

## **Social actor representation in mining discourse in the Philippines: A critical discourse analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses the need to investigate media's representation of mining issues in the Philippines, an unexplored linguistic field within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It focuses on referential strategies used in naming the social actors (SAs) involved in mining issues from 2012 to 2017 by three national broadsheets. A sample of 224 news reports was analyzed at the sentence level, and was validated by software and two inter-coders. The study found that SAs were commonly named by their unique identities mainly through nomination and categorization strategies. The valuing of the "elites" in the mining discourse is also traceable in the prominent use of nomination strategies, particularly formalization and honorification. While these strategies reflect the conventional linguistic features of the news genre which reinforces specificity, formality, and brevity, it is evident that they were seldom used to refer to the mine workers, disenfranchising them in the process. The tendency of the media to influence public perception through its construction of societal issues demands readers to be skeptical of what they read and to be aware of the machination which underlies the process of discourse production.

**Keywords:** categorization, environmental discourse, nomination, referential strategies

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Philippines is one of the mineral-rich countries in the world (Manicad 2011), with an estimated US\$840 billion worth of untapped mineral wealth (Angub 2013). The statistics of the Mines and Geoscience Bureau indicates that in 2012 the mining sector had created 252,000 jobs and contributed PhP22 billion to the country's treasury from taxes, fees, and

royalties (Angub 2013). On one hand, the substantial contribution of the mining industry to the national revenue and its generation of employment opportunities for Filipino people may have carved its reputable space in the Philippine society. On the other hand, the detrimental impact of mining to the country has also been heavily criticized as it causes massive potential destruction to environment and wildlife ecology such as acid mine drainage and contaminant leaching, soil erosion, and tailing impoundments among others (Sam 1999; ELAW 2010).

These conflicting interests are reflected in the mining discourses stoked or dimmed by media, which influence the readers' construal of meanings in the mining texts, social actors' roles in the mining industry, and the underlying contexts of the mining reality. Fairclough (1989) posits that in constructing a reality, media exercises power that lies on its sole producing rights in determining what/who can be included and excluded in the text, how events are represented, and how the readers are positioned in the texts. Demarest et al. (2020) share the same argument in saying that media do not merely convey information to the public but they also participate in constructing, maintaining, and transmitting certain narratives and discourse.

Moreover, Flores (2009) observes that print media in the Philippines employed manipulative prototypes in reporting on a certain alleged political rigging, realized through discursive and linguistic devices. Though not directly related to media's influence in public discourse, Holzcheiter (2016) sympathizes with the notion of representation as a form of power. She claims that representation, to some extent, realizes the possibility and authority to support, defend and advocate some interests without the concerned party's direct involvement and control of the situation.

Therefore, this study described the national and local media's allocation of referential strategies in discursively constructing the identities of social actors (SAs) involved in mining issues. The discourse and linguistic patterns employed by relevant SAs as recontextualized in the national and local media from 2012 to 2017 as well as the recurring discourse themes in the national and local domains constitute the "Philippine mining discourse," an unexplored field for linguistic investigation. This paper adopted the perspectives of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an approach in the humanities and social sciences that systematically examines the structure and functions of text and talk in their linguistic and discursive context, specifically van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actors Network (SAN) framework, a model in CDA that accounts for the referential strategies or the linguistic devices used in naming and labelling of SAs in text.

## **METHODS**

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data for this study were collected by manually searching the online archives of the top three national broadsheets using the keyword “mining” within the time frame June 2012 to June 2017. The three news portals were chosen as data sources because their printed editions are the leading national broadsheets in the country in terms of readership and circulation (Inquirer.Net 2015). From the 746 news reports downloaded, 224 articles were taken as samples by employing a lottery technique.

In addition, 112 weekly editions of a local newspaper yielded 27 mining news reports, which comprised the local news data. However, the samples were not a complete representation of the five-year publication due to archival limitations.

### **Analytical Framework**

The study employed the six categories of referential strategies adapted from van Leeuwen’s (2008) framework. First was nomination, representing SAs by referring to their unique identity, typically realized by proper nouns through formalization, use of surname, with or without honorifics; semiformalization, the use of given name and surname; or informalization, referring to SAs using given name. Nominations might be titulated, either in the form of honorification, the addition of standard titles, ranks, and other honorific titles, or in the form of affiliations, the addition of personal or kinship relation terms. Pseudo-titulation, the use of pseudo titles or “controversial” labels before the SA’s name, was also part of this category.

