

Political News Coverage in Philippine Tabloid Sheets: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic, discursive, and ideological features of political news in selected Philippine tabloid newspapers using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Anchored on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework and supported by mediatization and framing theories, the study employed a qualitative content analysis design. A total of 30 political news articles from People's Journal, People's Tonight, and Tempo, published between October 2018 and January 2019, served as the corpus. Data were analyzed through systematic coding of morphological, syntactic, grammatical, and discursive features, alongside journalistic roles, news sources, and framing strategies. Findings reveal that tabloid political discourse utilizes modality, passivity, transitivity, and syntactic compression to shape meaning, while discursive elements such as direct and indirect speech, cohesion, and classification contribute to coherence and interpretation. The results also show diverse news topics, multiple journalistic roles, and reliance on authoritative sources, with framing strategies such as game, conflict, human interest, responsibility, morality, economic, and issue framing reflecting underlying political meanings. The study concludes that tabloid news constructs political discourse through strategic language use and selective framing, influencing public perception. It recommends integrating CDA in education and expanding future research using quantitative and comparative approaches. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting media literacy and critical understanding of political communication. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational, socio-political, and institutional awareness through critical engagement with media discourse.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Framing Strategies, Journalistic Roles, Political News Discourse, Tabloid Journalism

1. Introduction

Tabloid journalism has been widely criticized for its sensationalized and entertainment-oriented reporting, raising concerns about credibility, political influence, and its role in shaping public discourse. Despite its global popularity and accessibility, particularly among broader audiences, scholarly attention to tabloid political discourse remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the linguistic and discursive features of political news in Philippine tabloids using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), aiming to uncover underlying political meanings and framing strategies.

1.1 Background of Tabloid Journalism and Political News Discourse in Philippine Media

Tabloid journalism is often associated with sensationalism, trivialization, and manipulated information, which undermine traditional journalistic standards (Fox, Van Sickel, & Steiger, 2007; Franklin, Hamer, Hanna, Kinsey, & Richardson, 2005; Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004; Popović & Popović, 2014; Chakraborty, Sarkar, Mrigen, & Ganguly, 2017; Williams, 2003). These characteristics contribute to concerns about declining media credibility, politicization, and threats to democratic processes (Popović & Popović, 2014; Vliegthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011; Rowe, 2011; Skovsgaard, 2014; Johansson, 2007a; Fisher, 2016). Despite criticisms, tabloids remain highly popular worldwide, dominating circulation in countries such as the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Johansson, 2007b; Wasserman, 2010; Janda, 2013; Yusuf, 2009; Mecale, 2006). Their accessibility, vernacular style, and appeal to lower socio-economic groups contribute to their widespread readership (Conboy, 2002; Kavanagh, 2011). As mass media significantly influence public opinion (Mahmood, Kausar, & Khan, 2018), examining how tabloids present political news is critical, particularly in understanding how language shapes political discourse and public perception.

1.2 Themes and Insights from Literature on Tabloid Journalism, Media, and Political Discourse

Literature highlights the dual nature of tabloids as both criticized and defended media forms. They are often characterized by sensationalism, focus on private lives, and limited coverage of serious political and economic issues (Bird, 1992; Sparks, 2000; Yin & Payne, 2004). At the same time, they provide alternative narratives accessible to the masses and may challenge dominant power structures (Fiske, 1992; Sparks, 2000; Levin & Arluke, 1987). Media and politics are closely interconnected, with media influencing political trust, engagement, and public opinion through both negative (media

malaise) and positive (mobilization) effects (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Bowen, Stamm, & Clark, 2000; Moy & Pfau, 2000; Norris, 2000; Avery, 2009). Media framing, including strategic, conflict, and issue framing, shapes how political events are interpreted (De Vreese, 2010; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012; Patterson, 1994). Linguistically, journalistic discourse employs distinctive features such as modality, passivity, nominalization, and syntactic compression, which influence meaning and interpretation (Halliday, 1985; Fintel, 2006; Simpson, 2004; Znamenskaya, 2005; Kenzhekanova et al., 2015; Sušinskienė, 2010; Zheng, 2017). Discursively, news reporting involves structures such as direct/indirect speech, cohesion, and classification, which contribute to meaning-making and audience influence (Halliday, 1985; Clark, 2010; Fairclough, 2003).

