



# Review on Cognitive Mediation in Social Actor Representation in Discourse

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**Abstract**— This paper has set off to unearth how cognitive construal operations anchor social actor representation in discourse. Most of the previous literature resorted to different approaches to deal with the domain of social actor representation focusing on analyzing the text itself rather than taking into consideration how the given linguistic choices provoke different conceptualizations in the mind of the reader. Thus, the present paper seeks to address the association between social and cognitive aspects of the text. It is motivated by the lack of rigorous critical sociocognitive analysis that address the enacted ideology as a social and cognitive phenomenon. Furthermore, the paper highlights the crucial role of cognitive conceptual abilities as a mediator between text and society and recommends the adaptation of sociocognitive multimodal analysis to qualitatively and quantitatively analyse text to cover both descriptive and interpretive levels of analysis.

**Keywords**— social actor representation, cognitive construal operations, ideology.

## BACKGROUND

The present paper centers on sociocognitive approach to investigate how certain cognitive abilities function as a mediator to anchor the intended social actor representation (SAR) in a given social practice. This section provides brief literature of some previous SAR studies. It then goes on to present number of studies on Cognitive Linguistics to Critical Discourse Analysis (CoL-CDA). A growing body of literature has investigated SAR adapting van Leeuwen's socio-semantic model (2008) such as that conducted by Anwar (2018) who has explored how Trump follows particular strategies in his tweets to deliver certain opinion over critical issues. The qualitative study has provided a deep analysis of fourteen tweets posted in the period between January and April 2018. The researcher has found that simple words in tweets can hold implicit and explicit messages, Trump often uses inclusion strategy over exclusion, and that the president of the United States uses his power to influence the citizens about his personal political perspective.

Evayani and Rido (2019) on the other hand, have provided an outline of their previous work in CDA to examine SAR in sexual violence issue in newspaper articles, namely New York Times and Jakarta Post Newspapers to analyze the representation of victims and perpetrators in the articles discuss sexual violence actions. The study has adapted van Leeuwen's framework (2008) and has found that in their articles, both newspapers use suppression and backgrounding strategies, and that victims are mostly represented in passive agents, while active agents are spaced for perpetrators. In terms of the inclusion strategy, the researchers find that there is a salient difference between the two newspapers; New York Times presents actors by their surname and their social status like "Mr., Dr., Prof., etc." whereas Jakarta Post tends to present actors by their names, age, and occupation.

Examining whether SAR can be applicable to literary works, AbdulWahid (2020) has attempted to demonstrate how characters are represented in Sinan Antoon's Self-translated novel *The Corpse Washer*. The researcher investigates the way in which characters as social actors

reveal their own ideologies, and perspectives through their interaction and examines how the topic is signaled out through the major characters of the novel. CDA has been adapted to analyze major characters' utterances through a three-pillar framework; van Leeuwen's socio-semantic model (2008), Tajfel's social identity theory (1978, 1979), and the narrative components by Phelan's (1989, 2007). For more validity and reliability, a corpus analysis is conducted to study the concordance of the social actors in the novel. The findings have shown that characters are frequently included than excluded, activated more than passivated, SAS tend to be individualised, specified, functionalised, and identified. In addition, the framework has provided the researcher with important information about SAR in literary texts, and confirms findings of previous studies by adding additional evidence that SAR can flexibly analyze first-person narration novels.

Considering the aforementioned, the previous studies on SAR have accounted for the descriptive level of analysis and neglect interpretations achieved by addressing cognitive aspects associated with the reader's mind. The negotiations of cognitive constructions cannot, however, be satisfactorily explained by SAR alone. It falls short of what it claims to be necessary for the dialectical link between text and social practice, since it does not provide an in-depth exploration of how these representations are further connected to social activities (Al Maghlouth, 2017, p. 21). In order to connect the social level and literary level, a mediator is required.

More recent attention has been paid for the provision of cognitive aspects of media discourse to address linguistic choices from a common perspective. Scholars have made use of CoL not as a single framework, but as a paradigm made up of several frameworks including cognitive grammar (Langacker, 1987, 1991, 2002, 2008), conceptual semantics (Talmy, 2000), frame semantics (Fillmore, 1982, 1985) and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999). For example, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory has provided the lens through which naturalised or opaque ideological patterns in text and conceptualisation can be diagnosed.