Next was categorization, used when SAs were represented in terms of identities and functions they shared with others through functionalization and identification. Functionalization occurred when SAs were named through their occupation, or role (e.g. teacher). Identification was realized when SAs were defined in terms of their societal memberships, more or less permanently. Identification had three distinct categories: social classification (SC) where SAs were named by their societal or organizational categorization (e.g. Muslim); relational identification (RI) when SAs were represented by their personal, kinship, or work relations; physical identification (PI) when they were labeled in terms of physical characteristics which uniquely identify them in a given context based on age or gender. A sub-type of PI was appraisalment, it gave SAs positive or negative attributions through a set of nouns and idioms denoting such descriptions. The third referential strategy was indetermination, occurred when SAs were represented using indefinite pronouns used in the nominal function. Assimilation was another referential strategy, which

occurred when SAs were being referred to as groups, realized either through aggregation or the quantification of SAs, or collectivization as a collective unit. Abstraction happened when SAs were labeled through the quality assigned to them (e.g. poor, skilled). Finally, objectivation, occurred when SAs were named by referring to a place (spatialization) or a thing (instrumentalization) closely associated with either the person or the action in which they were represented as being engaged, or through their utterance (utterance autonomization), or in reference to a part of their body (somatization).

The framework was modified to account for other strategies that could not be accommodated by the existing list. The modified taxonomy includes functionalized nomination, referring to SAs using institutional titles which were only used for a select few (e.g. the Senator); affiliation, adding personal or kinship relations or SAs' functions and/or organizational affiliation; overdetermination, representing SAs as participants of more than one social practice; accompaniment, referring to SAs together with other participant/s; and hypocoristic nomination, calling SAs through their nicknames. Moreover, abstraction and objectivation though presented as individual categories were subsumed under impersonalization strategies in the presentation of findings, keeping van Leeuwen's system.

For the local news, all strategies in each category with a less than five frequency were combined and labeled as "others."

### **Coding and Analysis**

The data consisting 12,276 sentences were coded manually at the sentence level employing Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) matrix of participants, termed in this study as SAs. After the manual identification of SAs, the data were subjected to a computer-assisted analysis using UAM Corpus Tool, a software for linguistic annotation of texts. This step was necessary to validate whether all items that function as participants in the data were properly identified. The computer-generated list was cleaned manually to weed out double-tagged or mistakenly-coded tokens before the final coding using van Leeuwen's (2008) framework ensued.

To further establish the validity of the findings, two university professors with a doctorate in Applied Linguistics inter-coded 30% (67 news articles) of the data, yielding a 99.96% agreement rate with the researcher's analysis.

## RESULTS

### Referential Strategies in the National Media

**Nomination.** Among the ten nomination strategies, formalization (37.81%) and honorification (35.16%) were widely used while informalization (0.96%) and pseudo-titulation (0.69%) were seldom employed by the text producers (Table 1).

Table 1. Nomination strategies in the national news reports (n = 2,187)

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Formalization	827	37.81
Honorification	769	35.16
Affiliation	159	7.27
Over-determination	136	6.22
Accompaniment	100	4.57
Functionalized Nomination	98	4.48
Semi-formalization	37	1.69
Hypocoristic Nomination	25	1.14
Informalization	21	0.96
Pseudo-titulation	15	0.69
Total	2,187	100.00

**Categorization.** Functionalization (50.06%) was predominant while appraisalment (9.02%) and PI (2.43%) were barely employed (Table 2). Findings further revealed that categorization strategies were commonly used to refer to “ordinary” SAs (e.g. miners, activists).

Table 2. Categorization strategies in the national news reports (n = 865).

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Functionalization	433	50.06
Relational Identification (RI)	204	23.58
Social Classification (SC)	129	14.91
Appraisalment	78	9.02
Physical Identification (PI)	21	2.43
Total	865	100.00

**Indetermination.** Only 55 cases of indetermination manifested in the data. They all appeared as part of quoted statements. Some instances of indetermination were realized by indefinite pronouns: anybody, some, and few.

**Assimilation.** There was a disproportionate frequency of collectivization (88.63%) and aggregation (11.37%) in the data (Table 3).

Table 3. Assimilation strategies in the national news reports (n = 2,243).

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Collectivization	1,988	88.63
Aggregation	255	11.37
Total	2, 243	100.00

**Impersonalization.** Utterance autonomization (42.91%) topped in this category of referential strategies, followed by abstraction (25.37%) and spatialization (15.17%). The least employed strategies were instrumentalization (13.06%) and somatization (3.48%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Impersonalization strategies in the national news reports (n = 804).

