

Brainwashing or nurturing positive values: Competing voices in Hong Kong's national education debate



Winnie Cheng^{a,*}, Janet Ho^b

^a *Research Centre for Professional Communication in English, Department of English,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hunghom, Hong Kong*

^b *Department of English, Lingnan University, Hong Kong*

Received 5 April 2013; received in revised form 17 July 2014; accepted 8 August 2014

Abstract

This corpus-based discourse analytical study compares the use of collocations, semantic preferences, semantic prosodies and metaphors in the news reports and Hong Kong Government press releases concerning the introduction of the school subject Moral and National Education in Hong Kong in 2012. The analysis of word co-occurrences with the phrase 'national education' in the two corpora shows that journalists use various FIGHT metaphors to describe the attitudes and actions of protesters and the responses of the government. However, the government press releases are much more literal, showing a neutral to positive tone and implying that when the planned introduction was shelved, national education will be re-introduced in the future.

© 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Moral and National Education; Metaphors; The fight metaphor; Semantic preferences and prosodies; Media reports and press releases

1. Introduction

Political development in Hong Kong has increasingly become a main concern since the change of sovereignty from the United Kingdom to China in 1997, particularly in recent years. The extent to which Hong Kong citizens enjoy the same degree of personal freedoms and the same kind of rights in the past has been of both local and international concern. In the white paper issued by the China State Council on the practice of the "one country, two systems" policy in Hong Kong on 10 June 2014, the central government contend that the HKSAR will 'work hand in hand with the mainland towards a better future for the China nation', contributing to the 'Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' (*South China Morning Post*, 10 June 2014).

Designed with the objective to strengthen the national identity of Hong Kong people, the 'Policy Address 2010–2011' announced an education reform, stating that 'Moral and Civic Education' would be replaced by 'Moral and National Education' (thereafter MNE) to 'strengthen national education'. The plan was implemented by the Hong Kong Government in June 2012, with the Education Bureau announcing that the subject MNE would become compulsory in primary schools in September 2012 and in secondary schools 2013. The subject manual and instructional materials, prepared by Hong Kong National Education Services Centre, were distributed to different schools in July 2012, and sparked fierce controversies in different sectors of the community, including education institutions, pressure groups, civic organizations,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 27667558.

E-mail addresses: egwcheng@polyu.edu.hk (W. Cheng), janho@ln.edu.hk (J. Ho).

and the entertainment industry. The introduction of MNE was criticized as 'brainwashing' (*The Telegraph*, 3 September 2012). At least 115 out of the 528 schools in Hong Kong opposed the plan (*The Standard*, 20 June 2012), and more than 1000 parents co-signed an open letter to the Hong Kong Government and the Chinese Communist Party (*The Standard*, 23 July 2012).

A series of events occurred protesting the introduction of MNE as a compulsory school subject; for example, a march involving more than 9000 protestors from 21 civic organizations (including Hong Kong Federation of Students, Parents' Concern Group, pressure groups, Alliance Youth, Civic Human Rights Front and Professional Teachers' Union) (*The Standard*, 10 August 2012), a boycott of schools by more than 8000 students, and an occupation of Tamar Park outside the Hong Kong Government headquarters by hunger strikers for more than three days (*The Standard*, 3 September 2012). The cumulative effect of these events resulted in the government announcing that the commencement of the MNE subject in schools would be indefinitely postponed. The incident has aroused international concern and has been widely reported by the Western media, as seen in some of the news headlines: 'Thousands in HK protest China patriotism classes' (*The Guardian*, 29 July 2012), 'Hong Kong protest over 'brainwashing' by China' (*The Telegraph*, 3 September 2012), and 'Protesters besiege Hong Kong plaza as crisis over 'national education' mounts' (*The Washington Post*, 6 September 2012).

In fact, the national identity of Hong Kong citizens has always been a concern. As observed by Brewer (1999), Hong Kong citizens have developed a dual identity of being both HongKongers and Chinese during the transition period before the handover in 1997. After the reversion of sovereignty to China, Hong Kong citizens have developed a stronger regional identity and many labelled themselves as 'Hong Konger'. At the end of 2011, poll results of the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong showed that the proportion of Hong Kong locals who identified themselves as a 'Hong Konger' is 20–30 percentage higher than as a 'Chinese citizen' (*The Standard*, 29 June 2012).

A better understanding of representation of Hong Kongers' reaction and attitude regarding the MNE incident can be achieved by examining the media coverage, specifically the ways in which journalists establish common ground with the readers by presenting the reaction and attitude of the stakeholders, including the school management, teachers, parents, students and educational institutions as well as the general public on the whole.

2. Literature review

Grounding is an interactive process by which speakers share the facts, beliefs, attitudes, values, evaluations and assumptions to achieve mutual understandings (Clark and Brennan, 1991). Lee (2001) identifies various categories of common ground through combinations of five components: belief, knowledge, common (or background), shared and mutual. The individual's relative degree of certainty of truth increases from 'belief' to 'knowledge', and his certainty of the sharedness increases from common, shared to mutual (Lee, 2001). Establishing common ground is a crucial interactive and discursive activity for knowledge sharing in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural professional and public communication (Bromme, 2000; Richardson and Dale, 2005; Hayashi and Miwa, 2009). Studies have investigated the entering and building of common ground in a range of discourses and contexts such as health care (O'Malley and Reschovsky, 2011), collaboration (Lindgren et al., 2007), negotiation (Campolo, 2005), text chat (Birnholtz et al., 2005), and speech and gesture (Holler and Stevens, 2007).

A comparative approach is often used to investigate the factors in the build-up and maintenance of common ground. Lindgren et al. (2007), for instance, compared the communication styles of two pairs of firemen during breathing apparatus rescue operations. The pair with better performance has finished a three-step procedure, namely informative utterance of a member, confirmation of the utterance by his partner, followed by the acknowledgement of the confirmation by the member. In another study, O'Malley and Reschovsky (2011) explored the reasons for inadequate communication between physicians and specialists on referrals and consultations. The authors found that the inter-specialty communication problems are more related to such factors as "adequate" visit time with patients, receipt of quality reports regarding patients with chronic conditions, and nurse support for monitoring patients with chronic conditions' (p. 56).

One way for the media to achieve common ground is through the use of metaphors. Goatly (2007) noted that metaphor is useful for cultivating intimacy as it can create 'a sense of community' (p. 160) 'because the understanding of metaphors depends on shared Grounds, metaphor can become a means of activating the assumptions shared between only two people, or a small group' (p. 160). Cameron (2007) investigated metaphors in reconciliation talk between an IRA bomber and victim, as in *in our true light* and *a caricature*. She acknowledged the important role metaphors play in the 're-humanization of individuals away from the limited stereotypes as 'enemy' and the offer of 'affordances for empathic understanding of the other' (p. 219).

In metaphor studies, corpus linguistic methods have been increasingly used (Deignan, 1999; Stefanowitsch, 2006; Soler, 2008; Skorzynska, 2010). As Baker (2006) points out, the corpus can both 'uncover the possible metaphors surrounding a word or concept' and show 'how that metaphor works in a range of other cases, enabling researchers to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/932656>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/932656>

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