Hart(2011a) has proposed that Talmy's (1988, 2000) theory of force-dynamics offers a further, useful framework for the Cognitive Linguistic Approach to CDA. Hart himself has analyzed immigration discourse using this analytical framework, then, he identifies the ideological qualities of force-dynamic conceptualisations in his data. In another significant study, Hart(2013a) has adapted CL-CDA to compare between online press reports of violence in the UK student fees protests on the 10th and

24th of November 2010, to give answers about how the linguistic choices are reflected as specific cognitive models and (re)constructions in the minds of readers. In addition, the study focuses on patterns of construal that index wider ideological discourses and how the available alternative image schemas facilitate different construals of protest events.

An in-depth critical analysis of press reports on violence in political protests has been provided by Hart (2013b). He has extended the scope of CoL-CDA by incorporating Langacker's model of Cognitive Grammar in an analysis of the alternative event-construals invoked in both *The Guardian* vs. *The Telegraph* press reports. The study is significant in that it provides insights recognisable in the wealth of critical metaphor studies, informed by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which have recently appeared (e.g. Charteris-Black 2004; Goatly 2007; Koller 2004; Musolff 2004; Santa Ana 2002 and many more). It also presents a framework for analysing representation at both levels; text and conceptualization, in which the problems of cognitive equivalence are thoroughly addressed (cf. Stubbs 1997; O'Halloran 2003; Widdowson 2004; Billig 2008). The results have shown that systematic differences in construal are found across several parameters of conceptualization to represent potential sites of ideological reproduction. The differences appear in the schematization and various 'focal adjustments.'

Hart (2017) has analyzed the British Miners' Strike of 1984–1985 to examine the significance of media stance which according to Hart "remains a controversial issue today" (p.3). For Hart, authors including miners, journalists and other commentators believe that the media worked to destabilise the strike and that media coverage has anti-trade union agenda. The researcher has drawn on Cognitive Linguistic Critical Discourse Studies (CL-CDS) to show how the used metaphorical framing of the strike, which construed the strike as a war between the National Union of Miners and the State. The same metaphor has persisted along the strike period and used as media strategies of (de)legitimation. The study has shown how this metaphor is realized in linguistic, visual and multimodal forms of media representation.

Voice (2018) has applied Cognitive Grammar to discourse-level analysis (following Pincombe, 2014, Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008) to a clause-level CDA of lexicogrammar (see Hart, 2013; 2014; 2018) to investigate the ways soldiers use language to report and structure their experiences of conflict. The researcher has examined autobiographical descriptions of acts of killing from wars across the 20th and 21st century.

The study has highlighted the importance of narrative context and background knowledge in the interpretation of individual clauses. Inferred intentions can function as reference points (Langacker, 2008; Harrison, 2017), marking continuity or deviation from mind-modelled (Stockwell, 2009) norms associated with the perception of an agent across discourse. The analysis has demonstrated that diverse stylistic strategies construe force and causality in a number of ways, Cognitive Grammar can effectively account for the ideological construal of killing in soldiers' writings, and that from a cognitive perspective, the adaptation of the cognitive model to consider the perception of intentionality promises further developments in the critical and stylistic analysis of discourse.

In his analysis of textual Multimodality in Hollywood Iraq war films, Aljubouri (2019) has employed an interdisciplinary cognitive quality to the adopted framework (textual Multimodality) to enhance the critical nature of his study. The researcher has tackled the misconception of facts and misrepresentation of Iraq and Iraqis, which he "find notoriously unfair"(p.1) as he has provided some insight into showing how the state of affairs can be institutionally distorted in order to affect the audiences' views through the medium of films. Aljubouri has chosen three films to be analysed by adopting a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis framework as the filmic semiotic resources has been explored to probe how the Iraqi identity is represented in the selected films.

Aljubouri (2019) has argued that his data supports Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 34) view "that the conceptual structures formed in our minds are formulated according to our body shapes (and postures), for instance, our orientations are determined by our sense of sight which is realized in our fronts not backs and according to this front posture we interact with other people and walk forward, not backward. Thus, this orientation can underlie how "speakers describe the location of one entity (the locandum) in relation to another (the reference object) in a way that is relative to the speaker's own 'co-ordinates' in space (Aljubouri, 2019, p.76). On this ground, for Aljubouri (2019) What makes Hart's approach so significant is that it pays intensive attention to the way written and visual texts are comprehended by viewers. The researcher has analyzed the activated or passivated social actors in Van Leeuwen's (2008) terms according to the variables (or points of view) proposed by Hart (2014a), i.e., Anchor, Angle, and Distance.