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Utterance Autonomization	345	42.91
Abstraction	204	25.37
Spatialization	122	15.17
Instrumentalization	105	13.06
Somatization	28	3.48
Total	804	100.00

### Referential Strategies in Local News Reports

The prevalence of nomination strategies (41.94%) was evident in the local news reports, followed by assimilation (31.18%) and categorization (16.85%) strategies. Meanwhile, the impersonalization strategies (10.04%) were nearly absent (Table 5).

Table 5. Referential strategies in the local news reports (n = 279).

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Nomination</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>41.94</b>
Formalization	63	22.58
Honorification	45	16.13
Others	9	3.23
<b>Assimilation</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>31.18</b>
Collectivization	61	21.86
Aggregation	15	5.38
Accompaniment	11	3.94
<b>Categorization</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>16.85</b>
Functionalization	22	7.89
Classification	11	3.94
Relational Identification	9	3.23

Appraisalment	5	1.79
<b>Impersonalization</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>10.04</b>
Spatialization	7	2.51
Instrumentalization	7	2.51
Utterance Autonomation	6	2.15
Others	8	2.87
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## DISCUSSION

### Referential Strategies in the National News Reports

**Nomination.** The widespread of formalization among the nomination strategies can be attributed to the conventions of news genre, which enables the identification of specific actors in the news in the most possible concise manner, one of the marks of journalese writing (Bhatia 1993). Notably, most of the surnames that appeared in the data belong to government officials, mining executives, among other prominent personalities, and only a few for “ordinary” individuals.

Informalization was the second least employed nomination strategy. The informal and personal tone construed by the “first-name-basis” might not be a journalistic feature but could be the linguistic motif of other texts, i.e. short stories, narratives. Some instances of informalization were used to refer to the wife of a miner who died in a mining accident. She was introduced using semi-formalization in the lead but was constantly represented by her first name throughout the article. With informalization, the journalist sustained the emotional appeal phrased in the headline “It’s hard to wait, I want to help dig” (Burgos 2013). This quality of the news exemplifies color, one of the news values (Bednarek 2006). It suggests that news stories sometimes highlight the emotionally relevant aspect of the event. Moreover, appeals to emotion may be considered as deliberate manipulations to provoke an emotional reaction and to bypass rational thought (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 2009).

Functionalized nomination occurred considerably in the data. The term was coined in this study in response to van Leeuwen’s (2008) report that this way of representing social actors blurs the line between functionalization and nomination because the generic functional titles which are supposed to be shared with other members in the social category are exclusively used by only one or a very few social actors such as “the Vice-President.”

Pseudo-titulation was the least employed nomination strategy, signifying its inappropriateness in the news genre as it seems to project informal rather than formal tones. This finding strengthens van Leeuwen’s

(2008) observation that pseudo-titles are much commonly used in children's stories. Hypocoristic nomination, using SAs' nicknames as in "Digong" was the seldom employed. This phenomenon was not included in van Leeuwen's (2008) taxonomy; hence, the term was coined to describe its occurrence in the data. The use of this strategy conveys personal tone, familiarity, and affection, which is uncommon for this text genre. Its occurrence in the data reflects a certain characteristic of Filipino culture.

**Categorization.** Functionalization, labelling of SAs in terms of their societal functions, was predominant, realized by: legislators, miners, environmentalists, and barangay officials, among others. Relational identification, naming of SAs in terms of their personal, kinship, or work relations came second in terms of frequency. Some of its manifestations were: appointee, relatives, and co-worker. Social classification, naming of SAs in reference to social categories, which may include provenance, class, wealth, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, among others (van Leeuwen 2008), manifested with a relatively low number.

Appraisal, dichotomizing SAs as good or bad, loved or hated, among others, was infrequent in the data. This strategy exemplified Fairclough's (1989) claims that there are ideologically-charged words or those that have inherent negative meanings, instances of which in the data include: bandits, perpetrators, and rebels. Physical identification, the naming of SAs denoting their physical features such as "his pregnant wife," "the gunmen," and "rescuers using hand-held tools," was barely employed. According to van Leeuwen (2008), referring to SAs through physical attributes may have connotations that could obliquely classify or functionalize them.

Evidently, ordinary members of the society are the ones mostly named in this manner, which may indicate the play of power and social struggle. Fairclough (1989) argued that social struggle is a process whereby groupings of different interests (e.g. of men and women, young and old) take place. Although some instances may be obvious, others may be implicit.

**Indetermination.** As presented earlier, only 55 cases of indetermination appeared in the data. The finding is quite expected because journalistic writing, especially news reporting, aims to provide clear and specific information to the public—and that includes naming of all the actors in the news story.

