

## Recontextualizing Politics of Noun Phrases in the New York Times Editorial<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This research paper is an effort to recontextualize the politics of noun phrases on the New York Times editorial published on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016 entitled “North Korea Flexes Its Nuclear Muscle”. It examines how the recontextualization of these noun phrases can contribute to shaping public discourse about political events and ideas. Through a critical discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough’s concept of recontextualization and Theo Van Leeuwen’s discourse and function of language, the study demonstrates how the editorial uses noun phrases to mobilize support for certain political views while demonizing the opposing ones. To recontextualize the politics of noun phrases, deem how different political ideologies and movements may use specific language to reinforce their beliefs and goals. By recontextualizing the noun phrases, the editorial produces a particular political agenda that is likely to influence the reader’s opinions and attitudes towards certain political issues. The findings suggests that the language used in political discourse is a powerful tool that can be used to shape public opinion and that the manipulation of language should be a subject of public concern and also that the ideology can be changed by playing through choice of certain noun phrases.*

**Keywords:** Context, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, Noun-phrase, Politics, Recontextualization

The politics of language has been a topic of discussion for decades, and the ways in which language is used to communicate political ideas and opinions can have a significant impact on the way people think and behave. In the New York Times editorial dated January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, there is a notable recontextualization of the politics of noun

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phrases, which highlights the ways in which language can be used to shape public discourse. This paper will explore the use of noun phrases in the editorial and how recontextualizing them can create different meanings and interpretations of political events and ideas. Being an independent country, North Korea has been exercising its nuclear power for the last two decades. But why that practice is always taken as a threat to the western world and how the western media represents its practices (nuclear weapon test) as a hostile to whole humanity through their linguistic choice of words is a researchable issue.

This paper attempts to assess how ideology is hidden or portrayed through the choice of certain noun phrases. Fairclough (2011, p. 358) states that, "discursive practices may have major ideological effects: [...] they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic groups, through the ways in which they represent things and position people". Further he writes: "[o]ne thing which makes the problem at issue difficult to tackle is recontextualization" (p.130), "recontextualization implies transformation to suit the new context and its discourse" (p.133).

Recontextualization is the process of taking something out of its original context and placing it into a new context. It engrosses shifting the way something is presented or interprets, to shift its meaning or significance frequently. It can ensue in many dissimilar contexts, such as art, literature, media, and politics. An artist may take an everyday object and place it in an art gallery, transforming it into a work of art. A writer possibly will employ a phrase or quote in a new context to convey a different meaning or message. In the case of politics, it can be used to manipulate public opinion by framing an issue in a meticulous way or presenting information selectively. It can also be used to challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives or interpretations.

Jeffries (2010, p. 21) in her book *Critical Stylistics* states that, "[i]f we think of naming in everyday terms, we may think about the kind of choice that someone makes where a choice of a word in naming has more ideological potential." Language is an important tool for conveying meaning and shaping reality. The way language is used within a text can divulge power imbalances and ideologies. Jeffries in her book emphasizes the importance of groping the choices completed in language use and how the text is structured. The bond between language and ideology is a central focus of Jeffries. She also aspires to deconstruct and challenge prevailing discourses and power

structures through linguistic analysis. The analysis of language use in texts can provide insight into social, political and cultural context.

Leeuwen (2008, pp. vii-viii) in his book *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* writes:

In the process of recontextualization, aspects [...] may be excluded from the discourse or transformed, and recontextualization may also add elements such as purposes and legitimations for the actions. As a result, some recontextualizations eliminate much of the actual detail of the social practices they recontextualize and focus, for instance, mostly on legitimation or critique, while others focus on the social practices themselves and contain few elements of legitimation or critique.

Leeuwen, (2008) further writes that language is not only a tool for communication, but also has the power to shape and construct social practices and identities. He argues that text and discourse should not be analyzed in isolation, but rather in relation to the broader social practices in which they are situated. He highlights the importance of context and power relations in the analysis of discourse, and how language choices and representations can reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies and social structures. The focus on both discourse and practice, as well as their relationship, offers a more comprehensive understanding of how language functions in society.

