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I am not Prejudiced, or am I? Semantic Strategies Used by Ghanaian University Students in the Discourse of Ethnic Prejudice

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Abstract

Semantic strategies are a kind of discourse strategy that include the sum of language and cognitive moves which are used to reach an adequate goal of communication normally resulting in text comprehension by the reader or listener. Here, the language user takes a number of steps in order to perform a complex task. Semantic strategies in prejudiced talk have been examined extensively in western cultures (e.g., Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Bonnila-Silva, 2002). In order to close the gap on the vastness of western studies, the Ghanaian context is investigated in this study. Ten Ghanaian university students from differing ethnic backgrounds were sampled and interviewed to reveal their ethnic prejudices using the Discourse-Historical approach as advocated by Wodak and Reisigl (1999). The analysis of data reveals projection, semantic distancing, incoherence, and rationalization as the four semantic strategies used in the discourse of prejudice among Ghanaian university students. This study has implications for language socialization.

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1. Introduction

Ethnicity is neither a simple nor precise concept to explain. However, one does recognize ethnicity whenever one encounters it. Unlike race, ethnicity is not a biological construct but, rather, a social phenomenon (Montagu, 1997). Even though this distinction may exist between ethnicity and race, they do have a clear relationship which results in the common belief that they are similar. The concept of ethnicity denotes a people with shared origins or social background which must result in their sharing a considerable amount of cultural and traditional distinctiveness. This distinctiveness tends to be maintained between generations and leads to a sense of identity and group membership. Language plays a vital role in ethnicity and the construction of ethnic identity, thereby making ethnicity universal to all human societies (Schaefer, 2006).

The universality of ethnicity presents an interesting problem to human society. This is because although the concept of ethnicity may be universal, the diversity that exists creates a countless number of ethnic groups all over the world. This diversity results in groups seeking to distinguish themselves from other groups by forming a sense of belongingness and identity. In doing this, most groups form their identities by contrasting themselves with other groups. This is the process of 'othering', which produces an Us versus Them dichotomy (Yang, 2013). The dangers of such a process include the formation of many stereotypes that lead to prejudiced beliefs about the other.

Quasthoff (1987) thinks of stereotypes as verbal expressions of a certain conviction or belief directed toward a social group or an individual as a member of that social group. The stereotype is typically an element of common knowledge, shared to a high degree in a particular culture. It takes the form of a judgment that attributes something or denies it, in an oversimplified and generalising manner. Stereotypes, it is argued, are the linguistic or symbolic realisations of prejudice. Prejudices are mental states defined as negative attitudes towards social groups with matching stereotypic convictions or beliefs. It is thought that the more ethnically diverse a population

is, the more probable it is that stereotypes and prejudices will be frequent.

Ethnic diversity is a main feature of Ghanaian society. In 1960, roughly one hundred linguistic and cultural groups were recorded in Ghana. Although later censuses placed less emphasis on the ethnic and cultural composition of the population, differences that existed then have not disappeared. The major ethnic groups in Ghana include the Asanti, Ewe, Fante, Mole-Dagbani, Akyem, Guan and Ga-Adangbe. The subdivisions of each group share a common cultural heritage, history, language, and origin. No part of Ghana is ethnically homogeneous. Urban centres are the most ethnically mixed because of migration to towns and cities by those in search of employment. Rural areas, with the exception of cocoa-producing areas that have attracted migrant labour, tend to reflect a relatively more homogeneous distribution (Obeng, 1997).

More importantly to this study, any one ethnic group may be distinguished from others in the same linguistically defined category or subcategory, even when the members of the category are characterised by essentially the same social institutions. Each group has a historical group identity, and, usually, political autonomy. In some cases, however, what is considered a single unit for census or other purposes may have been divided into identifiable separate groups before and during much of the colonial period and, in some manner, may have continued to be separate after independence. The sense of belonging – or in this case identity – goes beyond borders. In an ethnically complex society as Ghana, the sheer number of different groups brings about this need to belong and other which will lead to prejudice.

2. Theoretical Framework

Since the seminal work of Allport (1954), the study of discourse and prejudices has bloomed. Van Dijk (1984) used a sociocognitivist perspective to study the discourse of racial prejudice in the Netherlands. Since that work, he has done extensive work in the discipline, suggesting that social elites be thoroughly examined as they are agents of prejudice legitimisation (van Dijk, 2009). A common finding in most

studies is the use of linguistic strategies that are on the surface non-prejudicial but are possibly indications of a new wave of means of expressing prejudice by the elite majority. Examples of these expressions include: “I am a bit for affirmative action but...”, “Yes and no, I mean...”, “I am not prejudiced but...”, “Some of my best friends are black”, “I sort of agree and disagree” (Bonnilla-Silva, 2002).

