

Mythopoesis as a legitimation strategy in discourse

La Mythopoèse comme stratégie de légitimation dans le discours

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Abstract

This article investigated how media constructs propositions about women subjected to violence in Morocco from a discourse vantage point. It confirmed the view posited in the literature that discourses cannot be understood without taking into consideration the social practices in which they are manifested and take shape. An analysis of the semantic macrostructures (the identified range of cognitive scripts) related to the challenges of women subject to marital violence provides invaluable insights about how these women seek to legitimize their position in the power network by having recourse to one of the four legitimation tactics introduced by Van Leeuwen (2007), namely mythopoesis in order to sensitize the Moroccan society about the threats they faced. The explicit exploration of the narrative is an effective device in locating the way in which they established cognitive scripts related to the imperative to take action to ensure that a change has to be created. Building on the analysis of narrative macrostructures, the study drew on legitimation theory (Van Leeuwen, 2007; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) to trace the way in which these women seek for legitimation to get their message across that they are were at-risk and vulnerable. Conversely, the violent husbands were constructed as strong, authoritative and cruel. The data used were extracted from a Moroccan talk show “Qesset Nnass” (the story of people) on the Moroccan station Medi 1 TV.

Keywords : discourse; media; mythopoesis; legitimation; women; violence.

Résumé

Cet article a étudié comment les médias construisent des propositions sur les femmes victimes de violence au Maroc du point de vue du discours. Elle a confirmé l'opinion postulée dans la littérature selon laquelle les discours ne peuvent être compris sans prendre en considération les pratiques sociales dans lesquelles ils se manifestent et prennent forme. Une analyse des macrostructures sémantiques (la gamme identifiée de scripts cognitifs) liées aux défis des femmes victimes de violence conjugale fournit des informations précieuses sur la façon dont ces femmes cherchent à légitimer leur position dans le réseau de pouvoir en ayant recours à l'une des quatre tactiques de légitimation introduites par Van Leeuwen (2007), à savoir la mythopoèse afin de sensibiliser la société marocaine aux menaces auxquelles elle sont confrontées. L'exploration explicite du récit est un outil efficace pour repérer la manière dont ils ont établi des scripts cognitifs liés à l'impératif d'agir pour s'assurer qu'un changement doit être créé. S'appuyant sur l'analyse des macrostructures narratives, l'étude s'est appuyée sur la théorie de la légitimation (Van Leeuwen, 2007 ; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) pour retracer la manière dont ces femmes recherchent la légitimation pour faire passer le message qu'elles vulnérable. Les maris violents étaient construits comme forts, autoritaires et cruels. Les données utilisées ont été extraites d'un talk-show marocain « Qesset Nnass » (l'histoire des gens) sur la chaîne marocaine Medi 1 TV.

Mots clés : discours, médias, mythopoèse, légitimation, femmes, violence.

Introduction

This study contributes to discourse theory by illuminating the ways in which discourse both establishes and reflects social cognitions. It has been argued that as part of the view of discourse as social practice, it is important to make explicit the relations between discourse and knowledge. Knowledge is both mental and social. While knowledge is held by the individual, it is acquired, shaped and shared through social interaction (van Dijk, 2003). In addition to Van Dijk, many researchers have recognized the social nature of cognition in constraining and shaping discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Keating, 1994; Luke, 2005b; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). By focusing on narratives as a social and cognitive model, this research has highlighted the role that narratives play in social cognition and in legitimating social action. This study has explicated how narratives act as socially shared cognitive scripts that establish what is regarded as legitimate, and conversely what is regarded as illegitimate. In sum, in terms of theory and method, this study points to the potential of using sociocognitive approaches to enrich the explanation and investigation of discourse. In particular this study has demonstrated the effectiveness of applying a methodological focus on the integrated role played by narratives and legitimation. The data used were extracted from a Moroccan talk show “Qesset Nnass” (the story of people) on the Moroccan station Medi 1 TV, where women subject to marital violence (WSMV) narrated their stories about the marital violence they experienced. The overall objective is to scrutinize how women use legitimation to persuade the Moroccan audience.

1. Basic elements in feminist research

For Ritzer (1991, p. 248), from a theoretical angle there exist three views about gender: gender difference, gender inequality and gender oppression. First, theories of gender difference revolve around the pivotal idea that there should be an answer for the question of who women are and how different from men they are. Here, the main topic is about the nature of women’s inner psychic life which is different from men’s (Ritzer, 1988, p. 293) and an explanation of gender through biological and institutional differences is looked for.