Carter (2001) in his book *Working with Text: A Core Introduction to Language* focuses on the importance of context, audience, and purpose in understanding how language works in different genres and discourse communities. He emphasizes the importance of linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, and style in shaping meaning and communication. Through numerous examples and exercises, Carter provides practical tools and strategies for analyzing texts from a linguistic perspective. He also highlights the social and cultural dimensions of language use, and the ways in which language can reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies and power relations. Ultimately, Carter argues that understanding language is essential for effective communication, critical thinking, and social engagement.

The title of the editorial has used the word 'muscle' and here, muscle stands for the power of human beings. So, the muscle power of male is uniquely replaced here by the quite new noun phrase nuclear muscle. The editorial was about the urgency of growing threat from the increasing nuclear tests by North Korea. The editorial has urged

USA and China to hold tough talks for settling the issues of manufacturing nuclear weapons on North Korea and Iran and other war torn countries.

The paragraph opens with the statement saying 'North Korea has carried its latest nuclear test for the fourth time and it has become a predictable ritual for the rest of the world to react, especially focusing America'. The editorial has focused the North Korea's nuclear test as 'latest' and America's quick reaction as a "predictable ritual" as every time America becomes first to react and threaten North Korea for limiting its' sanctions if it keeps making regular tests. The noun "nuclear" has been modified with pre-modifier "latest" and post-modifier "test". Jeffries argues that, "[n]ominal parts of English clauses and sentences are packaging up something that is named by that nominal element, and the reader or hearer is not encouraged by such a structure to question the relationship between the parts of that structure" (p. 22). So, here in the sentence North Korea carries its latest nuclear test, its fourth is presupposed by the reader as the real action of the agent without questioning its corroboration.

The angry reaction of America has been described as "vigorous condemnation" followed by promises never to accept the North Korea as "a nuclear weapons state". The editor has given America's strong disapproval as "vigorous condemnation" under the pseudo name "the world's reaction" and disagrees to accept the North as "a nuclear weapons state". Here, the transformation of "vigorous condemnation" through the word "world's reaction" is hiding the direct disagreement of America with North Korea as Leeuwen (2008, p.303) in his essay "Discourse as the Recontextualization of Social Practice" under the topic Substitution states that "[t]he most fundamental transformation is the substitution of elements of the actual social practice adds new meaning to that practice in the course of recontextualization". So, here the added meaning is that fear of America signifies that "nuclear weapons are threat not only to the rest of the world but the so called most powerful nation of the world 'America' itself".

Here, researcher wants to add the reference of another editorial from the same newspaper about the speech of Barak Obama on January 6, 2016 as Leewen, (2008, p.304) claims that in the process of recontextualizing "[e]lements can also be added to the recontextualized social practice". In the speech, Barak Obama shows anxiety about the increasing epidemic of gun violence in America as a national crisis that has killed and injured hundreds of thousands of Americans, he says "We are the only advance nation on the earth that sees this kind of mass violence with this frequency". This shows the fear of

America and its people not only from its domestic violence but also from international conflicts. But, it can be seen quiet as American feelings of Mr. President and American people because as Leewen (2008, p.306) argues in the process of recontextualizing, "the purpose of the same social practice may be constructed differently in different recontextualization of the same practice". It raises the critical question that Barak Obama is speaking in against of nuclear weapons as President of America or as the benevolent for all other people except that America.

Further, the editorial says the United States and its partners have failed miserably at finding "an effective solution" while the North Korea threat is real and growing. It shows a kind of appeal to America to sort out for the useful solution to stop North for the tests using the noun phrase "an effective solution" with the determiner 'an' and the pre-modifier "effective". It further acclaims that "a final judgment" as the requirement to make sure that North Korea has really carried out its latest nuclear weapon test again with determiner 'a' and the pre-modifier 'final'. The weapon has been described as "a hydrogen bomb", with the pre-modifier 'hydrogen' assuming that such weapon of mass destruction exists as Jeffries, (2010, p. 93) argues that "[w]hat speakers/ writers assume or imply is powerful because ideologies are not structured into the main proposition of the utterance/ sentence explicitly".