**Assimilation.** Government agencies (e.g. DENR, the government) and mining companies were among the most-cited collectivized social actors in the data. The prevalence of "the government" is predictable because of its mandate to govern the country's natural wealth and to promote equitable economic opportunities for Filipinos. Such obligation is enshrined in Section



2, Article XII of the 1987 Constitution (Refworld 2021), justifying its frequency in the data. Instances of assimilation are usually reflected in news reports highlighting the authority of “the government” or “the DENR” in imposing suspension on mining companies that committed environmental infractions (Gamil and Domingo 2016).

Aggregation or the quantification of SAs could be a potent intensification strategy, a pressuring tactic to move the concerned SAs into action. Aggregation seems more effective if the contested situation poses a grave threat to a significant number of people or things, such in “over 7,000 people” who are dependent on mining would suffer mass starvation if the DENR would impose the proposed mine closure (Panganiban 2017). The cited statistics compels the authorities to hasten the process of solving the problem. While aggregation might not be a linguistic feature of the mining news reports, it might be common in other news sub-genres, i.e. business column section which usually covers economic topics and presents financial statistics.

Meanwhile, the media’s representation of the mining issues in the country tends to highlight the unified actions of individuals or groups, justifying the much higher frequency of collectivization over the aggregation strategy in the data.

**Impersonalization.** Among the impersonalization strategies, utterance autonomization (UA), referring to SAs by means of their utterance was mostly employed. Some instances of UA were realized by “temporary environmental protection order (TEPO)” and “President Aquino’s Executive Order 79.” For instance, a statement in a news report stating that the TEPO halted the operation in a forest reserved (Aning 2014) seems to distance the doer (the Supreme Court) from the action by employing UA. All manifestations of UA in the text satisfied the felicity condition required of the utterances. In pragmatics, the speaker’s utterances necessitate certain conditions to make the expressions valid and felicitous. Austin’s (1992) theory explains that words are not just mere expressions, but something has to be done out of them under the appropriate conditions. Thus, UA requires a set of conditions for the utterance to be felicitous, that is, the speaker must be in authority over the addressee so that he or she could execute a valid declaration, such in the case of the Supreme Court for the TEPO and the President for the executive order.

Abstraction was mostly realized by the adjective “poor”, as exemplified in, “President[e] Duterte should live up to his commitment to defend our country from those who destroy her, to help poor people rise from misery, the true enemies of his ideals aren’t the poor addicts....” (Aurelio 2017). In the labeling of self and others, Bourdieu (1991) explained that the perspective of the world, the point of view of individuals, and their position become the basis

of how they name themselves and others, which are often self-interested. Moreover, the quoted statement is laden with emotionally-loaded words such as her, the poor people, the poor addicts, appealing to the readers' sentiment. The two metaphorical representations, nature as "her" and environmental violators as the "true enemies," are effective predication discourse strategies to convince President Duterte to focus on environmental concerns rather than on the "poor addicts" if indeed he is bent on protecting "her", the country, and help the poor people in the process. It must be noted that the poor people that are being attributed to in the extract are those whose livelihoods are dependent on the environment (e.g. farmers) and the poor addicts are literally those who waged lives in the government's campaign against illegal drugs.

Spatialization, referring to SAs by reference to a place with which they are associated, was the third most employed strategy in this category. Some instances are: "Manila has warned it" and "the pit took my husband," in which Manila and "the pit" exemplified the strategy.

However, instrumentalization, personifying the objects to perform human actions, was the second least employed strategy. It was illustrated in a news report about the rejection of former DENR secretary's appointment in which President Duterte quipped that "money" influenced the decision (Corales 2017). Instrumentalization can then shift the reader's attention from the actor to the object performing the action, a potent tool for downplaying the actor—a case of obfuscating the message and the accountability of the actor. In this particular case, the media might be construed to have intentionally or unintentionally reverberated Duterte's exclusion of the actor or actors who were responsible for the decision and who should be punished for the "money" used in the process, an act which could be considered a form of corruption.

Somatization, the least employed strategy, was highlighted in a news report quoting the presidential spokesperson saying that President Duterte can "head" the DENR but he would rather not advise him to do because his "hands" were already full with his other state functions (Geducos 2017). Somatization was also a configuration of the part-whole relationship as with synecdoche in which reference to the whole is made by reference to a salient part (Taylor 1995). This concept denotes that failure of the part means failure of the whole. As with instrumentalization, somatization shifts the attention of the readers away from the actors by simply referring to parts of his/her body, a mitigating strategy.

