with their own choice of discourse, they would reject the political dynasty's issue. Rather, they would try to convince public that their desire to become regional officials is for the development of the region, not for their own personal interest.
5. From the 2020 regional election, we move forward to 2023. There was an issue in early 2023 that Jokowi's youngest son, Kaesang, is planning to also dive into a political career. The word "**hints**" in this headline becomes a keyword as well as a clue to the readers. It brings free assumptions of public about where and what he will be joining. Furthermore, the "**political ambitions**" is also a presupposition term which brings back the attempt of Jokowi to build a political dynasty within his family.
6. The presuppositions in the sixth headline are shown in two parts. First is "**President's Son**" which refers to his youngest son, Kaesang and the second is "**Leads Another Party**" which refers to an

Indonesian party named Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI/ *Partai Solidaritas Indonesia*). In September 2023, it was declared that Kaesang becomes the chairman of PSI. A lot of people are questioning his capacity to be the leader of this party.

The article journalist even introduced Kaesang with the irrelevant identity to his chairman position which implicitly reflects his incapability and how he is well-known in public.

“... Kaesang Pangarep, a 28-year-old prolific YouTuber and the youngest son of Indonesian President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo...”

7. The last headline shows the presupposition through the term “**brushes**” which I think has the similar interpretation as headline number 4. What makes it different is because now it comes out from the mouth of Jokowi’s himself. After all the issues of political dynasty came out from 2019, he finally made a statement in 2023 at the end of his presidential period. According to the article Jokowi brushes the issue by stating that Indonesian citizens have the rights to choose their future leader. “Just leave it to the people,” he said.

The above analysis of presupposition is in line with the Machin and Mayr’s idea (2012). They argue that presupposition can allow the speakers to avoid stating something explicitly about what they mean. Rather, it allows them to create certain framing of what they want to say or state. Presupposition has been a common practice in media industry especially in the news article production. The use of presupposition in news articles, just like the above examples, will lead the readers to a broader sense and increase to some particular ideologies.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored how language can be used to achieve three main goals. First, it can hide identities, responsibilities, and contexts. Second, it can present disputable ideas as unquestioned truths. Lastly, it can imply meanings without explicitly stating them. Nominalization and presupposition are valuable techniques for authors aiming to persuade without overtly expressing their ideologies. Nominalization is particularly useful when authors want to represent processes and events in a more abstract way, focusing on general concepts rather than specific details of who did what to whom.

In our analysis of the provided examples, we identified which participants and actions are abstracted and which are not. We also observed how authors aim to establish certain concepts as commonly accepted and considered what impact this has. Overall, we've learned how language can be wielded to convey ideas, shape perceptions, and influence readers subtly, even without directly stating those ideas.

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Sources of Figure:

Figure 1:

Gold, M., Kilgannon, C., Meko, H., (2022). 2 Police Officer Killed in Connecticut After a Suspicious 911 Call. Nytimes.com

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Source of Presupposition Examples:

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