The editorial says that all the hyperbolic activities in North Korea including this nuclear weapons test because of ambitious leader Kim Jong Un to expand its "impoverished country". Activities of North Korea have been described as worse than it really is using the linguistics term 'hyperbolic'. So, North Korea is given the symbol of destitute and beggared country using the noun phrase "impoverished country", which will only cause the political mechanism and arose the feeling of hatred towards American ideology of Watching it. Radstone, (2016, p.31) in her essay "Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics and Ethics" argues that, "western politics and culture are acting as a vehicle of political mechanism rather than check and balance". These all activities are described in against of United Nations resolutions, making itself noticeable in the world political spectrum when it feels ignored and keeping Asia off balance. So, again it has been given the title "nuclear arsenal" with post modifier 'arsenal' that means store room weapons.

In the third paragraph opening it says, the United states and other major powers expanded maximum effort negotiating "a landmark agreement" to keep Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons with pre-modifier 'landmark' to agreement. The peace talks

and negotiation talks have been metaphoric using the noun phrase "a landmark agreement". So, the effort of America is described as a climacteric and milestone step in evading the nuclear weapons test from the world. So, the editorial has quite positive attitudes towards the attempts made by America.

In the fourth paragraph, North Korea's ammunitions producing are described as sustaining its economy by using the noun phrase "hard currency". The more bombs and missiles North Korea produces, the more likely it is to try to sell those weapons to earn desperately needed "hard currency". Again, here the editorial presents indifferent sympathetic attitudes towards North Korea. The sentence tries to make clear about the worried condition of North Korea but the hidden implication is that it is visualizing the apathetic condition of North Korea through the choice of word hard.

All the weapon making activities are solely blamed for earning "a currency that is not likely to depreciate suddenly in value". But the thing to put in mind is that if the country is surely making enough missiles and artillery for earning hard currency then first how they get money to buy raw materials for making those weapons. Without good expense, you cannot have good products. So, the editor's view becomes doubtful remark to North Korea's welfare.

In the fifth Paragraph, the visit to North's capital, Pyongyang has been made by "a senior Chinese Official" for inspection and guaranteeing that there are no such activities of test and others that can really become threat to the United States and the rest of the world. However, the noun phrase with a long pre-modifier "a senior Chinese official" does not disclose the name and the designation of that official. So, this step can be taken as friendlier visit rather than to make the roaring sound of missile come in silence.

Same paragraph's tail part says that "the latest nuclear test" has raised condemnation among the United Nations Security Council, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the European Union as well as individual countries. The noun phrase "The latest nuclear test" swifts the agony in most of the developed countries whereas there are no comments from poor countries. It's a matter of a rivalry of being powerful in the world rather than being so thoughtful of the growing danger to the whole world.

"What can be done to back up the tough talk ?" the sixth paragraph throws a hard and difficult question again to recontextualize that practice "The tough talk" remarks the dialogue to settle such conflicts is pretty not light and superficial with the determiner 'the'

and the pre-modifier 'tough'. So, the persistent and serious effort is needed to halt such test projects. Without making the tough talk Congress seems to tighten the sanctions on North Korea like the one India has done over Nepal creating unofficial blocked but claiming only obstruction and unhealthy border situation. Is it human or inhuman to impose blockade over other nation in the name of making one nation's choice fulfilled? So, the paragraph further says, "Unilateral American action" is not enough to put an end to such power displaying competitions with two pre-modifiers 'Unilateral and American'. Leeuwan, (2008, pp. 12-13) writes:

[i]n recontextualization, the recontextualized social practice may be a sequence of nonlinguistic actions ... Recontextualization not only makes the recontextualized social practices explicit to a greater or lesser degree, it also makes them pass through the filter of the practices in which they are inserted. The way in which this happens is rarely transparent to the participants of the recontextualizing practice, and is usually embedded in their common sense, in their habits of relating to each other, and in what they take the purposes of the recontextualizing practice to be—all those things which form the usually tacit know-how of experienced participants of the recontextualizing social practice.