These studies can be classified by the way they interpret their findings on the linguistic strategies that seek to justify positions that may be interpreted as being prejudiced. The first group interpret such utterances as an indication of the majority’s racial ambivalence. This group includes studies such as Hass, Glen, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey, and Moore (1992), Katz and Hass (1988) and Pandey (2004). The second group of scholars believe that such utterances/structures are an expression of progression and resistance in racial matters. The work of Schuman, Steech, Bobo, Krysan (1997) can be found within this second group. The third group interprets such utterances as representing the elite majority’s careful considerations of all sides of racial matters. This group consists of scholars such as Lipset (1996), Sniderman and Carmines (1997). In somewhat opposition to these more conventional views is that argued by Bonnilla-Silva (2002). He argues that these phrases and the ideas that they introduce are indeed part of the discourse found within ‘colour-blind racism’ – the dominant racial ideology in the post civil rights era of the United States of America.

Identity and prejudices are social constructs that are projected and perceived by the members of a society. Ethnic identity and its attendant prejudices expressed through discourse have received a lot of attention in western culture (e.g., Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Mitten & Wodak, 1993; van Dijk, 2004; Wodak & Reisigl, 1999) creating the impression that these concepts are not in play in sub-Sahara Africa such as found in Ghana. As ethnic identity and prejudices are socially conditioned, it is possible that different societies will express these concepts differently and interpret them differently. Recent research has confirmed that there is variation in the complexity and explicitness of discursive patterns of prejudice-expression,

and has suggested that even the specific prejudicial content such expressions transmit is largely determined by the historical and linguistic contexts of their emergence (Mitten & Wodak, 1993). Thus, the present study aims to investigate the way Ghanaian students use the English language to show their attitude towards their ethnic identities and those of others as Ghana presents a different context to the ones that have received extensive attention.

All in all, the current study has the objective of widening the scope of the study of talk and prejudice to reveal a more general look of the features of prejudiced discourse. The study may contribute to our insight into talk and communication about minority groups, and hence, into forms of discrimination and prejudice in many other sub-Saharan African countries.

In following the traditions of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study deals with the use of discourse as a means to enact and legitimise structures and strategies of dominance and resistance in the social relationship of ethnicity. This is done with the purpose of uncovering, revealing and disclosing what is implicit, hidden or otherwise not immediately obvious in relations of discursively enacted dominance and their underlying ideologies (van Dijk, 1995).

3. Methodology

The Discourse-Historical Approach is used in this study. This approach was developed by Ruth Wodak as a means of analysing the “Waldheim Affair” in Austria. Wodak and Reisigl (1999) consider this approach as an improvement on van Dijk’s (1984) socio-cognitivist approach.

The Discourse-Historical Approach believes that the association of Us versus Them forms the basis of prejudiced perceptions and discourses (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). This dichotomy begins with the negative labelling of the Them while positively referring to Us. This is furthered by the generalisation of the negative attributes to the Other group (stereotyping) and then the argument made is elaborated and justified through narratives.

The discursive realisation of this process can be more or less intensified or mitigated,

implicit or explicit, due to historical conventions, public levels of tolerance, political correctness, context, and public sphere (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In analysing these discursive realisations, the approach advocates that the following questions be posed: How are persons named and referred to linguistically? What traits, characteristics and features are attributed to Them? By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify or legitimise the exclusion or inclusion of some? From what perspective or point of view are these labels, attributions, and arguments expressed? Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they even intensified or mitigated? The current study focuses on one facet of the Discourse-Historical approach. This is the approach's need to find answers to the third question: By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify or legitimise the exclusion or inclusion of some?

3.1. Participants

The population targeted was the student body of the University of Cape Coast. The university has 17, 000 regular students and 200, 000 distant learners. The students that were used for the study were sampled from the 17, 000 regular students.

The informants used in the study totalled twenty. These twenty were sampled purposively from student associations that have exclusive membership for members of specific ethnic groups. An example of such an association used for the study is the Nzema Students Association of the University of Cape

Coast. The informants were sampled if they fulfilled the following criteria:

- a. The student has been a regular student of the University of Cape Coast for a minimum of one full academic year. Thus, first year students were not included in the study as there is no empirical way to ensure that first year students had lived in societies that demanded every day interaction with people of different ethnic backgrounds.
- b. The student belongs to one of ten major ethnic groups needed for the study. The student must belong to an ethnic group that has not already had someone sampled as a representative of the student's ethnic group. The ethnic groups used in this study included the Asanti, Ewe, Fanti, Dagbani, Nzema, Ga, Krobo, Akyem, Guan, and Gonja.
- c. The student does not have issues of dual ethnicity where there could be confusion as where he or she comes from and to which ethnic group they identify themselves with. Thus, informants had to have both parents being members of the same ethnic group.

Students who fulfilled the criteria were sampled and grouped into two. The first group of ten were the focal participants and were interviewed both as members of the focus group and as individuals while members of the second group were interviewed individually as secondary participants. These secondary participants reviewed the data analysis to determine the consistency of the results drawn. The participants were allowed to choose aliases of their own and these were used.

