

"From the Shadows to the Limelight": Battle of General's Wife in the Public Sphere- A Discourse Analysis of Sunday Times' Feature Article on Anoma Fonseka. (A case study)

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ABSTRACT

Communication scholars and social science researchers have long been interested in the way people and events are portrayed or represented in the mainstream media. Common female gender stereotypes found in the media have a powerful influence over how society views women and how women view themselves. According to communication scholars scrutiny of media portrayals is important because the social status of groups and individuals are identified, revealed and established, disseminated widely through media's positive or negative portrayals. How media reflects or constructs reality through language is one of the central themes in discourse analysis(DA). DA was used to analyse one of the main feature articles published about Mrs. Anoma Fonseka in the "Sunday Times" one of the most widely read English newspapers today. It is evident from this analysis that Mrs. Fonseka is portrayed as a person embodied in the domestic sphere confining and limiting her to the role of a good house wife.

Key words: Gender Stereotypes, Discourse Analysis, Inter-textuality, Patriarchy, Labeling

1. INTRODUCTION.

Communication scholars and researchers have long been interested in the way things are portrayed in media. Hacker (1951) and Durik, Amanda and Hyde, (2010) have suggested that examination of media portrayals is important because the social status of groups and individuals can be identified through these portrayals. The influence of the media in reflecting, representing, constructing and expressing and portraying culture, should not be taken for granted. How media reflects or constructs reality or both is a question central to discourse analysis. As (Hartley, 1982) puts it, news is a creative process that takes raw materials (linguistic, social or historical determinants), works on them, and transforms them into 'a recognizable product which we accept as familiar'. According to (Burton, 2005) not only do news texts 'draw upon and re-circulate discourses' (sometimes magnifying and privileging some), but they are also capable of promoting mythologies and false understandings. Similarly according to (Hartley, 1982) a critical understanding of news discourse through analysis can demystify social meanings that in turn will contribute towards greater equity among people. More importantly, according to (Bell,

1995) news offers an ideal source of data from which we can learn about social meanings and stereotypes through its mode of language and communication. By looking at a particular news discourse we can ask ourselves, whether there are patterns in the language of a text which promote a particular discourse in representing or stereotyping specific groups. Further, we can also compare the way, television, radio and print media present the same news item, viz. do they use similar or different words to describe what happened? Do they use emotive language in their description or is the language dry in its effort to be both informative and impartial? The discourses of other groups such as politicians, men and women, religious leaders or pressure groups could infiltrate news discourse and become an accepted part of its structure. Scrutiny or investigation of such inter-textuality whereby genres and discourses can inform, influence or become embedded in an existing text, can produce some interesting insights. Discourse analysis (DA) has evolved from linguistic studies, literary criticism, and semiotics. Schiffren, Tannen and Hamilton (2001) hold that DA is concerned with language-in use; that is, how individuals accomplish personal, social, and political projects through language. Further, discourse analysis argues that language and words, as a system of signs, are in themselves essentially meaningless; it is through the shared, mutually agreed on use of language that meaning are created. Language both mediates and constructs one's understanding of reality. Moreover, language also defines the social roles that are available to individuals and serves as the primary means through which they enact their identities (Chandler, cited in Starks and Trinidad 2007, p 1375). Moreover, by careful analysis of language, in other words, using what Gee (2005) has described as the seven "building tasks" of language (significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, sign systems and knowledge), can shed light on the creation and maintenance of social norms, the construction of personal and group identities, and the negotiation of social and political interaction. Scholars, such as Crewe (2004); Gee (2005); Hayakawa & Hayakawa (1991) hold that, discourse analysis involves tracing the historical evolution of language practices and examining how language both shapes and reflects dynamic cultural, social, and political practices.

2. OBJECTIVES.

Keeping the above information in mind, first in order to understand how newspaper journalists use language to create and enact identities and activities, and second what discourses are used and how they shape identities, activities and relationships, the purpose of this research paper is, to use discourse analysis as a method to scrutinize one of the main feature articles which appeared on page 12, of *Sunday Times*, one of the most read privately owned English newspapers in Sri Lanka, on Sunday 7th March 2010 about Mrs. Anoma Fonseka under the main heading "From the shadows to the limelight". Having taken on the mantle of running the political campaign of her remanded husband, General (retd,) Sarath Fonseka, Anoma Fonseka talks of her "new found strength." Further,

the same feature article was given prominence in the front cover page of the same Sunday paper on the left side with her photograph, with the eye-catching words, "Anoma's battle." In order to get readers' attention, Mrs. Fonseka's photograph was placed on par with the paper's own logo "The Sunday Times" indicating its relevance. So, how does Chandani Kirinde, a woman journalist, on behalf of the Sunday Times portray Mrs. Anoma Fonseka? Since, the leader of the Democratic National Alliance party's main candidate former Army Commander, General (retd) Sarath Fonseka was put in custody facing possible court martial, it is a fact that his wife, Mrs. Anoma Fonseka has emerged as his proxy campaigner. Therefore, how is Mrs. Anoma Fonseka portrayed in the Sunday Times? Are the women who enter public sphere activities such as politics represented fairly and given equal status as their male counterparts?