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Tabloid Political News Coverage

Globally, tabloids dominate newspaper circulation in several countries, though their roles and content vary across contexts (Johansson, 2007b; Williams, 2005). In the Philippines, tabloids are more popular than broadsheets and allocate significant space to local politics and advertisements (Mecale, 2006; Guingab, 2016). Media systems operate within broader political and social frameworks, influencing democratic processes by shaping public awareness and political engagement (Street, 2001; Camaj, 2014). In mediatized environments, citizens rely heavily on media representations to form political opinions, as direct interaction with political actors is limited (Strömbäck, 2008; Norris, 2000). Thus, understanding how Philippine tabloids construct political discourse provides insight into how media influences political perceptions within local and global contexts.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis: Critical Discourse Analysis and Mediatization in Political News

This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views language as a social practice shaped by power, ideology, and context (Fairclough, 1992; 1993; Van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Chilton, 2007). Fairclough's (1992; 1995) three-dimensional framework description, interpretation, and explanation guides the analysis of linguistic features, discursive processes, and social implications of political news. The study also incorporates mediatization theory, which examines how media shape political communication and interpretations (Altheide, 2013; Meyer, 2002). Political framing game, conflict, and issue framing serves as a lens for analyzing how political narratives are constructed (De Vreese, 2010; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012; Patterson, 1994). Additionally, concepts of journalistic roles, discourse features, and news sources inform the analysis of how political news is structured and presented (Mellado, 2014; Falasca, 2014).

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for CDA of Philippine Tabloid Political Discourse

Despite the widespread use and influence of tabloids, scholarly research on their political discourse remains limited (Maesele & Schuurman, 2008). Existing studies focus on content allocation, framing, or representation but rarely employ critical discourse analysis, particularly in the Philippine context (Guingab, 2016; Voynich, 2008; Knaub, 2007; Mandichev, 2010; Carver, Rødland, & Breivik, 2013). There is a notable lack of research examining how linguistic and discursive features in Philippine tabloid political news reflect underlying political ideologies. Furthermore, the application of CDA to tabloid corpora remains underexplored (Bednarek, 2006). This study addresses these gaps by analyzing the linguistic, discursive, and ideological dimensions of political news in Philippine tabloids.

1.6 Alignment with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education by contributing to media literacy and critical language awareness, enabling readers and learners to better understand how language influences political discourse. It also supports SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, as examining media representations of politics contributes to transparency, informed citizenship, and democratic accountability. Additionally, the study relates to SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, considering the role of media industries and journalism in shaping public discourse and socio-economic awareness.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

This study contributes to educational sustainability by enhancing critical literacy and discourse analysis skills among learners and educators, particularly in understanding media language and political communication. It supports socio-political sustainability by promoting awareness of how media framing and discourse influence public opinion, governance, and democratic participation. In the field of linguistic and cultural sustainability, the study advances knowledge on the use of language in media, particularly within the Philippine context, highlighting how cultural and societal factors shape discourse. Moreover, the research contributes to institutional and policy sustainability by providing insights into media practices that can inform responsible journalism and media regulation.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized qualitative content analysis, specifically Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to examine political news discourse. Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena by exploring meanings constructed from experiences without statistical quantification (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

