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Text and Reality: An Enquiry on Discursive Structure

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1 Introduction

The communication between text and reality has been a predominant area of discussion from early 20th century onwards. The representation of day-to-day experiences in life and events in the world, either in written or spoken discourse, has been a dilemma for all the linguists. The initial steps by Harris and Mitchell, notion of schemata by Bartlett, technical approaches by Minsky and archeology of knowledge by Foucault have been exploring the broad field of life centered existential linguistics and structural dynamism. M. Foucault says that the same experience or event creates different versions of realities. Once reality is born experience may disappear. This argument amassed many criticisms from the part of historians and journalists to him. He was accused of neglecting past events and experiences.

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Dichotomy between Experience and Reality

The dichotomy between experience and reality is surprising. The experience is the text and which is transformed into a reality through a process of discursive structure. The structures are neither accidental nor spontaneous rather deliberate and definite occurrence. The sum total of the discursive structure creates a discourse.

1.1 Significance

It is indeed true that human communication and means of communication have become more complex and sophisticated today. Language is the fundamental mode of communication. Despite the means and ways, the communication still remains confusing and ambiguous. The reason is that no language can communicate the experience of man in its fullest sense. And when somebody tried to make use language in such a way, the readers are not prepared to get full core. This age old dilemma inspired the linguists to learn the language and human communication more seriously. The three levels of human communication such as; meaning, form and substance or discourse, syntax and phonology are unanimously agreed to by all the linguists. Though Bloomfield focused only on the relation between form and substance, Firth and Chomsky led linguists towards the study of sentence structure beyond morpheme and phoneme, and analysis of conversations (Malcolm Coulthard, p.1). These two initiatives were the impetus to all types of discourse level analyses.

1.2 Methodology

This paper analyzes a few selected readers' reviews taken from *The Hindu* daily based on a front page news titled "PM to skip CHOGM" published on 10th November 2013. The decision of Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh not to participate in Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) hosted at Jaffna, Srilanka by President Rajpakse accumulated different types of reviews both in favour and against the PM's decision. The same event created different kinds of structural representations and discourses.

The main purpose of this analysis of the structures of discourse is not to uncover the truth or the origin of a statement but rather to discover the support mechanisms which allow it to be

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said and keep it in place. These mechanisms are both intrinsic to discourse itself and also extra discursive, in the sense that they are socio cultural (Sara Mills p.45). Some of the significant constituents upon which discursive structure analysis is done are Foucault's concepts such as; Episteme, statements, discourses and archive. The selected reviews are analyzed under these categories.

1.2.1 Episteme and Discursive Structure

Episteme is the central concept of Foucault in his archeological method of discourse analysis. It refers to the orderly 'unconscious' structures underlying the production of scientific knowledge in a particular time and place. The sense of the world of objects is being created through these structures. These structures of knowledge are being supported and traced out by certain procedures and by linguistic artifacts. The textual coherence and cohesion will bring forth world of knowledge on a particular subject or an issue. The selected reviews would narrate this well.

Review 1

1. Permit me to go back to the days of 1947-48 up to 1950, when the Commonwealth of Nations was just a fledgling organization.

2. India became a sovereign Republic on January 26, 1950. Then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru hailed the birth of the Commonwealth. As he acknowledged then, true globalization means and entails global citizenship of all people on this planet.

3. The word Commonwealth profoundly conveys the meaning that we share the wealth gifted to us by nature as well as the economic, social, cultural aspects of all member nations. Nehru in his magnanimity and true spirit of statesmanship acknowledged that queen of England as the Head of the Commonwealth, though India became republic.

4. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's decision to stay away from CHOGM 2013 does not augur well for his statesmanship. He has missed a great opportunity to interact with other heads of state as well as with the Sri Lankan President for a frank talk on the Tamils issue.

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Cohesion Level

There are four anaphoric references, one cataphoric and two exophoric references. There are no substitutions and ellipsis but conjunctional cohesion markers are as many as; eight in the additive and one in the causative category. For the benefit of the analysis the review is divided into five subgroups.

