Subjectivity of Discourse from the Philosophic Perspective

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Language not only objectively expresses the thought of a proposition but also indicates the speaker's emotion, attitude, and viewpoints toward a proposition, which is called subjectivity in the study. Subjectivity is one of the main topics in philosophy. However, the phenomenon of subjectivity is mainly discussed at the word, construction, or syntactic level from the perspective of linguistics. To better the characteristics of speakers as subjects in social practice activities and cognitive activities, an analytical framework of subjectivity in discourse from the perspective of philosophy was constructed to investigate subjectivity at the discourse level. Three aspects, that is, experience, mental and communicative models, were explored. The results show that (1) the constructed analytical framework clearly shows the social characteristics of subjectivity in discourse; (2) the experience model is divided into the speaker's social and cultural experience; (3) the mental model is construed as the speaker's mental cognition, reflected by the speaker's mental stance and emotion; (4) the communicative model is represented by the speaker's communicative intention and communicative practice, including appeal, command and announcement. The study provides an analytical framework to dig up the subjective nature of language and the relationship among speakers, society and discourse. This study also enriches the research on subjectivity and discourse analysis.

Keywords: subjectivity, discourse, philosophic perspective, experience model, mental model, communicative model

INTRODUCTION

Subjectivity has always been a hot topic of attention and research. Subjectivity is significant to the development of philosophy. In philosophy, subjectivity indicates human's practical and cognitive activities (Liu 2009: 9). However, studies investigated subjectivity mainly from the linguistic perspective on the lexical, constructional and syntactic aspects of subjectivity (House 2013; Grisot 2018; Kratochvílová 2019), lacking the philosophical perspective on the discourse level of subjectivity.

Discourse is considered an important way to understand participants' communication. The subjectivity of discourse in this paper refers to the speaker's subjective components, including the speaker's views, ideas and attitudes, in discourse concerning social situations or events. Hence, the subjectivity of discourse indicates the speaker's participation in social practice and cognitive activities. Researchers have analysed the discourse via critical discourse analysis (van Dijk 2000: 211) and multimodal discourse analysis (Wang, Qu 2020: 42). However, few studies have examined the social framework of discourse subjectivity.

Language philosophy nowadays is a highly professional and diversified research field (Szubka 2021: 72). Philosophic attention should be given to different attributes of language expressions in daily communication (Cappelen, McKeever 2022: 12). Associating with the social situation and cognition, speakers can propose their subjective components to impel hearers to believe and act. Context is essential to explain how the use of language is a situational, social and personal factor and its reason (van Dijk 2009: 10). In social communication, speakers can transmit their communicative intentions, and hearers can infer the speakers' intentions based on the social context and cognition, establishing a social relationship.

Taking the US President Biden's discourse concerning COVID-19 as examples from February 2021 to June 2022, this study constructed an analytical framework of subjectivity in discourse from the philosophic perspective. It explored the subjectivity in discourse from three aspects: experience, mental and communicative models. The findings can provide a referential analytical framework to examine the subjective nature of language and the speaker's vital position in social and cognitive practices from the philosophic perspective and enrich the research on subjectivity and discourse analysis.

STATE OF THE ART

Research Domains of Subjectivity

Scholars have conducted relevant studies on subjectivity from different perspectives, including linguistic (Shen 2001), semiotics (Paolucci 2021) and philosophical (Peng 2021) perspectives. From the linguistic perspective, subjectivity is the component of the speaker's self-expression or self-imprint. Subjectivity was explored from the perspective of the viewpoint, affect and epistemic modality of speakers (Shen 2001: 268). In terms of semiotics, the relationship between man and subjectivity in language was discussed (Paolucci 2021: 1257). The means and mechanism of the realisation of subjectivity were addressed from the philosophical cognitive perspective (Peng 2021: 223). The relationship between complexity and subjectivity was explored (Ehret and Taboada 2021: 141). Moreover, the discourse subjectivity framework was constructed, and the external context factors of the discourse and the speaker's communicative intention were analysed (Zhao 2022: 83).

Subjectivity Representations

Subjectivity is mainly discussed at lexical and syntactic levels, such as tense, conjunctions, discourse markers and modality. The subjectivity of English resultative conjunctions showed an evident tendency, and a corpus survey of results was used to mark specific consistency relations (Andersson 2019: 299). The relationships among subjectivity, verb tenses and grammar were investigated (Grisot 2018: 27). Native speakers express (inter)subjectivity and connectivity by reinterpreting high-frequency discourse markers *yes/yeah*, *so* and *okay*, to achieve communicative goals and develop pragmatic competence (House 2013: 57). Subjectivity was investigated by analysing the discourse markers *you know* and *I think* in Zanzibar's spoken English when emphasising or evaluating a part of the discourse (Mohr 2021: 534).

Philosophical Approach to Language

Philosophy is vital to investigate linguistic meaning. In philosophy, the meanings of expressions receive more attention in language use (Austin 1962: 103), and priority should be given to philosophical investigations when analysing linguistic meanings (Frege 1948: 212). Mühlebach stated a proposal to utilise non-ideal philosophy to analyse linguistic meaning (Mühlebach 2022: 1). Linguistic meanings depend upon the meanings of people's utterances (Martinich 2012: 24), and exploring philosophic issues help scrutinise the meanings in language use (Bach 2004: 464). Moreover, philosophy is also essential to language functions or characteristics. Katz and Fodor found that philosophy is closely related to language functions (Wittgenstein 1958: 3). Besides, philosophy has an intrinsic relation with people's linguistic abilities and bodies (Toulmin 1971: 369) and also with thought and philosophical thinking (Zhang 2019: 58). Also, philosophy can understand the hidden meanings of different types of discourse, such as political manipulation and hate speech (Saul 2018: 360).