Content analysis was applied as a systematic method for interpreting linguistic data, where researcher insight plays a crucial role (Mayring, 2000; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), and validity is ensured through detailed analytical descriptions (Schreier, 2012). CDA, as described by Fairclough (1992), integrates linguistic theories such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985) and discourse theory (Foucault, 1972; 1981) to analyze language as a social practice. It examines texts at textual, interpersonal, and societal levels. Unlike general discourse analysis, CDA provides deeper explanations of how texts construct social realities (Breeze, 2011; McGregor, 2003). Various CDA approaches exist, including French discourse analysis, social semiotics, socio-cognitive studies, discourse historical method, and multimodal analysis (Foucault, 1972; Pecheux, 1975; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 1996; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). This design was appropriate as the study aimed not only to describe linguistic features but also to uncover political underpinnings in tabloid discourse.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted within the Philippine media context, focusing on widely circulated English-language tabloid newspapers. The selected tabloids *People's Journal*, *People's Tonight*, and *Tempo* were chosen based on their national circulation and accessibility, ensuring that the data represented commonly consumed tabloid news across the country.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

This study did not involve human participants. Instead, the units of analysis were political news articles serving as corpora. These articles represented public media texts that function as sources of information for the general population, aligning with the definition of news as publicly relevant information (Reah, 1988).

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A total of 30 political news articles were selected as the study corpus, with 10 articles randomly drawn from each of the three selected tabloids. The sample size aligns with qualitative research standards recommending 10 to 100 materials for analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Inclusion criteria required that the articles focus on political content, including government affairs, political figures, programs, appointments, and related topics. Only articles published between October 2018 and January 2019 and written in English were considered. Articles from other tabloids, non-political content, and opinion or editorial pieces were excluded. Random sampling ensured representativeness while maintaining manageable data for in-depth qualitative analysis.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument consisted of the selected corpus of political news articles, which were analyzed using structured analytical frameworks derived from CDA. These frameworks were based on Fairclough's three levels of analysis and supported by linguistic and discourse theories. The analysis focused on identifying morphological, syntactic, and grammatical features, as well as discursive elements such as speech presentation, cohesion, and classification. Additional analytical categories included journalistic roles and news sources, guided by established theoretical models (Mellado, 2014; Falasca, 2014).

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began with defining criteria for selecting relevant political news articles. The researcher identified available Philippine tabloid publications and narrowed them down based on readership, circulation, and use of the English language. From the selected tabloids, political news articles published within the specified period were gathered. Only articles meeting the defined criteria were included, and random selection was applied to obtain 10 articles from each tabloid, resulting in a total of 30 corpora. The collected articles were labeled and prepared for systematic analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed Fairclough's (1992) three levels of CDA: description, interpretation, and explanation. The researcher conducted multiple readings of the corpora to ensure familiarity with the data. The first level focused on linguistic features, including morphology, syntax, and grammar. The second level examined discursive features, news contexts, journalistic roles, and sources, analyzing how news stories were constructed and presented. The third level explored political underpinnings through framing analysis. Coding and categorization were applied to identify patterns within each analytical category. Linguistic features were grouped into morphological, syntactic, and grammatical elements, while discursive analysis included direct and indirect speech, cohesion, endophora, and classification. Journalistic roles were analyzed using six dimensions of role performance (Mellado, 2014), and news sources were categorized based on their contribution to the reports (Falasca, 2014). To ensure rigor, the analysis followed established coding schemes, and findings underwent debriefing and member checking. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, including validation of data sources, detailed methodological descriptions, external audits, and consultation with a linguistic expert (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Macnee and McCabe, 2008; Shenton, 2004; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2003). Ethical considerations were observed by adhering to Fair Use guidelines, protecting source confidentiality, avoiding evaluative judgments on authors, and ensuring proper citation and plagiarism control.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Linguistic and Discursive Features of Political News in Tabloid Sheets

3.1.1 Morphological Features in Political News Discourse

The analysis revealed that political news in tabloids prominently uses modality and mood to convey meaning. Epistemic modality is reflected through expressions such as “can possibly,” “could be,” and “maybe,” indicating uncertainty and likelihood, while deontic modality appears in expressions like “must,” “should,” and “need,” signaling obligation and necessity. Additionally, indicative mood dominates in factual reporting, while conditional and interrogative moods are also present, particularly in quoted statements. These findings indicate that tabloid writers rely on modality to reflect varying degrees of certainty and obligation, often attributing such meanings to quoted sources rather than asserting them directly. The use of indicative mood supports the presentation of factual and verifiable information, while conditional constructions allow the expression of hypothetical or situational possibilities. This aligns with the function of journalistic language in presenting both information and perspective while maintaining a balance between objectivity and interpretation.