- □   The pronoun 'me' in the first section is a cataphoric reference, looking forward to a word that has not been used yet, to the writer Wg. Cdr. (retd.) K.R Dwarakanath

- □   The pronoun 'he' is an anaphoric reference point back to the Jawaharlal Nehru. The connecting words; then (2), and are additives because they add information to the previous clause and sentence.

- □   The pronouns 'we' and 'us' are exophoric references pointing to something outside the text. Though there may have confusions whether they are cataphoric or not as 'member nations'. But 'we' and 'us' are not referring the member nations in the sentence. The words; 'as well as', 'and' are the additives and 'though' is contrastive word. The pronoun 'his' is an anaphoric reference to antecedent Nehru.

- □   The pronouns 'his', 'he' are anaphoric refers back to Manmohan Sing. The word 'as well as' is an additive.

Coherence Level

- □   The words repeated; commonwealth (5), republic (2), Prime Minister (2), Nehru (2), statesmanship (2).

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☐ The verb acknowledged is repeated two times and found synonym with 'hailed'.

☐ The words; 'stay away', 'missed' are superordinates

The more anaphoric reference the more focus on the antecedent. The more repeated words the more effect on the subject. At cohesion level both PMs have got two anaphoric references pointing out the focus of review on the comparison between two prime ministers. This comparison is done on the basis of the key concepts such as; commonwealth, Republic and statesmanship that threads together the whole text. The former PM acknowledged and hailed whereas the latter stayed away and missed the whole concept of Commonwealth. It is a personal criticism.

Review 2

1. We have once again demonstrated how easily national strategic interests can be sacrificed at the altar of political expediency.

2. We have only ourselves to blame if we find new and strange neighbours in our southern backyard   (11th November 2013)

☐ The pronoun 'we' in the first section and rest of the pronouns such as; 'we, ourselves, we, our' are exophoric references pointing out something outside the text. All the pronouns refer the word 'India' which exists outside the text. The focus is on the nation's failure. Indirectly asserting and apologizing the failure. The pronoun we is representing each and every member of this nation. This further indicates the failure of each and every one of us. Its focus is neither on politicians nor on reader or writer rather self criticism.

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□   The second sentence focus on the indirect negative politeness of warning. India is going to find new and strange neighbours in southern backyard. Warning is for the benefit of the addressee and not to the speaker. Thus this is a warning for each of us.

Review 3

1. The prime Minister's decision is disappointing. Instead of helping Tamil leaders in Jaffna, Tamil Nadu's politicians have played the wrong card in order to gain attention politically. This will only be the beginning of endless problems for India.

2. It was not very long ago that Tamil Nadu did not allow Sri Lankan cricket players to play in Chennai and some Sri Lankan tourists were attacked.

3. The Central government remained a mute spectator through all this. India must help the Tamils to secure political and economic rights.   (12th November 2013)

□   The repeated words such as; Tamil Nadu (2) ,Sri Lankan Tamils (4) , generic word Politics (3) focus on relationship between Tami Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils. The issue is anything other than politics.

□   Positive politeness of imperative in section 3, 'India must help the Tamils' it is a speech act of threat rather than a warning. Unlike warning it is for the benefit of the speaker rather than the addressee.

□   The word 'this' is an ellipsis, omission of the phrase mentioned in the first section itself: wrong play to gain political attention. The reader need to look back to previous sections to understand the meaning of this ellipsis.

1.2.2 Statement and Discursive Structure

Episteme is constructed from sets of statements grouped into different discourses or discursive frameworks. They are building blocks of a discourse. It is not just an utterance but a

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sentence having several different functions as statements depending upon which discursive context it appears in. The statements are analyzed on the basis of speech acts.

Review 4

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1. The question is with the Prime minister not attending CHOGM; will India be alleviating the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils? Will we further lose the opportunity to give Tamils a dignified life?

2. Moreover, it is not an internal meeting of Sri Lanka but an international summit where Sri Lanka is just a venue. India should have understood this.   (14th November 2013)

□   The two direct speech acts, questions, based on 'not attending CHOGM' shows the anxiety of the speaker. The CHOGM was crucial and unless attending we may not able at least to alleviate the plight and get opportunity to give Tamils a dignified life.