According to a recent study (Tudawe, 2009), most women who have received political nominations in Sri Lanka are widows, daughters or sisters of men with political connections. Further, the ruling party nominated only 10 women, and the main opposition party nominated 15 women for the general elections in April, 2010. Therefore, it is correct to say that women in Sri Lanka have remained under-represented in Parliament with just 11 Members (representing just 6%) in 2009. General elections, held on the 8th April 2010 has only resulted in 10 women being elected to the seventh Parliament of Sri Lanka, and some women groups are rightly disappointed, because there were 12 women members in the previous parliament. A non-discrimination clause in Article 12 (2) of the 1978 Constitution, includes provisions to safeguard the rights and specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Further, Sri Lanka has also ratified international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and a Women's Charter which established a National Committee on women to take care of women's issues in 1993. The United Nations' theme for International Women's day for 2010, was "Equal rights, Equal opportunities, Progress for all". Though, according to the "Mid Year Population in Thousands-2008" statistics, released by Department of Census and Statistics, over 52% of the population of Sri Lanka are women, the sad ground-reality is that, still most women, remain invisible in the public sphere. Some media scholars accuse media itself as responsible for symbolically annihilating women from the public sphere, by always portraying them under 'masculine or patriarchal corporate culture' (Tuchman et al., 1978). In fact, years of research examining media content, has documented many stereotypical images of women in a variety of media (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003; Coltrane and Messineo 2000). According to Steinke, J. (2005) though images of women, in the media have improved in recent years, many still focus on female characters that appear to be more concerned about appearance and romance than academic achievement or careers. While some media images portray girls and women as strong characters, showing them as independent, intelligent, honest, direct, and capable of solving their own problems, many more media images reinforce traditional stereotypes of girls and women as dependent, passive, and emotional Signorelli (1997).

3. METHODOLOGY

As already explained, according to Smith & Bell (2007, p.78), "discourse analysis involves a close examination of text, including visual imagery and sound as well as spoken or written language. It is concerned with both the form of the text and its use in social context, its construction, distribution and reception. It aims to understand and elucidate the meanings and social significance of the text". According to Taylor (2001), it is useful to view DA as a range of approaches rather than a single practice. This option, includes social linguistic analysis, interpretive structuralism, critical linguistic analysis, conversational analysis, genre analysis, ethnography of communication, genealogical analysis, discursive psychology, narrative analysis, literary analysis, content analysis and so on. A factor common to all approaches is the analysis of language in use, with the methodology more likely to be qualitative than quantitative. The detail of analysis that qualitative research offers, enables the deconstruction of language to reveal nuances and shades of meaning to go far beyond the benefits of a purely quantitative approach. Further, linguistics can be considered the major source of discourse analysis, in particular European text linguistics van Dijk (1988a). On the other hand, Halliday's approach to linguistic description, systemic functional theory (1976, 1978, 1985), focuses on the function of language and how people use it to exchange meaning. Moving from an abstract view of linguistics towards a more functional perspective has led to the emergence of critical linguistics, whereby choice of words and word combinations were seen to reflect ideological forces (Fowler et al., 1979). Critical linguistics however was later overtaken by social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 198, 1992, 1995; and van Dijk, 1993).

"Analysis of text can range from the micro-analysis of language features such as lexical choices or syntactic forms, to a broader focus that looks at overall textual structures. Accordingly, these broader kinds of analysis have maintained the principle of linguistic analysis, that both language and discourse have a systematic nature that may be described through rules" (van Dijk, 1988a cited in Smith and Bell, p 80). However, scholars hold that the search for meaning behind the social construction of words, sounds and images remains at the heart of modern discourse analysis, which aims to achieve a more whole and transparent view of the world through understanding dominance and power.