3.1.2 Syntactic Features in Political News Construction

The results show that syntactic structures such as passivity, transitivity, nominalization, appositives, and embedding are widely used in tabloid political news. Passive constructions emphasize events or recipients rather than agents, while transitive structures highlight actors performing actions. Nominalization transforms actions into abstract nouns, often omitting agents, while appositives provide additional descriptive information. Embedding is frequently used to construct longer, information-dense sentences. These syntactic choices demonstrate how tabloid writers structure information to emphasize specific elements of the news. Passive constructions can obscure responsibility, while transitivity highlights agency and action. Nominalization contributes to abstraction and depersonalization, and appositives enhance clarity by adding context. The use of embedding reflects an effort to compress information while maintaining detail, showing how syntactic features shape the presentation and interpretation of political discourse.

3.1.3 Grammatical Features in News Reporting

The findings indicate that grammatical features such as pre-modification, verb usage, and omission are prevalent in tabloid news. Pre-modification occurs through nouns, adjectives, and participles that describe key elements concisely. Verbs are often used in present tense for past events, particularly in headlines, and reporting verbs such as “said,” “told,” and “according to” are frequently employed. Omissions of auxiliary verbs, articles, and conjunctions are also observed, especially in headlines. These grammatical patterns highlight the need for brevity and immediacy in tabloid journalism. Pre-modification allows efficient information delivery, while present tense usage creates a sense of immediacy. Reporting verbs maintain a neutral stance, although variations can introduce interpretation. Omissions further contribute to concise and impactful headlines, demonstrating how grammatical features support the stylistic and communicative goals of tabloid news writing.

3.1.4 Discursive Features and Meaning Construction

The results show that discursive features such as direct and indirect speech, cohesion, endophora, and classification are consistently used. Direct speech is employed for emphasis and authenticity, while indirect speech summarizes information. Cohesion is achieved through collocations and conjunctions, and referencing is facilitated through anaphora, cataphora, and deixis. Classification is evident in the use of pronouns, adjectives, and alternative naming of individuals and events. These features indicate that tabloid writers construct meaning through strategic language choices. Direct speech enhances credibility, while indirect speech allows flexibility in reporting. Cohesion ensures coherence, and referencing reduces redundancy. Classification reflects how individuals and events are framed, revealing the role of language in shaping perception and reinforcing social meanings within political discourse.

3.2 Contexts, Topics, and Journalistic Roles in Political News

3.2.1 News Topics and Political Contexts

The analysis revealed that political news topics in tabloids include social issues such as rumors, transparency, and power dynamics; economic concerns like budgets and inflation; government advocacies; election-related events; issues involving politicians; international relations; and public trust and ratings. These findings suggest that tabloid political news covers a wide range of themes relevant to governance and public interest. The inclusion of rumors and power dynamics reflects the media’s role in highlighting uncertainty and authority, while economic and policy-related topics indicate attention to national development. Election and public trust coverage emphasize the connection between media and democratic processes, showing how tabloid news contextualizes political events for its audience.

3.2.2 Journalistic Roles in Tabloid Political Reporting

The results indicate that tabloid journalists perform multiple roles, including intervention, watchdog, loyal facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic roles. Intervention is reflected in evaluative language, watchdog in the exposure of issues and problems, loyal facilitation in positive portrayals of government actions, service in providing practical information,

infotainment in emotional or personal content, and civic roles in presenting public opinion. These roles demonstrate the multifaceted nature of tabloid journalism. The presence of intervention suggests that journalists sometimes influence interpretation, while the watchdog role highlights accountability. Loyal facilitation reflects support for institutions, and infotainment indicates the blending of information and entertainment. Civic roles emphasize the inclusion of public perspectives, showing how tabloid journalism contributes to both information dissemination and audience engagement.