Recontextualization is recursive as well and it happens over and over again confiscating us from the preliminary point of the sequence of recontextualizations. It can recontextualize: assumptions, values and the meanings that it produces.

In the second last paragraph, it says that such tough economic penalties would cause people to flee North Korea for China. So, the editorial aspires China to be a leader in the peaceful talk by showing the chances of becoming “world leader” through the pre-modifier 'world'. But there is one condition that China must be able to solve the North Korean nuclear threat. The noun phrase "world leader" arises the suspicion that making other nation not to yield lethal products is for becoming world power oneself or it's for the salvation of the whole world.

In the last paragraph, the negotiation programs with such countries is taken as “a pipe dream” because North Korea and Iran has no any interest in negotiating nuclear weapons. An agreement with the United States was also collapsed in 2002 and now America demands that the North must agree first that the outcome would be nuclear disarmament. So, the dream has been pre-modifier with the noun ‘pipe’ which shows the uselessness of the negotiation.

The editorial used a range of noun phrases to discuss the political implications of the issue. A noun phrase is a group of words that act like a noun in a sentence. In this editorial, they are often used to construct a particular political stance. For example, the phrase “gun manufacturers” is used to highlight a particular view on the issue. The editorial argues that gun manufacturers are not doing enough to prevent gun violence, saying, “[t]he gun manufacturers bear some responsibility for this carnage, and it is long past time they accepted it”. By using the noun phrase “gun manufacturers”, the editorial positions these companies as responsible for the shootings.

Another noun phrase “assault weapons”. The editorial argues that the sale of assault weapons should be banned, saying, “[i]t is time to ban the sale, manufacturer and possession of these weapons.” The editorial positions these weapons as particularly dangerous, and as having no legitimate purpose by using this phrase.

The phrase “gun-rights advocates” is also used in the editorial and argues that these advocates are misinterpreting the Second Amendment, saying, “They keep insisting that the Second Amendment guarantees an absolute individual right to bear any arms. This is a false and dangerous reading of the Constitution. “By using the noun phrase “gun-rights advocates,” the editorial positions these people as being on the wrong side of the debate. Therefore the noun phrases used in the editorials have created new discourse. Leeuwan, (2008, p. 6) writes, “... discourses are social cognitions, socially specific ways of knowing social practices, they can be, and are, used as resources for representing social practices in text. This means that it is possible to reconstruct discourses from the texts that draw on them”.

The editor has hope that "creative diplomacy" can make it happen through "the current approach" with North Korea certainly is not working implying the purpose to have the concrete solutions to the problem as Leeuwan (2008, p.361) states that "[p]urpose will be paramount where new things are to be done in new ways". The noun choice 'creative diplomacy' shows the lack of practical visions of politicians to solve the growing strategic conflicts among the countries regarding artillery power. If not, the process will only lead to (a pipe dream) of fear free world. The ideology can be veiled or revealed throughout the preference of positive noun phrases. The noun phrases used in the New York Times editorial serve to construct a particular political position on the gun control issue. By highlighting particular groups (such as gun manufacturers and gun-rights advocates) and particular objects (such as assault weapons), the editorial presents a



particular view on who is responsible for gun violence, and what should be done to address the issue.

In conclusion, this paper has examined the politics of noun phrases in the New York Times editorial published on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The analysis has shown how the recontextualization of noun phrases can contribute to shaping public discourse and promoting particular political agendas. By using carefully crafted noun phrases, the editorial mobilizes support for certain political views while demonizing opposing ones. Language is a powerful tool, and the manipulation of language in political discourse should be a subject of public concern. This study highlights the importance of critical discourse analysis in understanding the ways in which language is used to shape our perceptions and attitudes towards political events and ideas. In general, the findings of this study accentuate the need for conscientious language use in political discourse to ensure the reasonable representation of opinions and ideas, and to endorse democratic values of transparency and accountability.

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