Second, theories of gender inequality postulate that women are not equal to men. The following premises constitute the cornerstone of the theory: men and women are put in different positions in the social system as a whole and this positioning according to gender create huge inequalities between the two sexes; in other words, the resulting inequality is social and not biological. Within this view, according to feminists’ women lack the power and need to achieve their

legitimate goals like “self-actualization” (Ritzer 1988, pp. 295-296). Not only Liberal feminism, but also Marxian feminism reflect gender-inequality theories.

Third, theories of gender oppression see that power is a determinant factor in gender tyranny. Its adepts believe that oppression, subordination and abuse are features that reflect this inequality (Ritzer 1988, p. 303). Fear may be seen as a factor that pushes men to oppress women according to psychoanalytic feminists who adopt Freud’s legacy of the subconscious and unconscious (Ritzer 1988, pp. 303-5). Socialist feminist theory is in total conformity with Marx and Engels as both see that the working class is exploited. In all these versions, patriarchy and power have a role to play.

Patriarchy has been perceived as a principal ideological, social, and cultural power that places gendered expectations on both sexes, a notion backed up strongly by conservatism or traditional trends that endorse basic differences between the two sexes socially and culturally. The development and supremacy of ideological structures such as patriarchy has been accounted for under different approaches, one of which is the socialization process. This latter is based on psychology to understand social norms and practices. For feminists, the process of the individual’s socialization is of paramount importance in the process of initiating social change in favor of understanding women; for example, radical feminists are for a more ‘radical’ change in the socialization process via scrutinizing the operation of patriarchy at different stages of socialization through cultural institutions like school or religion (Fetsha, 1997).

All feminist theories agree on the purpose of the liberation of women which is a sort of political fight; however, for Hunnicutt, (2009, p. 553) notwithstanding the crucial character of activism, feminists have not articulated an explicit theory on one of the crucial problems in patriarchal societies, namely violence against women. Patriarchy as a concept was criticized for being an anti-male term that overlooks a package of positive interactions between men and women (Coward, 1983, pp. 272-273; Rowbotham, 2006, p. 52). It was also criticized for being a “too-encompassing term” which generalizes over all women no matter how their religion, race... are (Fox-Genovese, 1982, pp. 5-29).

In constructing a theory of patriarchy to shed light on violence against women, Hunnicutt (2009, p. 553) enumerates criticisms against associating patriarchy with violence against women: the concept of patriarchy oversimplifies power relations; its adoption entails a form of universalism; patriarchy puts men in one group; the theory of patriarchy cannot deal with other type of social violence like the one against men and why all men are not violent vis a vis women.

Feminist research in communication has been disseminated in diverse forms ranging from liberal, radical, and socialist orientation to postcolonial and transnational feminism, which rejects Western feminism postulates due to the universalization/globalization of female experiences. While gender studies attempt to circumscribe its scope by first characterizing gender from a biological angle and then by searching for arguments on each and/or both sexes, this endeavor also includes contributions from diverse but related fields including anthropology, psychology, politics as well as sociology, which suggest different arguments that can be easily borrowed and put to play in the study.

The period between 1960s-1980s was very important for feminists as a result of second wave feminism which specified its area of focus as media content and the media's representation of women. The rationale was to study the image of women in gender specific roles. All the studies undertaken in this regard (Friedan, 1963; Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Dominick and Rauch, 1972; Ferrante, Haynes and Kingsley, 1988; Gilly 1988; among others) aimed at pointing to the fact that media in general did not properly project current social developments through the illustration of the discrepancies between how women were treated in society and how they were depicted in the media. A related objective of these studies in this period was the construction of a body of feminist research to support feminist arguments towards liberating women from male dominance. Studies with an orientation towards roles emphasized a number of issues where women seem to suffer from inequality. The purpose was to reach findings to deal with the main concerns related to the image of women at the time. At this specific point of women studies, it has been expected to find that the image of men is more positively depicted in the media.

Three well known currents in feminism can be traced: liberal, radical, and socialist feminism. Liberal feminism pays particular attention to labor relations as well as the unrealistic and oppressive way that women are represented by the media (Strinati, 2003, p. 160). Radical feminism keeps the biological differences between women and men in perspective but attack the exploitation of these differences to lower the rank of women. Radical feminism also holds the view that patriarchy is the dominant ideology that is responsible for the repression of women. Socialist feminism furthermore state that the ideological role of patriarchy in society is prominent and think that a basic change and a radical shift in social norms and practices (including the media) is necessary to free and reinforce women's position in society. In general, the movement as a whole was really at its maximum force in the United States during the 1960s

where the issue of women portrayal in the media was scrutinized and where the media was accused of being instrumentalized to get across ideological messages (Pillay, 2008, p. 18).