As for Srie (2020) he has applied another cognitive framework for more objective and more systematic approach to study characterization in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The researcher has

adapted viz. Culpeper's (2001) model of cognitive stylistics and Jeffries' (2010) model of critical stylistics to find out the textual cues that participate in building a character and investigates how the authors create the characters according to their ideologies.

The study has concluded that there are typical stereotypes in both novels. Both authors create a clash between Good and Evil. The Evil force is embodied by character(s) with physical appearance, stupidity or negative use of intelligence, primitive way of thinking with indecent behaviors. The Good force is presented by character(s) with attractive appearance, moral values appealing traits and cleverness. At the same time, both authors share a commonality of distinguishing between Democratic and Dictatorial regimes represented by the characters. *Lord of the Flies* has an array of contrastive ideas represented by the characters namely between civilization and savagery, primitive and rational thinking, good and evil, and between democracy and dictatorship. Whereas the characters in *Animal Farm* show the clash between slavery and freedom, creative and restricted thinking, fabrication, manipulation, and reality, justice and injustice, and between democracy and dictatorship. In what have been mentioned above, the present paper represents a development of, the aforementioned review by highlighting the association between SAR and Cognitive configuration. Therefore, it is recommended that a rigorous analysis can be conducted by a sociocognitive multimodal analysis that comprises both aspects.

### **SOCIAL ACTOR REPRESENTATION**

In general, the construction of identity is an essential part of research steps in many social sciences, where people are categorized within specific linguistic and non-linguistic contexts. Therefore, it is important to identify the social actors in this context. With regard to discourse, Social Actors (SAs) are "the participants of social practices" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 23). The participant can be an individual or an object that performs and constructs various activities through discourses to carry out different ideologies and perspectives and can be seen by different linguistic and non-linguistic mechanisms. Social Actor Analysis of van Leeuwen (2008) will be quite convenient in dealing with the descriptive level of analysis (see Figure .1). van Leeuwen (2008, p.23) demonstrates that:

[u]nlike many other linguistically oriented forms of critical discourse analysis, I will not start out from linguistic operations, such as

nominalization and passive agent deletion, or from linguistic categories, such as the categories of transitivity, but instead will draw up a *sociosemantic* inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented and establish the sociological and critical relevance of my categories

before I turn to the question of how they are realized linguistically (*italic in original*).

He, then, explains that his “account of the representation of social actors .....will be grounded in linguistics. Each of the representational choices I propose will be tied to specific linguistic or rhetorical realizations” (p.25). This means the ways of representation can be investigated through the use of the formal rules of representation.

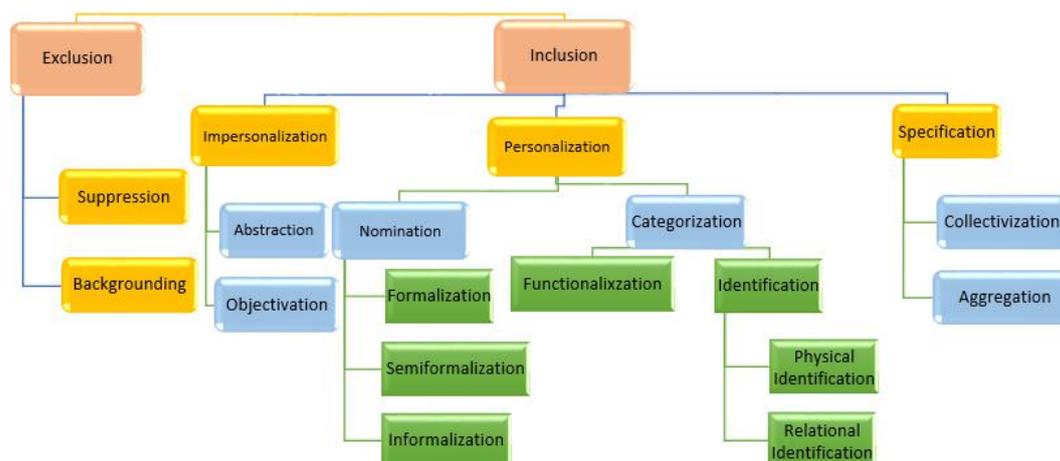


Fig.1: Partial network of Social Actor Representation (van Leeuwen, 2008, p55)

### COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (COL-CDA)

At first and exclusively, CoL was associated with a few introductions in the western seaboard of the US till it got spread during the 1980s among scholars in Europe, especially in Belgium, Holland, and Germany (Dabrowska & Divjak, 2015, p. 1-2; Barcelona & Valenzuela, 2011, p. 17; Evans et al., 2007, p.2). The collective works of pioneers bring CoL into a more coherent approach within the publications of Lakoff's *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987) and Langacker's *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* and *Topics in Cognitive Linguistics* (a compilation of influential articles edited by Rudzka-Ostyn in 1988).