Table 1
Focal Participants

Alias	Home town	Ethnic group
Hakim	Gambini	Dagbani
Rex	Gakpo	Ewe
Maame Efua	Elmina	Fanti
Kwame	Mampong	Asanti
Arrow	Axim	Nzema
Sutah	Jirapa	Dagaaba
Fati	Mole	Gonja
Baffour	Osino	Akim
Tetteh	Somanya	Krobo
Odartey	Labadi	Ga

3.2. Research Setting

The research site for the study is the University of Cape Coast which is situated in Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. The University is an equal opportunity teaching and research institution established on 15th December, 1962 by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah as a college. Established as the third government-funded university in Ghana it began with an initial intake of 155 students taking over from a teacher training college located in what is now called the Southern Section, 6.4 kilometres west of the ancient educational town of Cape Coast, the College expanded so rapidly in size that by 1965 the development of permanent campus 1.6 kilometres to the north of the original pioneer site had begun. Student enrolment has since levelled off around 17, 000 regular students and 200, 000 distant learners. The university is currently organised into ten Faculty /Schools and headed by Deans.

There are a number of reasons the University of Cape Coast was selected as the setting for this study. First, the student population of the university is drawn from the various ethnic groups in Ghana and it provides a rich pool in which these different cultures interact. For some, the university provides them with their first opportunity to interact with people from other cultures. Second, the University of Cape Coast was selected as entry into the site would be easier than entry into other universities in Ghana because of my own affiliation to the university. Finally, the proximity of the university was considered as it afforded me with more time to interact closely with my informants and keep in touch with them.

3.3. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in the research. Kvale (1996) conceives that an exploratory interview is open and has little structure. The interviewer in this case introduces an issue, an area to be charted or a problem complex to be uncovered. The interviewer follows up on the subject's answers and seeks new information about and new angles on the topic.

The individual interviews were conducted once. These interviews were conducted in the informant's room or when the informant felt it

much more comfortable in the researcher's office. Basically, the comfort of the informant was the overriding variable in deciding where to hold the interviews. The individual interviews were guided by an interview schedule which listed topics intended to be covered during the course of the interviews. The topics focused on inter-ethnic relations in terms of marriage, employment, and friendship. The open-ended questions in the interview schedule were intended to give the participants an opportunity to elaborate on their responses as well as enable the probing for detailed information and reformulate and reorder questions (Creswell, 2006). The questions on the schedule were not asked in the same order for all participants. In line with King (2004) and Kvale (1996), the interviews began with questions that demanded very simple and easy answers for all, but from then the order changed depending on the answers provided to the initial questions. Each interview lasted an average of forty-five minutes.

4. Results

Semantic strategies are a kind of discourse strategy that include the sum of language and cognitive moves which are used to reach an adequate goal of communication (van Dijk, 1981). It results in text comprehension by the reader or listener. Here, the language user takes a number of steps in order to perform a complex task – in this instance partaking in the discourse of ethnic prejudice in Ghana. Each functionally relevant step of a strategy, that is, each step that is assumed to contribute to the overall goal of the strategy, is called *a move*. Moves may relate backwards to previous moves as in corrections or they may relate forwards, as in the preparation of the next moves of the same speaker or of a previous or next speaker (van Dijk, 1984). The analysis of data reveals four types of semantic strategies used by Ghanaian university students in the discourse of prejudice, as presented sequentially.

4.1. Projection

Projection as a semantic strategy involves the transfer of prejudiced beliefs to the Other (Li, 2010). The transfer of these beliefs is normally done by attributing the prejudiced models to

the Other. This strategy is normally seen in moves similar to:

They [the Other] are the prejudiced ones.

The interview data show that projection is done with declarative sentences where the Other unto whom the projection is done is the agent of the prejudiced attribute. The following interview extracts show examples of participants using the projection semantic strategy.

Extract 1

TT: I like all sorts of people but *they don't like to make friends* (ITT)

Extract 2

AS: I remember SS [Secondary School] we all wanted friends but *the Ewes were always together, they didn't like to be friends so I don't have a lot of Ewe friends* (IAS)

The data reveals two possible sub-moves in projection; the blame the Other move and the blame the unknown move.

4.2. Blame the Other Projection Move

The 'Blame the Other Projection Move' is the more common of the projection moves. This move credits prejudiced models to the Other as one of its goals. The motive is to present the Other as having prejudiced characteristics.

In Extract 3 below, the participant, KD, who is an Ashanti, uses the projection strategy extensively when the interviewer asks him about his relationship with 'outsiders'.

Extract 3

I: so why do you think that you have a problem making friends with people from other groups

KD: mmm it's based on, *I think it's based on their ideas and perceptions* (IKD)

The above extract shows two types of moves that can be made within the 'Blame the Other Move' of projection. These two types include projecting within a subordinate clause, where the speaker shares a view that is personal; and projecting within a main clause, where the Other is the agent of the clause.