### **Referential Strategies in the Local News Reports**

The prevalence of formalization and honorification strategies in the local news reflects the mainstream media's representation of SAs, which is

consistent with the conventions of the genre. Although the widespread of formalization was quite expected, the extensive use of honorification strategies seemed unpredictable. This finding likewise echoes the national media's representation, seemingly favoring the discourse positions of the "elite" members of the society. The ubiquity of honorification and the infrequency of affiliation strategies were quite surprising as they signify under-representation of "ordinary" citizens in the local news. Unlike in the mainstream media where key officials and government agencies received more attention than those from the mining sector, the local news seemed to foreground the discourse position of a mining company. Meanwhile, the strategies with almost nil frequencies were affiliation, functionalized nomination, overdetermination, and pseudo-titulation; semi-formalization and informalization were totally absent. As have been mentioned, the thin distribution of referential strategies in the local news could be attributed to a quite limited data, which could also be a limitation of this study.

Generally, media's representations of SAs appeared to be tied to their social roles and ascribed status. Findings revealed that prominent personalities in the mining industry were individually specified, while ordinary citizens were collectively characterized or generalized (e.g. the protesters, the villagers). The same observation reverberated to the local media. The only difference, perhaps, was that the nominated SAs locally were mostly representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sectors. This finding reinforces van Leeuwen's (1996) observation that "the social roles that agents are given and their grammatical roles in discourse" tend to have a correlation. Interestingly, the data, specifically in the local news, showcased the detrimental impact of mining on the local people as well as the active and salient role of NGOs in lobbying for the protection of the environment and in advancing the cause of the marginalized sectors in the mining industry of the country.

The ubiquity of titulation strategies, particularly honorification, encodes the value given to titles or qualifications of social actors. Bourdieu (1991) explained that the social status or educational qualification, which is valid on all markets and which, as an official definition of one's official identity, "saves its bearers from the symbolic struggle of all against all, by establishing the authorized perspective, the one recognized by all, and thus universal from which social agents are viewed".

The professional title is a sort of legal rule of social perception, guaranteed as a right particularly in the Philippine culture which puts premium on educational attainment (Heathfield and Fusco 2016). It is a symbolic capital in an institutionalized, legal form (Bourdieu 1991). Professional titles have value in themselves and function like a great name, one which procures all sorts of symbolic profit (that one cannot directly

acquire with money). Further, the text producers' usage or non-usage of a particular linguistic device is always motivated by their communicative goals, and these are encoded in the representation of themselves and of the other personalities in the discourse they produce. Arguably, linguistic decisions are always entwined on the speakers or writers' communicative intentions (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014).

Furthermore, the text producers' linguistic choices seem to be anchored on the conventions of the text genre imposed by specialists in the discourse community. Bhatia (1993) explained that various genres display "constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form, and personal value." That is, though the writers have freedom in producing a text, they still must conform to the acceptable standard imposed by the discourse community. This does not mean, however, that the text producers' positioning, ideological orientations, and communicative intentions say nothing about their linguistic choices.

In sum, social actors represented in mining news reports primarily consist of the key players in the mining industry such as the Philippine government, public officials (e.g. the President of the Republic, DENR officials), mining investors, mining companies, mine workers, and other stakeholders (e.g. environmentalists, church leaders). Seemingly, the more socially prominent a social actor is in the industry and beyond, the more he or she is provided spatio-temporal space in the news report. In contrast, the marginalized such as the mine workers or the small-scale investors tend to be highlighted only when unfortunate incidents occurred such as involvement in mining mishaps or illegal activities. In this respect, the society, as concretized by the media, has its system in stratifying its members and groups depending on their assumed or ascribed status. This social stratification may/can only be done by "those who have more" access to public resources (e.g. information), a play of power difference.

The findings also revealed the power of media in amplifying or silencing a certain type of discourse as seen in the reported statements by which the original speakers made use of impersonalization strategies that tend to downplay the doers of the actions or exclude them entirely, lessening the accountability of the actors in matters that are of public interests like involvement in graft or corruption or simple bribery. In this case, media practitioners should become more aware of this power to shape public opinions that eventually affect societal values such as normalizing falsehood and corruption. It is hoped that with this recognition, they will affirm their role not only as gatekeepers of truth but also as societal engineers that help in the reconstruction of society for humanity's welfare.

Finally, since the media can shape discourses (un)intentionally, the public should be aware that not everything they read or heard are meant to be accepted. They should learn to be more critical in accepting or rejecting certain realities and perspectives by verifying various sources of information.

When necessary, the national and local media should perform a complementary role in reporting societal events that are of greater interest to the public. They should also reaffirm their role in providing all actors, dominant or marginalized, space where they can be heard and represented for a fair and coherent construction of social realities.

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