Behind the feminist academic orientation was the pervasiveness of media content which needed a close analysis due to the high rate of exposure of the audience, a thing that makes the media a major contributor in socialization (Boyd-Barrett, 2002). Liberal feminists advocated a more equal time allocation in media in addition to more positive portrayals in parallel with social changes (Williams, 2003, p. 58). Radical feminists wanted change too but accepted the determinant factor of the differences between the sexes. Proponents of this current held the view that some differences needed to be maintained and at the same time the ones that lead to inequality have to be “revisited and publicized” (McDowell and Pringle, 1992). A common point that unites all feminist movements within this fragmented scene is their agreement that the media embodies a real outlet to voice their concerns and activism through media as an ultimate solution to redefine gender.

2. Discourse Analysis

Among the difficulties scholars face in their attempt to define discourse analysis is to delimit and circumscribe the scope of the discipline due to its recent history as an autonomous field of inquiry and due to its multidisciplinary nature. To introduce it, we will take two definitions: the one by Reed (1997, p. 16), who defines it as a “framework with which the analyst approaches a text and explicates what it says and how it has been said, in addition to what has been understood and how it has been understood.”, and the one of Brown and Yule (1983, ix) , who conceptualize it as an account of how “humans use language to communicate and, in particular, how addressers construct linguistic messages for addressees and how addressees work on linguistic message in order to interpret them.”. Both definitions take into account not only the speaker/writer, but also the hearer /reader in the communicative process. Discourse analysts acknowledge the basic fact that communication is a personal event since people instill meaning (implied by the act itself or by the words used) into the communicative act (Bechtold, n.d., p. 7). All in all, discourse analysis aims to understand how language produces a meaning intended by the speaker and understood by the listener within the framework of his acquired understanding of the situation of the speech event. According to discourse analysis, the relationship between the intended meaning and its interpretations is not always symmetrical; that is why discourse analysis is mainly interested in multiple interpretations by the receiver (Reed, 1997, p. 26).

Two functions, for which different labels have been adopted (“representative and expressive (Buhler, 1934),” “referential and emotive” (Jakobson, 1960), “ideational and interpersonal”, and “descriptive and social-expressive” (Lyons, 1977), have been used in the discourse analysis literature: transactional or interactional. The transactional language function aims at transmitting information efficiently, whereas the function of interactional language is to keep social communication and manage relationships (Brown and Yule, 1983, p. 1).

Discourse analysis emphasis on the personal event as a major characteristic of communication is meant to serve the purpose of identifying how language is put to play to yield a cohesive coherent communication (Reed, 1997, p. 31). The main stress is put on the context of use as the manner and method of communication can change based on the environment in and purpose for which it is articulated. (Bechtold, n.d., p. 8).

As far as the narrative in discourse is concerned, and part of our sociocognitive endeavor, we use it as a reference point. We have incorporated this notion “narrative” in our analysis, which was mentioned by Van Dijk and Fairclough but without formalizing its role in discourse, because its adoption affords an opportunity for the construction of the world of human experience. The term “narrative” is abundant in research literatures, and as a result has various definitions (Juswik, 2012). We adopted Bruner’s (1991) treatment of this notion together with Van Dijk’s (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) conception that consists of dealing with narratives as macrostructures that act as cognitive models that mediate society and discourse. Bruner (1991) argues that narrative comprehension is ranked among the earlier cognitive abilities of the child and one of the most extensively manipulated forms of representing experience. He sees narrative as a form that both represents and constitutes reality. These macrostructures were the summaries of the stories narrated by WSMV in which we spotted the propositions used by the women to legitimize their discursive practice.

This discourse practice we emphasized zooms on questions related to the nature of the discourse inherent in the texts chosen for analysis, the nature of the narratives that emerge across the texts, the signification of the features in terms of social practices and conventions, and their indication in terms of the main scripts and schemas used to represent women who experienced violence. At this level, we will show how women legitimize their discourse by having recourse to one of Van Leuween’ s (2007) four legitimation categories, which is our version of Fairclough’s production practice, namely mythopoesis.

3. Legitimation

Van Leuween's (2007) four legitimation categories are distinguished as follows:

- 1) 'authorization' i.e., legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority is vested.
- 2) 'moral evaluation' i.e., legitimation by reference to discourses of value.
- 3) rationalization i.e., legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the social knowledge that endows them with cognitive validity.
- 4) mythopoesis, i.e., legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity.