3.2.3 Sources of News and Information Attribution

The findings show that political news sources include politicians, experts, journalists, and public records, while ordinary citizens are notably absent. Politicians are the most dominant sources, followed by experts such as institutional representatives, while journalists and official documents also contribute to information dissemination. This pattern indicates that political discourse in tabloids is largely shaped by authoritative voices. The dominance of politicians reinforces their influence in media narratives, while expert sources add credibility. The use of public records ensures factual grounding, but the absence of ordinary citizens suggests limited representation of grassroots perspectives, which may affect the diversity of viewpoints in political reporting.

3.3 Political Underpinnings and Framing in Tabloid News Discourse

3.3.1 Framing Strategies in Political News Coverage

The analysis identified several framing styles in tabloid political news, including game or strategic framing, conflict framing, human interest framing, attribution of responsibility framing, morality framing, economic consequences framing, and issue framing. Game framing emphasizes competition and electoral success, conflict framing highlights disagreements, and human-interest framing focuses on personal and emotional aspects. Attribution of responsibility assigns blame or solutions, morality framing reflects ethical judgments, economic framing highlights financial implications, and issue framing presents policy-related concerns. These framing strategies demonstrate how tabloid news constructs political meanings. Game framing reflects the competitive nature of politics, while conflict framing emphasizes opposition and debate. Human interest framing personalizes issues, making them relatable to readers. Attribution of responsibility and morality framing influence audience judgment by assigning accountability and ethical value. Economic and issue framing provide context for policy implications, illustrating how media framing shapes public understanding of political events.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study revealed that political news in Philippine tabloid sheets is characterized by a wide range of linguistic, discursive, and framing features that shape how information is presented and interpreted. Linguistically, morphological, syntactic, and grammatical elements such as modality, passivity, transitivity, and pre-modification are strategically used to convey meaning and influence emphasis. Discursively, features such as direct and indirect speech, cohesion, referencing, and classification contribute to the organization and clarity of news narratives, while topics span social, economic, political, and international issues. Journalistic roles including intervention, watchdog, loyal facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic functions are evident, reflecting the multifaceted nature of tabloid reporting. Moreover, political underpinnings are manifested through various framing strategies such as strategic, conflict, human interest, responsibility, morality, economic, and issue framing, demonstrating how tabloids construct political meanings and shape public perception through selective presentation of information.

It is recommended that educators, linguists, and media practitioners utilize the findings of this study to enhance language teaching, critical discourse analysis skills, and media literacy. Language teachers may incorporate the identified linguistic and discursive features into instruction to help learners understand how meaning is constructed in news texts. Additionally, integrating critical discourse analysis in educational practice can improve students' ability to analyze texts beyond surface meaning by considering context, language use, and underlying ideologies. Future researchers are encouraged to expand this study by employing quantitative approaches to measure the frequency of linguistic and discursive features, as well as by applying critical discourse analysis to other types of media texts such as political advertisements and different news genres to further explore how media discourse shapes public understanding.

The study is limited by its qualitative and descriptive design, which does not allow for generalization or quantification of the linguistic and discursive features identified in the corpus. The analysis focused on a specific set of tabloid news articles, restricting the scope of findings to the selected materials and timeframe. Additionally, the study did not extensively examine political ideologies or compare representations across different media sources or political figures. The interpretative nature of critical discourse analysis also introduces subjectivity, as the analysis depends on the researcher's interpretation of the text, which may influence how meanings and framing strategies are identified and explained.

Compliance with ethical standards

The author declares no conflict of interest and that this study received no external funding. The research did not involve human participants, as it utilized publicly available tabloid news articles collected under Fair Use guidelines, and therefore no invasive procedures were employed. All sources were treated with confidentiality by omitting specific authors and article identifiers in the analysis, ensuring no identifying information was disclosed. The study was conducted with academic integrity, and all materials were used solely for scholarly and educational purposes.

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