In projecting within a subordinate clause, the main clause tends to be a statement of the speaker's position on the proposition to be projected. This position has the intention of mitigating the probability of the hearer thinking the speaker as being prejudiced. For instance, in Extract 3, the choice of the modal expression "I think" as the main clause may depict the speaker's uncertainty in the proposition shared in the subordinate clause. This has the effect of projecting the Other as prejudiced and the speaker as being unsure in that thought. Extract 4 is another example of this move.

Extract 4

FM: *I like making friends but they [Ewe's] prefer to keep to themselves*

I: So are you trying to say that you don't have a lot of Ewe friends

FM: *I try but they naa they are always keeping to themselves you know.* (IFM)

Extract 4 above shows that the subordinating sub-move has its uses. In extract two, the main clause is used to make statements that aid the speaker to present herself as not ethnocentric. This sub-move is made before the main move of blaming the Other is done. Extract five shows another instance where this sub-move of positive self-presentation is used before the main move of blaming the other (the sub-move is underlined).

Extract 5

I: Would you like to marry an Ashanti

AT: *Of course if I get one but those people they don't like to marry outside their ethnic group* (IAT)

Sub-moves like the underlined in extract 5 perform an interesting goal. They serve as a means of de-emphasising the speaker's negative qualities while emphasising the negative qualities of the Other. Van Dijk (1992) argues that such moves perform the function of protecting the dominant group. This is because they help in defending oneself and one's ethnicity from charges of being prejudiced in nature (Augoustinos & Every, 2007).

The above extracts, while exemplifying the sub-move of subordinating the Other, show glimpses of the main move of 'Blame the Other.' The structure of this move tends to

make the Other the agent in the construction, thereby making out the Other to be a cognitively conscious party to the reproduction of the prejudice of which they are accused.

4.3. Blame the Unknown Projection Move

This move is less common than its counterpart discussed above. When one uses this strategy, one's goal is to project the prejudiced models to an unknown entity. This strategy is achieved in two moves: the 'Blame the Other Move' is followed by a move that seeks to attribute the beliefs shared in the first move to an unknown participant. The following extract shows this move in use.

Extract 6

ME: *They [Fantis] don't love to work. They are lazy people. That's what I have heard.*

I: why do you think people say that?

ME: I don't know. That's what they say that's what they know so... (IME)

The above extract shows a more subtle means of projecting negative attributes on to the Other by attributing prejudiced ideas to an unknown source. Thus, as surmised by Quasthoff (1973), it is not clear in projections like these if the semantics of such statements show the speaker repeating hegemonic prejudiced opinion or that she actually subscribes to it personally. A further example of this strategy in projection is as follows:

Extract 7

I: like what kind of ideas

KD: mhmhm let me say some people think the Ewes like they are into medicine and those things so people from other ethnic group wouldn't like that so...So they rather like people who are from the ethnic groups and they know they, they are like this so they can behave the same way towards ... (IKD)

Here, before the projection strategy is complete, the speaker does a double projection. The first move is to blame an unnamed entity for the view he is about to share; the second move is to blame the Other for the prejudice that occurs.

The above data and discussion on projection as a semantic strategy shows similarities in the

kinds of attributes that are commonly used to project the other as prejudiced. For example, Bartra (1994) and Bonnilla-Silva (2002) argue that in American society, when projection is used, the Other is normally depicted as segregationist in nature. This theme is very common in the Ghanaian context when speakers use projection to stereotypically declare Others as segregationist as seen in extracts 1 to 4. Indeed, as a means of denying ethnicism, projection is a means of reversing prejudice (Durrheim et al., 2005).

4.4. Rationalisation

Rationalisation is a strategy used to make a prejudiced statement seem to lack prejudice through reasoning (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). The danger of this strategy is that it serves as a serious means of legitimising prejudiced action and thought. Indeed, as Billig (1988) and Billig et al. (1988) point out, the common sense notion of prejudice – to prejudge – has become associated with irrationality, poor reasoning, and unexamined views. As such, prejudice is recognised as violating a common sense belief in the values of reason and rationality. To appear not prejudiced, it is important to present one's views as reasonable, rational, and thoughtfully arrived at. An effective way of doing this is to present one's views as reflecting the external world rather than one's internal (and therefore potentially racist) psychology.

Extract 8 illustrates the rationalisation strategy in use using the move of reflecting the views of the external world in a commonsensical manner:

Extract 8

I: would you employ some one from a different ethnic group

KD: *actually in this world we are living in ... and if you know you are, you are person who are related to most. The people, most of the people you are related to or you are friends with are Asantis, then that means most of the people working under you will be from your ethnic group.* (IKD)

Within the above extract, KD who is an Ashanti appeals to the 'logic' of the world. He does this by using the preamble "actually in this world we are living in." This creates the

impression that the logic of choosing to work with people from one's ethnic group is not an individual choice but rather one predestined by the nature of the social environment.