The final category, mythopoesis, refers to "legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92) and whose potential is to provide comprehensible explanation, or an illustration of, often, very complex argumentation.

All the women in the show tried to compare the past with the present. This comparison and contrast technique was meant to serve the purpose of juxtapositioning two opposing states to let the audience appreciate the gravity of the actual state of affairs. The quotation of Fatima (one of the WSMV) that after three years of a calm marriage, her husband started to disappear directly after his two brothers came to live with them and started to beat her for no reason is an illustration of this mode of argumentation.

Comparison of the past and the present is also used by Habiba (another WSMV), who stated that her relation with her husband was fine until his father died and then she was accused of being cursed. Oufae (yet another WSMV), too, referred back to her love to her husband at the beginning of marriage, a situation that has turned upside down then as after marriage he took her salary and problems with his family started to appear, a thing that led them to rent a house where she underwent all forms of suffering. Aicha (another woman in the show), on the other hand, narrated her story that she started with "shortly after marriage, he started to close the door of the house the whole day and gave me one loaf of bread". Similarly, Mina (a mother of one of the WSMVs) qualified the calm period her daughter lived by few months to contextually modulate the situation by moving to a period of beating and depression. Fatna (a desperate WSMV) in a likely manner told her story which began with a love story that turned into hell as he kept beating her because he used to remember that her family refused him because he used

to drink alcohol and take drugs. All the women projected bleak future outcomes as their behavior was deeply affected by what happened to them due to the changes they lived.

Some of the characteristics of legitimation through narrativity are the techniques of using an entertaining tone, dramatization, and a certain exaggeration. In this respect, the story of habiba (a WSMV) is a real illustration of this mode of argumentation. When Habiba used to go out and had to wait for her kid to come to open the door for her, when she used to rely on neighbors to break the lock to save her from him, and when she said that she started to beg near the mosque days after her child birth can be seen as forms of dramatization where exaggeration was omnipresent. Her physical description of the different fights she had with her husband like when she insisted on his savage battering that might have broken her ribs also displayed a little exaggeration.

Dramatization and exaggeration also qualify Ouafae's speech as narration elements like the reference to her handicapped kids who used to beg her violent husband not to beat her, and her metaphorical label "the monster" she glued to her husband's personality, a husband who was so tyrant that they couldn't even eat if he didn't give them their share of the food, made the audience appalled by the description of the events due to the drama that we sometimes felt tended to approximate exaggeration. No need to mention other events that unveiled real deranging elements that took place in the domestic sphere like her daughter's death in a psychiatrist hospital after twenty-five days of her attempt to commit suicide and this latter's revelation about her dad who told her he wanted to marry her and have a kid from her! Exaggeration was also apparent in some utterances like when her handicapped daughter begged him once for 20 dirhams to eat, but he slapped her on the face and bought credit units for his phone instead. The lack of the presence of the father to give his version of the events might be the cause behind such an exaggeration as the women tried to influence the audience by offering a negative image of the antagonist.

The same impression was felt in the case of Aicha, who provided a dramatic version of her story, a story that could be easily transformed into a fantastic script for a movie. All the elements for an entertaining story were there: drugs, incarceration in a house with one piece of bread, kids battering for futile reasons, and rape. These dramatic loading is meant to construct the other as the evil, the antagonist who should be punished by society.

The suicide stories of the women can also be categorized under the rubric of drama where the desperate housewives went to the forest, the railway, etc. as the ultimate solution to escape from the sour reality and only people prevented them from committing suicide.

The story of Ghizlane (a minor) was one of the most captivating episodes in “Qesset Nnass” as the disclosure of the consecutive events questioned the family structure and pushed us to ask whether kids are immune from the wrong decisions of the parents. The dramatic stance of her story was in fact perceived by the audience as one of the bitterest stories in the show. What can be more dramatic than a kid who gave birth to twins?

Conclusion

All the women who participated in the show attempted to convince the audience by an appeal to emotions. From our observation, we can easily deduce that this form of appeal is meant to evoke a sense of fear in the audience. In this conservative discourse, women are expected to make sacrifices for their children, families and husbands--whether their husbands deserve it or not. If there is a problem between the husband and wife, the woman is the one expected to make concessions, even if they affect her future and her life. The whole burden seems to be put on the shoulders of the woman. These views are particularly present when an issue is discussed from the moral and religious perspective. Women do more than just reveal the hidden truth about their conditions and stories. In the process of confession on a public television, they are constituted as subjects to the power of the social structure where women are expected to adhere to strict gender roles. What is hidden is the fact that the show itself is imbued with power as it facilitates the reestablishment of practices of abuse.

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