Therefore, it can be rightly said, that a number of different frameworks for analyzing news discourse have developed over the years, empowering media researchers to focus investigations in specific directions on texts and what they are looking for. Further, examples of media linguistic analysis include the critical DA of Norman Fairclough; the work of British and Australian critical linguists such as Fowler, Hodge, Kress, Van Leeuwen and Trew; studies of news stories and bulletins by the New Zealand linguist

Allan Bell; some of the analytical work on media discourse undertaken by Teun van Dijk; and work on the rhetoric and discourse of print news by John Richardson, which is grounded in material social realities. All in all, one of the most important terms used in discourse analysis is the term 'discourse.' Despite their differences, all the writers mentioned above share several key concerns. The first of these is with the use of language in social life, and the second, following on from this, is with the relationship between language use and social structure. It is in the context of this relationship that the term discourse becomes important. Though it is used in different ways, most importantly it enables one to focus not only on the actual use of language as a form of social interaction in particular situations and contexts but also on forms of representation in which different social categories, practices and relations are constructed from and in the interests of a particular point of view, a particular conception of social reality. One can further distinguish between two main uses of the term. One, predominant in language studies, sees discourse as 'social action and interaction, people interacting together in real social situations. That is, the focus is on language as it is used. The second use of the term is very much connected with the work of the French cultural historian and social theorist Michel Foucault, and has very little to do with linguistics. This second use understands "a discourse as a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge" (Fairclough, 1995, p.18 cited by (David Hexmondhalgh in *Analysing Media Texts* 2006) which determines what is knowable, sayable and doable in particular historical context.

More specifically, van Dijk's major work on media discourse (1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1991) proposes an analytical framework for the structures of news discourse by bringing together, production and interpretation of discourse as well as textual analysis. Thematic analysis goes beyond micro- analysis of language and concentrates on the arrangement of themes in news reports, such as narrative patterns which create dramatic tension in a story, or the non-chronological description of events influenced by its news value or relevance. Further, van Dijk, parallels this broad semantic structure with a systematic structure termed 'schemata'- the conventions and rules that organize content and the complexity of news themes. Accordingly, categories such as the headline, lead paragraph, previous events, background and the main event, can be analyzed and their interrelationships investigated.

Bell (1998) offers a step-by-step guide to analysis, which is used to determine the event structure in a news story and establish what a story actually says has happened. Analysis of events, actors, times and places in a story 'shows up inconsistencies, gaps and ambiguities within the story, conflicting forces during the story's production by journalist and copy-editor, and implications for readers' comprehension.

Fairclough's (1995) framework for critical DA of communicative events involves the three overlapping dimensions of text, discourse practice and social practice. Each area can be dealt with separately but the inter-relationship of all three is integral to the framework. For, Fairclough, analyzing text involves areas such as structure, vocabulary or representation of actors, through image, language or sound. Discourse practice relates to processes of text production and consumption which Fairclough divides into two threads-institutional routines such as journalistic practices of news selection, and discourse practices where texts can pass through a series of transformations.

As mentioned in the beginning, for the purpose of this research paper, a case based on how Mrs. Anoma Fonseka was portrayed in one of the feature articles of the *Sunday Times* would be undertaken. DA of this article was done by examining the article's structure, the social, cultural and political discourses embedded within the text are brought to light in order to present a clear picture of what is really going on. For our analysis, we look at news discourse as text as the 'outward manifestation of a communication event' (Garrett and Bell, 1998 p.9). More specifically, the researcher will concentrate on specific areas in applying discourse analysis in order to go deep into the article and pick out a number of different layers to ascertain exactly what has occurred in this communicative event. These areas are:

1. The structure and coherence of the story.
2. Intertextuality.
3. The nature of the story's sources.
4. The positioning of the various parties involved, particularly through lexical choice.
5. The news practice behind the story.

4. THE STRUCTURE AND COHERENCE OF THE STORY

The front page of " *The Sunday Times*" newspaper on March 7th 2010 starts with a close-up of Mrs. Anoma Fonseka, with a caption "Anoma's battle" and "Page 12". It is prominently placed on par with the paper's signature title logo on the front page indicating its importance to the audience. It could be said that story about General (retd.) Sarath Fonseka became a media event, especially after he consented to contest the presidential election held on 16th January 2010 against the incumbent president Mahinda Rajapakse, as the main opposition candidate and he was subsequently taken in to military custody under military law, after Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse was officially declared the winner, in the midst of so many rumors and controversies around how the results were announced. After his custody and his subsequent attempt to contest the general election April 8th 2010 as a leader of a newly formed Democratic national Front, his wife became a media

personality since she was his proxy campaigner and main media spokeswoman on his behalf.