The use of commonsense knowledge in rationalising is given an interesting twist when one participant refers to a popular proverb as justification for behaviour that could be construed as prejudiced:

Extract 9

I: if you manned a company, would you hire anybody from any ethnic background

OL: no. I'll like to employ mostly people from my ethnic group. *They say the devil you know is better than the angel you don't know so me I'll stick to my people I don't know*

I: even if they are not qualified

OL: I'm not sure but I'll prefer to help my own people

I: Isn't that prejudiced

OL: not at all. I'm just helping my people. *That is natural, right? (IOL)*

The participant OL is from the Ga ethnic group which is the majority ethnic group in the capital of Ghana, Accra. OL provides two examples of moves that are possible in the strategy of rationalising. These are 'the popular saying move' and the 'it is only natural move'. The goal of these moves is to establish the logic of the prejudiced attitude by appealing to good sense and the power of nature.

Verkuyten (1998) found that participants in his focus groups argued that they themselves were not responsible for their negative views of foreigners. Rather, their negative views were presented as the natural and inevitable outcome of living with foreigners. In such accounts, minority out-groups were constructed as having only themselves to blame for their negative portrayal. This type of strategy is useful for establishing oneself as reasonable and rational. The following extract shows a similar means of rationalisation used by a participant.

Extract 10

I: Would you like to marry an Ashanti

AT: Of course if I get one but those people they don't like to marry outside their ethnic group

I: really

AT: yes they always prefer to marry their own people so that their money stays in the family so even if I wanted, I wouldn't get. *I remember my cousin dated one but when it was time for them to get married, he left her and before she knew it, he was married to another woman from his village. So I won't even advice anyone to go out with them. (IAT)*

The above extract shows a further example of rationalisation. This example has two parts – the narrative of some personal experience and a 'logical' conclusion drawn from the experience. This conforms to what van Dijk (1992) and Tusting et al (2002) describe when they establish that to justify their views, speakers often appeal to observable and thus purported "factual" claims about minority out-group behaviour that is represented as negative, antisocial, or transgressing the dominant group's social norms. These factual claims often take the form of storytelling, which presents first-hand personal experiences of undesirable out-group behaviour. The justification of claims with reference to personal experience suggests that students are aware of the social norms cautioning against making stereotypical judgements of other cultures. This finding corroborates much of the research literature on racist discourse. Buttny (1997) in his study of American college students talking race, found that students were aware of the stigma against expressing explicitly racist views, and therefore legitimated their positions by backing them up with evidence from their own experience. Tusting et al. (2002) ascertains that this move in the rationalisation strategy was by far the most common in prejudiced discourse.

The strategy of rationalisation is a goal in itself (van Dijk, 1984). This is because even though the strategy has the goal of presenting that which is prejudiced as not prejudiced, it also seeks to rationalise and legitimised prejudiced action. This makes rationalisation one of the most dangerous strategies used in the discourse of ethnic prejudice.

4.5. Semantic Distancing

The English language, much like any other language, has an array of resources available to it for the expression of temporal or

locational characteristics of a situation within which an utterance takes place and whose meaning is thus relative to the situation. These resources are termed as deictic in nature (Crystal, 1980). Referential elements that are exophoric, cataphoric, and anaphoric structures are also considered to be deictic in nature. However, this view of deixis is incomplete. It is possible to think of deictic structures as not just a means of determining the context or the deictic context as suggested by Brown and Yule (1983), but increasingly, as a means of determining the spatial relationship between the speaker of an utterance and the proposition made in the utterance itself. Thus, it is possible to determine how closely a speaker associates him/herself to concepts within the utterance made and how distant they are to them. This view of deictic structures can be exemplified in the following simple examples:

I am Ga
They are Ga

It can be determined easily that in the first example, the speaker associates more closely with the concept of being Ga than the second speaker. This clearly shows that pronouns are used as a means of showing how closely or otherwise we feel about being associated with certain groups.

By extending the above argument, it is possible to determine people's attitudes towards their own ethnic groups as well as the ethnic groups of others by examining the manner in which they use deixis. Particularly, pronouns are a great resource in this kind of examination. While some think that personal pronouns are purely indexical in nature and substitutes for nouns (as found in most basic grammars), there are those who believe that personal pronouns have the added semantic feature of determining distance. This is to submit that personal pronouns are deictic in addition to their indexical nature. Thus, the personal pronouns as well as the possessive pronouns can be used for the purpose of declaring membership (showing closeness) and disassociation (showing distance). While the first person pronouns *I*, *We*, *Me*, *Us*, *My*, and *Our* can be interpreted as including the speaker in the predicative proposition and as such show closeness of group identification

(as argued by de Gaynesford [2006]), pronouns of the second and third person nature are exclusive in nature and can be interpreted to show distancing in group identification. Thus, these pronouns provide us with a window through which we get a peek into the kind of identities a speaker prefers to project and the kind he/she would rather not have associated with him/her.