□   It is an indirect speech act with politeness. Though seems to be imperative, intends to make an interrogation, Why shouldn't have India understood this? It is also a warning reminding the discreteness of the Indian Government. Warning is always for the benefit of the addressee rather than the speaker.

1.2.3 Discourses and Discursive Structure

Discourse is the set of rules and procedures for the production of particular discourses. Discourses are set of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force and grouped together because of some institutional pressure because of similarity of context or act in a similar way. They have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think.

Review 5

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1. Like the abrupt announcement of the formation of a Telangana state, the prime Minister's decision to skip CHOGM is aimed at benefits in the coming Lok Sabha election.

2. But the political managers and think tanks of the UPA have failed to realize that in order to harvest a good yield; one has to sow good seed.

3. By deciding to skip CHOGM on the ground that it will be against the sentiments of the people, the UPA has compromised India's strategic interests and thereby conceded space to Pakistan and China.   (11th November 2013)

Four Major discourses are discussed which influenced the contemporary history of India.

☐   The problems related with **formation of Telengana state** have become a headache for the UPA. The internal and external pressure even after the declaration is still prevailing.

☐   The advent of **Parliament election** with strategic movements may be collapsed by this decision. Though the former decision had a good intention, it has been badly affected the impression of the UPA. This decision would result the same.

☐   The **moral saying** with a negative politeness asserts UPA decision as well as the Party is a failure.

☐   The frequent **attack by the Pakistan and China** without respecting strategies can not be blamed at all since UPA compromised the strategies of India. There will have many such enemies in future.

1.2.4 The Archive and Discursive Structure

This is a technical term Foucault uses in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. It designates the collection of all material traces left behind by a particular historical period and culture. Archives are analyzed on the basis of set of rules at a given period and for a definite society. Set of discursive mechanisms which limit what can be said, in what form and what is counted as worth knowing and remembering.

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Review 6

> 1. The controversy over the Prime Minister's participation in CHOGM, a low key outfit, has only helped to enhance its importance. The downslide in the Congress party's standing in Tamil Nadu began during Indira Gandhi's time.
>
> 2. It will be no exaggeration to say that it has hit an all time low now, thanks to a series of scams. Would Dr. Singh's participation have affected his party in the polls as is being made out? Most probably not   (11th November 2013)

☐   A historical trace back to the time of 'Indira Gandhi'

☐   'A series of Scams' goes back to the national and regional scams in the contemporary history of Tamil Nadu Congress party.

1.3 *The Hindu* and the Reality

Discursive structure analysis based on readers' reviews from 10th to 25th November 2013 has been an occasion to evaluate how the media manipulated the texts to create a particular version of reality of the event. According to Foucault, discourse is knowledge that controls and manages the society and structure. The textual reality born out of discursive structures is a discourse. A statistical data would enable us to evaluate this more scientifically. Out of 27 reviews 22 are against PM's decision, and only 5 supported the decision. The two editorials titled "Surrender on CHOGM" published on 10th November and "Commonwealth Games" published on 18th November, adamantly criticize the PM's decision. In support of this view the reviews are being selected and published. The manipulated versions of reality criticized by the readers are being published for e.g. "*The Hindu*'s comment moderation process is awful…" in the reader's editorial by A.S Panneerselvan.

1.4 Findings and Suggestions

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1. The structures provide the substantial data to establish the discourse. Cohesive and coherence markers can be used to prove the reality.

2. The different constituents of discursive structures together create the versions of reality at a particular context but it is not the vision of the world.

3. Reality is created not only by discursive structures but also by schemata of the reader of the texts.

5. There are many dangers while depending more on structures alone. The false textual and spoken structures create a virtual world of illusion which distorts the reality as such.

6. There is a large possibility of manipulating the reality through discursive structures.

1.5 Conclusion

Discursive constraints are delimitating our perception of objects. According to Foucault we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher. The world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no pre discursive providence which disposes the world in our favor. (Sara mills p.67) There is no intrinsic order to the world itself other than the ordering which we impose on it through our linguistic structures. Events and ideology are created by humans and institutions which constitutes reality for us. This is not to deny the reality rather we have to apprehend the reality through discursive structure.

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