On page 12 of the Sunday Times, Mrs. Anoma Fonseka is placed on the right side the main feature article, and the topic of the article is in bold and large letters. The title or the first heading of the article is titled "From the shadows to the limelight." In other words, this main title is indicating to us metaphorically that Mrs. Fonseka is not a person with her own rights, but a shadow of her husband and now she has come to the limelight. Further, the main headline is followed by another heading which is also called a "stand first." It is also in bold letters and the sub editor has used 26 inch fonts for the second heading, and it is sub-titled, "Having taken on the mantle of running the political campaign of her remanded husband, the wife of General (retd.) Sarath Fonseka, Anoma Fonseka talks of her new found strength."

In the main article, instead of action verbs, passive verbs and tenses are used to describe her. The first paragraph begins with emphasizing her married life "Anoma Fonseka has been thrust into the hurly-burly world of politics.....while her husband, former Army Commander, General (retd.) Sarath Fonseka languishes in custody facing possible court martial. In the second paragraph, her married status is repeated, ".....she is busy meeting supporters of her husband.....In the third paragraph, once again her married status is repeated, "...it is a for a woman who met her future husband at the age of 15 years, back in 1972 and married him seven years later when he was 2nd Lieutenant in the Sri Lanka Army."

Her marital status or domestic sphere is mentioned again in the fifth paragraph, "...it's a relationship that has faced many trying times with her husband being twice injured in battle and once gravely injured in a suicide bomb attack.". All in all, her married and domestic sphere is mentioned ten times in the whole article to emphasize that she was a dutiful wife who stood by her husband.

Space in the main feature article also carries another photograph of Mrs. Anoma Fonseka packing a food parcel for her husband in prison, and it is titled "Ms Fonseka preparing a meal to take for her husband." As the famous saying goes, "A picture is worth 1000 words" and speaks more to us than the writer's words. The photograph is taken in the kitchen and once again it is re-imposing the patriarchal ideology that a woman's place is the kitchen. In the 6th paragraph, the writer of the feature article quotes or introduces Mrs. Anoma Fonseka's sphere in this way: "I visit my husband at the Navy Headquarters daily to take him lunch and dinner," she said adding she takes a simple meal of red rice and curry for lunch and a light dinner for him. "He enjoys traditional Sinhalese foods such as "kos" and "polos" with rice while for dinner it is "string hoppers" or "pittu", she added.

The article uses, "self labeling" such as "I am a religious person and I know they are both innocent. I also know that the truth will prevail in the end," she said. Further, the writer has used emotive language to describe Mrs. Anoma Fonseka. In a way we can also say that the language used is to entertain and inform, and throughout the article the "innocent victim frame" is used. When we analyze all the words of 15 paragraphs in the feature article, one can say that the famous journalistic code, "who, what, when, where and how" of the questions are answered by the writer directly and indirectly, and in other words connoting and denoting that Mrs. Anoma Fonseka is not a person with her own personality, but just a housewife, who happened to be the wife of a retired General emphasizing her domestic existence.

5. INTERTEXTUALITY

The discourses of different parties are introduced using direct quotations and by being embedded in the reporter's words. Since her main task is to free her husband from prison, the journalist uses many military discourses into her story. Words like, "Battle, General, Army Commander, Court martial, Headquarters, Gathering regularly, Lieutenant, Suicide bomb attack, Military camps, Navy Headquarters, are examples of military discourse. Mrs. Anoma Fonseka gets the opportunity to present her husband's discourse by her own words given under direct quotations, "When my husband was injured in a suicide attack, the whole country was with us, the government was with us but today we are being harassed so much. People are afraid to come forward and support us openly."

Paragraph 10 exemplifies how the military authorities curtail her husband's freedom: with little or no access to newspapers other than state-owned publications as well as state television or radio, her husband depends on her to relay information of what is happening outside. "I am not allowed to take newspapers to him and he does not read the state run newspapers. They (the state run newspapers) are meant to brainwash people," she added defiantly. In the 11th paragraph of the feature article Mrs. Anoma Fonseka, gets the space to tell the readers about her husband's health. And in spite of the restrictions imposed on him; she says the former military heavy weight is in high spirits. "He is an extraordinary man. He kept his spirits up when fighting the war: He is the same even now," she said. Under inter-textuality it can be said, that the article is well placed, in the right hand top corner of the page 12, and on the page 13 we find a paid, large advertisement about (retd.) General Sarath Fonseka. The advertisement is in a form of a letter addressed to the patriotic Sri Lankans, highlighting what he did for the country and informing the public why he is contesting as a candidate in the general election to be held on 8th of April 2010. Some of the wordings are deliberately deleted or whitened over to denote censorship. After reading the feature article, the paid advertisement evokes sympathy or empathy; one will feel sympathy for the General who is in the prison.