The analysis of transcribed interviews shows that informants identified with their ethnic groups and at different grades of distance through the use of pronouns. Informants showed closeness to their ethnic groups when the propositions in the utterance were positive. AH, a Dagbani, shares the following thoughts when interviewed.

Extract 11

I: where do you come from?

AH: **we** come from the northern region specifically erm Gombini a suburb in Tamale...

I: do you find scenes that the northerner gets offended when people say things like ntefo

AH: for **me** at this level erm of education having this level of education **I** do understand it, to **me I I** think **I** understand it but just that people usually use it to tease no that's all (IAH)

The informant has no problem with disclosing where he comes from and showing how closely he relates to his hometown by not just using the first person singular pronoun but by using the royal *we* or *pluralis majestatis*. The *pluralis majestatis*, as found in a number of languages, is used when the first person plural pronoun occasionally refers to a single speaker to make the addressee aware of the speaker's superior social status. As a mark of royalty, AH uses the *pluralis majestatis* as a member of the Dagbani royal family branch known as the Andani which resides in the Tamale metropolis. It must be noted that as Tamale is arguably the third largest city of Ghana, it puts the Andani in a position to control massive resources in that area. Again, as stated by AH, Gombini is a suburb and suburbia is an exclusive area. Most Ghanaians come from villages but AH comes from an area thought of as suburban. It might be these things that AH wishes to relate himself so closely with that

influence his choice of the first person pronoun. Thus, the goal of the strategy of semantic distancing in this instance is very similar to van Dijk's (2004) assertion that prejudiced discourse has the singular goal of positive self-presentation while emphasising the negativity of the Other by the elites of society.

Although AH was the only informant to use the *pluralis majestatis*, he was not the only informant who seemed aware of the availability of the use of the pronoun as a means of showing the closeness one feels towards the proposition in an utterance. KD, an Asanti, provides the following examples.

Extract 12

I easily get, you know, easily make friends when I know people are from **my** ethnic group like easily make friend but for the other ethnic groups mmm tse it takes a longer time yeah especially when...(IKD)

As with AH, KD uses the first person pronoun to show how closely he would want to be associated with the positive propositions established in the utterances. KD uses these deictic elements to show how much he would love to be associated with being a good friend. Of particular interest is KD's use of the first person possessive pronoun 'my' to show his affinity to his ethnic group. KD shows a close bond between himself and the concepts of friendship and ethnicity.

The use of distant pronouns in negative propositions is recurrent in the interviews conducted during the study. AH, for instance, provides the following extract, using the third person in answering a question that should have been about himself, and not others.

Extract 13

erm for me at this level erm of education, having this level of education, I do understand it but if you say it to a typical person who have not had the education that we have now, it might cause a confusion. Because the word nte, the history behind it is like **they** move together because of the wars in the north **they** moving in pairs so **they** were called nte two people but people misinterpret it as people who don't understand things and stuff like that so if you say it to a typical northerner it might

bring some confusion but to me I I think I understand it but just that people usually use it to tease no that's all. (IAH)

The above extract shows AH closely identifying with the concept of being a northerner, that is, when the predicative proposition is positive. As such, he uses the first person pronoun when he talks about education. However, he reverts to the distant third person pronoun when the predicative proposition talks about the prejudice that he suffers as a member of the group known as northerners and prejudice he has towards members of his own group that he refers to as 'typical'. AH undergoes a cognitive process that demands that he distances himself from the concept of the 'disagreeing northerner' to an atypical one – a modern northerner. This move is an example of what Wetherell and Potter (1992) refer to as an ideological dilemma.

The Fanti informant, ME, presents an even more peculiar use of language in talking about and constructing prejudice. Unlike most of the other informants who used close pronouns when discussing concepts that put them and their ethnic groups in favourable terms, ME, throughout the interview, preferred to use distant pronouns – whether the propositions made in the utterances were positive or negative in nature. For instance, when ME wanted to insist on the hardworking nature of the Fanti, she says:

Extract 14

Me I will say **they** are not lazy cos I've seen **them they** try to do **their** best ok but em may it because of some financial problems here and there that's why. (IME)

The distant pronouns (in bold) could have been substituted by the closer first person pronouns of 'we', 'us' and 'our', if ME had truly wished to associate herself more closely with her ethnic group. Indeed, one would think that this choice of pronoun use would be a one off thing explainable as that ME, not being comfortable with the concept of being lazy, wishes to distance herself as much as possible from it. However, in talking of beauty – an unmistakably positive concept – ME continues to distance herself from her ethnicity by the use of the third person plural pronoun.

