



Institutional discourses and ascribed disability identities



Mukta Kulkarni ^{a,*}, K.V. Gopakumar ^b, Devi Vijay ^c

^a *Mphasis Chair for Digital Accessibility and Inclusion, Organisational Behaviour & Human Resources Management Area, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, Bannerghatta Road, Bangalore, Karnataka, India*

^b *Organisational Behaviour Area, Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India*

^c *Organisational Behaviour Area, Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, Diamond Harbour Road, Joka, Kolkata, West Bengal, India*

Received 19 November 2014; revised 11 February 2015; accepted 18 July 2017; available online 26 August 2017

KEYWORDS

Discourse;
Ascribed identity;
Disability;
India

Abstract In the present study we asked: how do institutional discourses, as represented in mass media such as newspapers, confer identities upon a traditionally marginalised collective such as those with a disability? To answer our question, we examined Indian newspaper discourse from 2001 to 2010, the time period between two census counts. We observed that disability identities—that of a welfare recipient, a collective with human rights, a collective that is vulnerable, and that engages in miscreancy—were ascribed through selective highlighting of certain aspects of the collective, thereby socially positioning the collective, and through the associated signalling of institutional subject positions. Present observations indicate that identities of a collective can be governed by institutional discourse, that those “labelled” can themselves reinforce institutionally ascribed identities, and that as institutional discourses confer identities onto the marginalised, they simultaneously also signal who the relatively more powerful institutional actors are.

© 2017 Production and hosting by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Introduction

Institutions can be understood as products of discursive activity wherein actors produce and consume texts as they shape their social world (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). As most of what is known is not through direct experience, but through

words created by others, institutional discourses shape beliefs and prejudices and thereby the moral and intellectual environment in which one lives (Hayakawa, 1990). Elite institutional actors such as newspapers can particularly shape beliefs and prejudices as they discursively define and portray certain collectives such as minorities within institutions (Haller, Dorries, & Rahn, 2006). Analysing such discourses, especially in mass media such as newspapers, thus allows for an understanding of broader social factors which influence the formation of collective identities and associated social roles of those considered marginalised (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Haller et al., 2006).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: + 91 80 2699 3029.

E-mail address: mkulkarni@iimb.ernet.in (M. Kulkarni).

Peer-review under responsibility of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iimb.2017.07.002>

0970-3896 © 2017 Production and hosting by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

In the present study, we draw upon newspaper discourse from 2001 to 2010—the time period between two census counts—and outline ascribed disability identities in India. This was a critical period for understanding what is a disability and associated enumeration as there were definitional discrepancies between the governmental census and the National Sample Survey (Jeffery & Singal, 2008; Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006). This was also the time period in which the seminal Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995 was being replaced by the Indian government in harmony with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and thus an opportune time to understand how disability is portrayed (Kumar, Sonpal, & Hiranandani, 2012).

Our specific research question is: how do institutional discourses, as represented in mass media such as newspapers, confer identities upon a traditionally marginalised collective? Our focus is on persons with a disability in India. We draw upon critical discourse theory (Fairclough, 1995) and disability research, both of which have noted the importance of media framing which reflects institutional sociolinguistic practices in the creation of identities of traditionally marginalised people such as those with a disability (Haller et al., 2006; Peters, 1999). Critical discourse theory particularly entails viewing institutional discourse as manifesting ideologies, manipulating which, institutional elites confer social roles and identities onto less powerful institutional actors (Fairclough, 1989).

To understand ascribed identities, we obtained each newspaper article dealing with disability from 2001 to 2010 from the *Times of India*, a leading daily English language newspaper. Present data indicate four specific identities. In order of discursive dominance, we noted articles which portrayed the collective as recipients of governmental welfare schemes, as those with human rights, as vulnerable institutional subjects, and as those who are miscreants who create nuisance in society.

In identifying ascribed identities, our study makes the following contributions. First, data indicate components of discourse that ascribe certain identities onto a collective. For example, when the aforementioned newspaper included articles about “welfare” (a term used by the newspaper and by the Indian government as outlined later), governmental welfare schemes such as disability-specific travel concessions or reservations in governmental jobs were outlined. Sometimes, alongside such disability benefits, articles noted instances of charity that were aimed at the welfare of the “economically weaker scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and persons with a disability”. The collective with a disability was thus identified either on its own or by conjoining it with other collectives as being relatively inferior to other collectives as social positioning was based on economic and political factors (cf. Hagendoorn, 1993). Data thus indicate that identities are ascribed through the “othering” of certain groups through use of language (Galvin, 2003) as certain aspects of a collective are selectively highlighted.

Second, related to social positioning, data allude to the creation of institutional subject positions as identities are signalled. Subject positions are institutional roles that afford social subjects rights of communication and authority (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1972). As identities are discursively created for a collective, actors not part of the la-

belled collective also assume a certain identity, with concomitant implications for social relations within the institutional field (Phillips & Hardy, 1997). In the present data, as the identity of a welfare recipient was constructed, so was the role of the government as a powerful controller of welfare benefits.

Third, present data may help understand why certain institutional subject positions or roles can be sticky. In the present data, the human rights discourse did not overcome the welfare discourse. Present observations suggest that the collective which seemed to be classified as recipients of welfare often sidestepped demands for empowerment and instead chose to demand more welfare benefits thus reinforcing a particular identity they were endowed with. Further, the welfare discourse was more specific (e.g., types of governmental schemes) as compared with the human rights discourse (e.g., noting importance of rights). It is possible that the relative permanence of identities based on longevity and social impact of media (Cooren, 2004; McPhee, 2004) is replicated at the individual level as institutional discourses inscribe certain subject positions and lead institutional prejudices to become part of individual schema (Ybema et al., 2009). Even when some institutional actors may wish to question assumed social relations, they may not be able to articulate objections as these may make little or no sense within extant patterns of speech and thought (Galvin, 2003). Present data thus reinforce the notion that discourses can create social categories and have practical implications for those categorised as well as those involved in the categorisation (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004a; Hacking, 1986).

Overall, present data help outline the discursive underpinnings of institutional functioning by noting how collectives are socially positioned within institutions. Data shed light on how social definitions are governed by institutional discourse, and identity is thus not only about individual claims based on personality or character (cf. Ybema et al., 2009). Even when institutional narratives are beyond one’s awareness, they can shape how actors see themselves and others (Somers, 1994) and thereby reinforce social categorisations (Galvin, 2003).

Literature review

In this section, we discuss what we mean by discourse and ascribed identities, and how news media in particular can influence the creation of ascribed identities. We then present the research question.

Discourse and ascribed identities

Discourse refers to a collection of texts and speech, or a vocabulary, which supports certain ways of thinking and behaving. When texts can be distributed widely, they are prone to influencing actions and can serve as a coercive form of influence (Phillips et al., 2004) and social domination (Foucault, 1972). Discourse, as representative of social practice, can represent reality, enact social relations, and establish identities of a collective (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2005). Written texts in particular contain implied judgments that can shape readers’ thoughts (Hayakawa, 1990).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5109216>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5109216>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)