6. SOURCES

When reading the feature article "From the shadows to the limelight" we find that the journalist used only Mrs. Anoma Fonseka as a source. Chandani uses these words to describe her. "Being an army wife for nearly three decades, Anoma Fonseka is familiar with visits to military camps but the ones of the past are filled with fond memories that she like to recall. But these days her daily visits to the Navy Headquarters in Colombo, restricted to two hours a day, an hour in the evening, are ones she would like to put behind her.

7. LABELING (THE POSITIONING OF THE VARIOUS PARTIES INVOLVED, PARTICULARLY THROUGH LEXICAL CHOICE)

Further, the feature article is based on a dichotomy of good versus bad, probably the essence of most narratives involving drama. There is obvious demarcation of two sides. In paragraph two, we find those who support Mrs. Anoma Fonseka. "She is busy meeting supporters of her husband and the Democratic National Alliance (DNA), the Party from which he is contesting the election, and the "other side". This is evident in the saying, "Mrs. Fonseka maintains that he and her son-in-law Danuna Tilakarana are being framed for crimes they did not commit." The positing of good versus bad or justice versus injustice is shown in three levels: Self-labeling, description by others, and media's own labeling. Examples of self labeling is evident in the paragraph 14th where she says "I am a religious person and I know they are both innocent.." and also in the paragraph 12 she says "...that he and her son-in-law Danuna Tillakaratne are being framed for crimes they did not commit." In paragraph 15 , she is describing herself in these words "..So how did Anoma Fonseka, who has so far lived in her husband's shadow, emerge as a strong woman now on the verge of getting on the political platform to woo voters on his behalf? Because every woman has a hidden strength. We may not show it all the time but when we need to be strong, we can be," she said." She is given the media label, in the heading of the feature article, "From the shadows to the lime light." and also in the sub heading, Having taken on the mantle of running the political campaign of her remanded husband, the wife of General (retd.) Sarath Fonseka, Anoma Fonseka talks of her new found strength.

The other most noticeable feature in the article is the use of conflict terms and patriarchal images inclusively presenting a house wife or person confined to the domestic sphere. The use of words like "battle" , " remanded", "Hurly burly world" , "contesting the election" , "gathering regularity", "Lieutenant in the Sri Lankan Army" , "Injured in the battle", "suicide bomb attack" , "Army wife" , " Military camps", "Navy headquarters" , "restricted", her confinement to the domestic sphere is evident in the words such as "Husband" , "wife for

three decades". The main medium close-up photograph used in the article is a picture in a pantry packing food for her husband. Only in one place, namely in paragraph 12, is she presented as Mrs. Fonseka.

8. THE NEWS PRACTICE BEHIND THE STORY

The heading of the article has the capacity to encapsulate a story. In other words, it is attention-getting, and suggests that certain stereotypes are operating in the press in relation to women. Mrs. Anoma Fonseka is being depicted as existing primarily in relation to her husband. In most of the sentences or the syntax, she is on the receiving end of action rather than the doer. The writer's use of words or the lexicalization shows that it is capable of establishing an ideological stance. The article uses many words from the semantic field of military and domestic sphere.

9. DISCUSSION.

It is very evident from this discourse analysis that Anoma Fonseka is represented symbolically as a person embodied in the domestic sphere confining her to the role of a good housewife. The use of photographs, having emotive and passive sentence structure, use of military and patriarchal images confirm that she is not presented as a person enjoying an independent existence. The feature article on Anoma Fonseka also reveals the need to train media journalists regularly in gender sensitive-reporting. Though the article is written by a woman journalist, it shows that most journalists working in the media, whether, it is print, radio, or television and films, have little idea of gender studies, or feminist perspectives which are ratified by such important conventions such as the international Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and a Women's Charter which established a National Committee on women to take care of women's issues in 1993. The United Nations' theme for International Women's day for 2010, was "Equal rights, Equal opportunities, Progress for all". In a way, this article proves that media itself is responsible for symbolically annihilating women from the public sphere, by always portraying them under the 'masculine or patriarchal corporate culture' (Tuchman et al.,1978). In fact, years of research examining media content, has documented many stereotypical images of women in a variety of media. Along with demanding structural changes that bring more women to the public sphere, feminists should try to convince media owners to train their scribes in gender sensitive- reporting. That seems to be a current priority.

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