Extract 15

Ok you know **they** [Fanti women] are beautiful **they** can cook better. (IME)

It is possible to argue thus that ME does not cognitively feel as much pride as she should probably feel as a member of the Fanti ethnic group and this leads her to make deixic choices that distance her from a group of which she is a member. Therefore, from her linguistic choices, it is deduced that ME is subconsciously prejudiced towards members of her own ethnic group.

The use of deixis to show cognitive closeness or distance through the use of pronouns among various ethnolinguistic groups in Ghana is fascinating. Even more intriguing is the use of the definite article 'the' as a 'pseudo-pronoun' as a means of determining one's closeness or prejudice towards a concept or group. This use of 'the' is captured once in AH's interview when the following transpires

Extract 16

I: so what group does that put you under

AH: the ethnic group will fall under the Andani. (IAH)

AH avoids using any of the personal pronouns but opts for the definite article. The use of the definite article as a personal pronoun in Ghanaian English is a known phenomenon. However, instances of its use have mostly been limited to situations where the third person personal pronoun would have been expected (Owusu-Ansah, 1992). Using the definite article in this sense could be influenced by a number of social variables which may have affected AH's thought processes and motivated him to make a choice of a linguistic form that is neither too close nor too far from the Andani. As explained earlier, the Andani is a royal family whose ascendance to power would give them control over most of the north of Ghana. Thus, AH would love to be associated with royalty as the Andani would excite political, cultural and economic power in anyone who knows his Ghanaian history. However, placed within the context of what has been happening in contemporary times, being an Andani can also be problematic. This is because the death of the past Ya-Na, overlord of Dagbon (a title to which the Andanis hold joint rights to with the

Abudu family), has in public circles in Ghana been partially blamed on the Andani. In light of this, one would also love to distance one's self from accusations of murder. AH is socially and cognitively in a dilemma, as associating too closely with his ethnicity comes along with the tag of being possibly associated with some crime and being too distant takes away the benefits of royalty. AH chooses a neutral form, a linguistic form that is neither close nor distant. This shows that the use of deixis to indicate prejudice is graded as the distance can be far, near or midway.

The informant AE presents what might be considered as the norm where no prejudice is shown towards one's own ethnicity and the appropriate distance is maintained from the other ethnic groups. Even when the propositions expressed in the utterance are not flattering in any way, AE, who is an Nzema, sticks to relating closely to his ethnic group as is found in the following extract.

Extract 17

Most of the time, they classify **us** together with the Ewe. They say that em **we** [Nzemas] like practicing this sort of black magic and all that. But it's wrong it's totally wrong... fine people practice it but from my point of view I think it's a general thing its everywhere every tribe it everywhere just that in the olden days or something because of the wars and all that the tribal wars that was the main reason why people were using black magic...but that was back then (IAE)

The above extract reveals the following. First, Ghanaian university students are familiar with the prescriptive use of pronouns. This may diffuse the impression that the choices in pronouns that are distant may have been as a result of a lack of linguistic competence. Again, the extract possibly reveals further that even though prejudice is socially conditioned, individual characteristics are also influential. AE, unlike the other participants, is a student of African Studies, hence, it is possible to argue that he has a better understanding of prejudice and ethnic relations in Ghana. This influence may affect his way of thought (cognition) and his choice of words.

The above discussion suggests that it is possible to determine one's attitude towards

his or her own ethnic group through the way that person uses deictic structures, particularly personal and possessive pronouns. When the attitude a participant has is one of solidarity, then that person is more likely to use a pronoun in the first person. However, the third

person pronoun is used to distance one's self from one's ethnic group. The on-going argument shows that it is possible to use pronouns in grades to show one's cognitive spatial relationship to one's ethnicity, which is illustrated below