Langacker (1987, p.12) is one of many other scholars who looked beyond the prescriptivism of structure to the descriptivism of meaning (literal and nonliteral). According to CoL, conceptual meaning does not directly reside in words. However, Tenbrink, (2020, p.59) argues that concepts are too complex to be encoded directly in the language, while the linguistic level reveals part of the content. The lexical item supplies access to the conceptual model which has the crucial meaning aspect. Thus, in the sense of ‘access semantics’, conceptual knowledge is

reached by language (the abstract and schematic access point).

While investigating syntactic and semantic structures in relation to thought, cognitive linguists develop theoretical accounts of how the physical environment is related to different languages and represents their speakers’ thoughts (Tenbrink, 2020, p.57). Ali (2021, p.44) believes that from cognitive perspective, knowledge of the language is not gained by fixed patterns of competence, but rather it is very much derived from the patterns of language in use. This is the so-called *usage-based paradigm*. The conventional patterns of linguistic units are developed to fulfill the communicative needs of speakers, and then get stabilised within a given speech community.

Since conceptual-blending theory studies were gradually developed in the late 1990s, more attention has been given to the ongoing language processing and its open-ended nature in actual language use (the procedural and contextual aspects). Stressing on context-dependence, CoL is intertwined with some pragmatic approaches such as Relevance Theory. Such multidimensional focus is enhanced by the growing belief in the exchange of ideas between cognitively-minded pragmatics and cognitive thinking (Ungerer & Schmid, 2006, p.346).

However, the theory of CM is not received in a vacuum; there were some precursor theories that led to its emergence. Neuroscientists and cognitive linguists cooperate to draw the features of CM. Neuroscience raises the slogan *Neurons that Fire Together Wire Together* (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, p. 256). The slogan claims that when an abstract concept is objectivized to be understood metaphorically, the brain activated two sets of neurons (When repeatedly activated, the connections get strengthened). The neurological correlation reflects the entrenchment of CM. Supporting this claims, Ungerer and Schmid (2006, p.344) assert that as a matter of fact, the embodiment-of language thesis opens new horizons for a number of approaches in CoL, CM is the most prominent of which. They assert that the striking similarity of figurative expression in totally unrelated languages and cultures can be explained in CM. Which is supported by Hart (2014, p.98) who states that conceptual metaphors are the result of metaphorical expressions related to abstract conceptual knowledge structures.

CoL-CDA approach investigates one or more of the discursive strategies in discourse that present a particular social topic, group or event. One of these construal operations is schematization. To realize the structural configuration strategies, Schematization realizes the basic structural properties of a situation or event. To represent a given scene, a particular image schema (abstract conceptual structures which represent recurrent patterns of embodied experience) is selected as a model. Hart (2014, p.109-110) identifies the association between language and cognition into specific points. First, Culture is the source of meaning which is derived from nonlinguistic experience. Thus, language is linked to experience in two ways:

- The meanings attached to words, phrases, and grammatical structures are derived from experiences of the body and interaction with the physical environment including visuospatial and sensory-motor, as well as the experiences people have from their culture.
- Language encodes experience. The meaning of a word or sentence lies in what it conjures of encyclopedic knowledge structures and dynamic mental representation.

Second, cognition domains such as memory, imagination, reason, and perception have a key role in language production, which are found within one integrated cognitive system. For instance, the image schema emerges pre-linguistically as they form the basic meaning of linguistic units (including grammatical units). Our basic understanding of the described situation or event relies on those image schemas for that they appear as gestalts (holistic patterns of experience) (Hart,2020, p.99). Based on Cognitive Grammar, alternative grammatical devices are naturally available to code the same situation ‘precisely because of their conceptual import – the contrasting images they impose’ (Langacker 1991, p.295).

Cognitive conceptual operations include different strategies, such as framing, positioning, and identification strategies (see Figure.2). For instance, frames are the encyclopaedic knowledge structures accessed by lexical items. They represent our cultural experience, thus constitute the source of richer, more specific information that defines our basic conceptualization to further shape our understanding or evaluation of the target scene. Frames are realized by categorisation and metaphor, i.e. the conceptual operations represent the general cognitive ability to compare areas of experience (Hart,2020, p.100).

