

Written Discourse Analysis

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Abstract— The research will be focusing on the Written Discourse. It analyzes the written discourse of holiday photo cards in the chapter of “Their lives are so much better than ours”. It tries to analyse people's lifestyle by reviewing their holiday cards. This research paper shows the trend which directs future discourses to also consider incorporating photos and other digital media on their analyses of people.

1 INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis involves a list of strategies employed by the linguists and other professional researchers to gain as much information as possible from what people say in either spoken or written language. This research paper analyses the written discourses of the holiday photo cards in the chapter of “Their lives are so much better than ours” .

2 Their lives are so much better than ours

The chapter on “Their lives are so much better than ours” was written by Jenna Mahay and focuses on holiday photo cards. Her decision to write on this topic was inspired when she received a card from a friend who had left to France. This card had well-designed photos that showing a happy family enjoying their holidays. Mahay daughter, who was only four years, was impressed by the lifestyle the photos conveyed that she felt that her friends lived a better life than theirs. In fact, the title of this chapter was a remark made by Mahay's daughter as she suggested her mother to consider vacating so that they can also have a better life. Mahay's analyses shows that the technology has played an important role in advancing the message of holiday cards to include social class and status as well as construct an ideal of what happiness is all about.

The author employs professional analysis to understand the actual message being carried by the digitally constructed photos. She understands very well that such cards were in the past used to wish people an enjoyable or eventful holidays. However, this is no longer the case in the technologically advanced world where people have been given much power to professionally produce their photos. Her analysis leads her to a number of findings among which include how the holiday cards signify status. For example, she notes that a person's status is seen through the cultural and economic capital represented in an elite holiday photo card (Jenna, 86). Many photos on holiday cards show pictures of a family in different places enjoying life with their family members. These cards have certainly become a powerful tool used to express oneself. They are no longer sent to only those people who are far away from the sender, but also to the persons they meet on a daily basis. For many, the holiday card is the only communication they have with much of their extended social network (Jenna, 86).

The author takes sufficient effort to combine both the qualitative and quantitative analysis. She uses the qualitative analysis by looking into some of the best holiday photo card retail websites. This analysis gives us a clear picture of how the holiday photo cards can reflect a person's position in life. She considers the high value of materials used to make these cards as something that defines the elite status. Besides that, the cards are personalized by adding the owner's message, and then given sophisticated designs. Clearly, the consumer's desire for differentiation is reflected (Jenna, 89). Generally, the author is effective in painting a clear picture of how the modern digital technology has made it easier to customize photo cards. This customization of photo cards has therefore changed the holiday card ritual into project of identity (Jenna, 96). Besides that, photo cards are being used to show the influence of certain families.

The strength of Mahay's writing comes out strongly as she addresses a subject that is of interest to almost everyone and, therefore, it appeals to everyone whoever reads it. Although she only brought out the issue of holiday photo cards, her analysis was worth the representation of the effect of modern photo technology. She took her time to explain the outcome of it all in a more simple way and thus making the reader to keep on reading. It is this simplicity of bringing out the message that captures the readers' attention. Even though she applied two methodologies, the qualitative analysis which is reflected in the costly materials, sophisticated designs and modern digital technology, and the quantitative analysis on the displays of these retail websites to gather her information, she only rested on two photo card retail websites. These websites are the Shutterfly and Tiny Prints (Jenna, 87). The use of other Medias like the holiday photo card retail shops, magazines and interviews could have given her more support on how the holiday photo card have greatly transformed humanity. In addition, she points out that holiday photo cards identifies a family as an elite community which is not always the case. There are many other people who put their photos on holiday cards yet they are not of the elite community. Most people do this as an appreciation to the season they are traveling into, and not as a way of showing their advancements in life.

The fact that this chapter is easy to understand does not rule

out the difficult and hard terms in it. There are a number of concepts and terms used which at first were hard to understand. This includes statements like the hegemonic ideal, normative and aesthetics. The solution to these came by reading on and relating the vocabularies to the sentences which followed. In some situations, I had to rely on my sixth sense to understand the implied meaning. For instance, the author writes about "what is ultimately communicated and reinforced through these holiday photo cards in a normative ideal of happiness itself" (86). It is somehow difficult to connect this statement with the overall message of discourse analysis. Nonetheless, after rereading and trying to create a context with our course "Discourse Analysis", it became evident that such holiday photos are generally used to communicate what society perceives to be happy lifestyle. In fact this could be the reason why Mahay's daughter remarked that "their lives is better than ours" when she saw photos of her friends.

3 Connection to Discourse Analysis

The chapter finds important connection to the study on "Discourse Analysis". Discourse analysis involves a list of strategies employed by the linguists and other professional researchers to gain as much information as possible from what people say in either spoken or written language. For example, in studying a particular people's perception of political affiliations, a linguist transcribes the statements they make during an interview or group discussion. Then through a complete analysis, he or she may make some generalization about that group. Similarly, this chapter relates with the spoken discourse in the sense that it tries to analyse people's lifestyle by reviewing their holiday cards. Mahay notes that "As I watched the holiday photo card technology develop, it seemed that these cards became less about wishing someone happy holidays, and more about something else" (Mahay 86). The chapter reinforces the idea that people communicate not only by their literal words, but also through critical analysis of their words. However, unlike the traditional tool used by linguistic to study people, the chapter introduces digital photo media as another aspect of understanding people's lifestyle.

4 conclusion

There is no doubt that holiday photos would sooner be embraced in future version of our discourse analysis course. The world has gone digital and so much is being represented in form of photos and other digital media. Take example of "instagram" application that is commonly used to share photos through the internet. Denying that the mode of communication has broadened to also include digitally designed photos will be a lie. Also, a fact worth noting is that this trend is increasingly becoming people among people using the social platforms. This trend directs future discourses to also consider incorporating photos and other digital media on their analyses of people.

References

- [1] Mahay, Jenna. "Their Lives Are So Much Better Than Ours." *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013. 272. Print