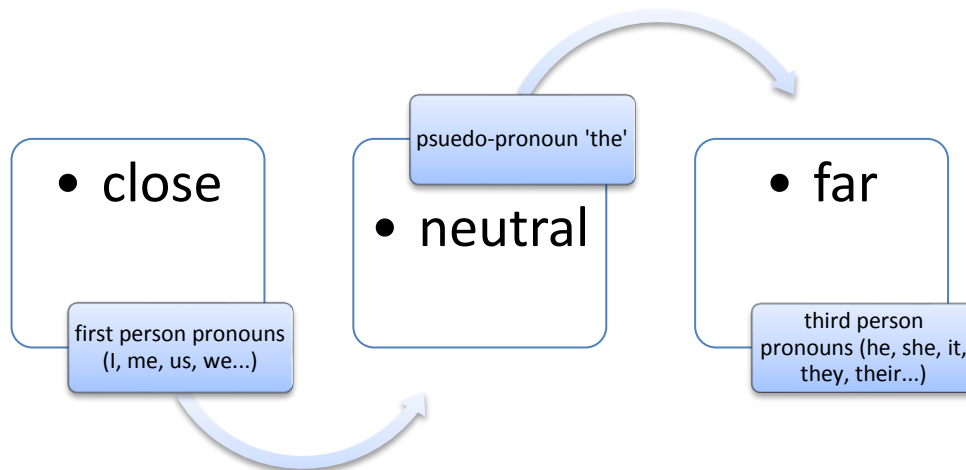


Figure 1

Pronouns and their Propositional Distance in Relation to Prejudice

4.6. Incoherence

Coherence deals with the togetherness of a text that makes it understandable. This can be achieved using a number of strategies. These strategies include cohesion, clarity of expression, and mechanical accuracy among others. The concept of cohesion is a semantic one (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). It refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs when the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. One element in the discourse presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. When this happens, a relationship of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposed and the presupposing, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text. Thus, for some utterance of language to be considered as whole and as text, it is important that that piece of language use be at the very least, cohesive.

The literature has shown that when directly confronted with being prejudiced during interviews, most people have given answers that are less coherent than previous answers

they have given. Van Dijk (2002) and Bonnilla-Silva (2002) have shown that this can be characterised by the use of hesitation features and the utterance of structures that make little or no sense together.

The data gathered from the interviews show that Ghanaian university students also become incoherent when asked questions that may reveal their intolerance towards members of the out-group. This can be seen in the following extract where the informant is fairly fluent but hesitates each time he is about to say something that can be perceived as being prejudicial.

Extract 19

KD: well as for favouritism it is inborn you always try and make sure your people get places to fit but when it comes to producing I mean doing the work as expected looking for quality I think will go in for the em not the tri I will go in not on tribal base but I would select based on your quality and efficiency (IKD)

It can be seen that from the above extract, when the informant gets to the part where he has to utter anything remotely prejudiced, he

hesitates and finds the need to reconstruct the sentence. It can be argued that this informant is cognitively uncomfortable with the way he thinks of the other or that he is aware of the social implications about making his prejudiced views clear and open through language, thus making him attempt to carefully choose his words – thus, explaining the hesitation. A clearer example can be seen in the following example:

Extract 20

I: Would you say you are prejudiced

FM: Not at all

I: so would you marry a man from just any ethnic group

FM: mmm...hmmm...I don't. I don't. May be. [laughter].

Marry someone. Sure. (*IFM*)

Incoherence can also be characterised by the excessive use of hesitation markers and repetitions in one's speech. An example of such incoherence is provided in the following extract.

Extract 21

I: Have you ever dated anyone outside your ethnic group

ME: **mmm...erm...I. Well you know how it's like...I think** (laughter)

I: well have you

ME: **(laughter) yes I think but aaa erm not really**

I: but would you mind dating someone from another ethnic group

ME: **er...er...right now I'm no longer no longer sure** (*IME*)

This informant hitherto had been rather sure and straight forward in her responses. It may be argued that she may have been uncomfortable talking about dating but the same informant had previously freely answered questions about marriage. It is more plausible that she became less coherent because her prejudices had been directly confronted. Bonilla-Silva (2002) argues that incoherence in prejudiced talk can be a strategy used with the goal of saving face.

It is possible to think that in talking directly about our prejudices, especially the ones that people recognise to be prejudicial, most people would feel uncomfortable about them and as such, this discomfort would be communicated in language through incoherence. It is consequently suggested by Bonilla-Silva (2002) that incoherence occurs when the subject matter of the interaction delves into topics that are forbidden by the larger society.

5. Discussion

This final section provides a summary of the research findings, implications, and recommendations for further research.

The research finds that Ghanaian university students use the strategies of projection, rationalisation, semantic distancing, and incoherence for varying reasons in the discourse of prejudice. These observations are summarily presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Semantic Strategies Used by Ghanaian University Students in the Discourse of Ethnic Prejudice

Semantic Strategy	Goal	Devices
Projection	Positive Us representation versus Negative Them representation	Subordination
Rationalization	Legitimization of stereotypes	Narratives
Semantic Distancing	Propositional positioning	Personal and possessive pronouns
Incoherence	Deflection of prejudice projection	Hesitation markers, grammatical errors, fragmentation of sentences

Table 2 shows the strategies, their goal and the linguistic devices that are used to realise these goals.

The findings have an implication for language socialisation; since language is a part of culture and is a means of (re)producing and legitimising shared beliefs, it is possible that

these strategies are learnt through language socialisation (van Dijk, 2006). Language, through discourse is the link between cognition and social construction. As such, language is a means of engineering society. In lieu of this, it is possible to think that ethnic prejudice can be combated through a critical look at language socialisation and systematically re-socializing society using the same mechanism.

It is also recommended that studies be conducted in the same Ghanaian setting that seeks to analyse the labelling practices used in the discourse of ethnic prejudice in Ghana. Again, the language of other social elites like politicians and journalist can be analysed to identify other strategies in play in the discourse of ethnic prejudice in Ghana.

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