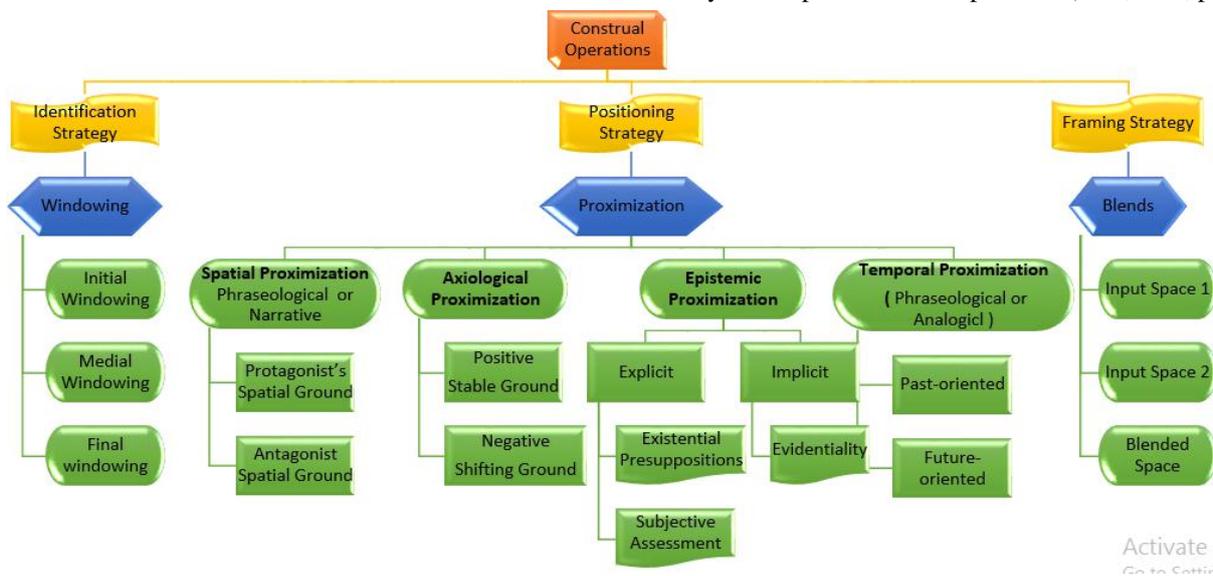


Fig.2: Construal Operations (Hart, 2020)

Identification is another type of strategies that is concerned with the question which aspects of a given situation are selected to be conceptualized and the extent to which an aspect is salience relative to another? Examples of Identification Strategies are inclusion/exclusion, foregrounding/backgrounding, figure/ground, and windowing. Such strategies are realized by construal operations to distribute attention over a scene in different ways. Finally, the construal operations of viewpoint and deixis are exploited to realize the last type of strategies.i.e. positioning which embodies our ability to assume a different perspective on a given scene. Positioning strategies deal with where we locate ourselves in terms of time, space, and evaluation, and where we situate other text elements (actors, actions, and events). (Cap, 2006, 2008; Chilton, 2004) study positioning strategies in discourses seeking justification for military intervention (Hart,2020, p.101).

### CONCLUSION

It has been established in the literature review that discourse and context are associated by a reciprocal relation anchored by the cognition mediation. As an example of that, construal operations depends heavily on frames and schmetizations realized by lexical items related to the encyclopaedic knowledge that represents cultural experience. The same lexical items utilized for inclusion as a discursive strategy in SAR are employed as access for cognitive configuration to further shape the reader's understanding and evaluation of the actor. In other words, social actors are observed through the refracting lens of the different construal operations. Their distorting effects direct the reader to see the social actors in a particular way and to focus on certain characteristics of them at the expense of others. Identification strategy is realized by deictic expressions that allow to locate SAs in certain positions seen by specific point of view.

As for positioning strategy; in the course of discourse, the cognitive model is populated by conceptual elements (SAs, actions, times, and places) that are represented explicitly or implicitly in the text. They are mapped out within the three-dimensional space by connectors and vectors. The connector represents the social actor's attributions and possessions which are realized by ways of inclusion and exclusion. However, the vector represents material processes between elements including the conceptualizer at the deictic centre which are, in turn realized by ways of activation and passivation of the SAs. Crucially, the mapping out of elements inside the discourse space reflects the intended representation as a construed reality.

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