The above studies investigated subjectivity mainly from linguistic and semiotic perspectives, but the philosophical perspective did not receive enough attention. Besides, scholars mainly adopted the concept of subjectivity to explain the lexical meanings and syntactic structures, but research on analysing and constructing the subjectivity of discourse in social practices is lacking. Most studies on subjectivity were confined to lexical and syntactic levels, scarcely mentioning the discourse level. Moreover, scholars roughly focused on critical and multimodal discourse analyses of discourse, paying less attention to its subjectivity. The prior papers mainly focused on the representations of subjectivity in the micro-linguistic aspect, and research on the overall subjectivity of discourse was limited. Additionally, there was less agreement on the systematic or comprehensive research framework to analyse subjectivity in discourse concerning the social, cultural or cognitive conditions from the philosophic perspective.

The current study constructs an analytical framework of subjectivity in discourse from the philosophic perspective and explores the subjectivity in discourse from the speaker's experience, mental and communicative models. The study aims to further interpret the speaker's subjective imprints in discourse and understand the social characteristics of discourse subjectivity.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Discourse has no direct or linear accordance with social practices, but discourse functions at a cognitive level: 'the mental representations of language users as individuals and as social members' (van Dijk 2015: 64). Subjectivity is closely related to a person's mental consciousness (Liu 2009: 10). People's perceptual experience and cognitive processing are the two major sources of human's language and knowledge (Wang 2012: 17). van Dijk emphasised the fundamental function of the mind between discourse and society (van Dijk 1990: 163). Accordingly, to explore the subjectivity in discourse, and to explicate the relationships among speakers, society and discourse, the present study constructs an analytical framework of subjectivity in discourse from the philosophic perspective (Figure).

In the Figure, the philosophic approach focuses on the interconnections among speakers, discourse and society and digs up the characteristics of speakers as subjects in social practice activities and cognitive activities. Experience, mental and communicative models are intrinsically linked to subjectivity in social contexts. The speakers, the crucial philosophic subjects, have

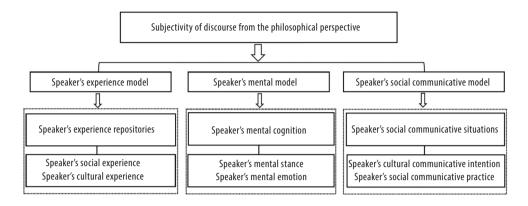


Figure. Analytical framework of subjectivity of discourse from the philosophic perspective

participated in dynamically constructing the subjectivity of discourse. Subjectivity in discourse is discussed from three aspects: the experience model reflected by the speaker's social repositories, the mental model represented in the speaker's mental cognition and the communicative model shown in the speaker's communicative situations. Specifically, the speaker's social repositories include social and cultural experiences. The speaker's mental cognition is embedded in the speaker's mental stance and mental emotion. The speaker's communicative situations contain the speaker's communicative intention and practice.

ANALYSIS OF SUBJECTIVITY IN DISCOURSE FROM THE PHILOSOPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Speaker's Experience Model

The speaker's social repositories are inseparable from one's experience model of the world. Individuals are identified according to their particular social groups and culture and they voluntarily concern and form mental manifestations of social information (Kitayama, Park 2010: 111). The discourse depends on the speaker's social and cultural experience and cannot be separated from the social and cultural context.

Speaker's Social Experience

Discourse production is a social phenomenon. The speaker's social experience is an important part of the discourse, and any discourse cannot be separated from the speaker's social experience, customs and habits. Notably, speakers can draw insights from the content, linguistic feature, semantic and lexical choices, enabling them to capture underlying ideologies and appropriately adjust the discourse content and expression.

(1) 'This nation will smile again. This nation will know sunny days again. This nation will know joy again. And as we do, we will remember each person we've lost, the lives they lived, the loved ones they left behind. **We will** get through this, **I promise you'** (Remarks by President Biden on the More Than 500,000 American Lives Lost to COVID-19, February 22, 2021).

Example (1) implies Biden's positive mental expectation of overcoming COVID-19. By saying '*I promise you*', President Biden is bound to make all decisions that will benefit the Americans. The implication is that the new government under his leadership is a government that

serves its citizens. Biden used the first-person pronoun and modal verb to indicate that all Americans have the same social experience confronting the epidemic. In Biden's speech, people can share feelings and exchange opinions, such as '*We will*' to express his political viewpoint that the American people will soon return to everyday life without staying socially distanced or wearing masks.

Speaker's Cultural Experience

In a specific cultural context, the cultural experience of the speaker is analysed through language expressions. Cultural experience has different aspects, including social system, philosophy, political environment, religious belief, history and culture. People with different cultural experiences will have different feelings and experiences, and so is their discourse.

(2) 'As of now, the total deaths in America: 537,726. That's more deaths than in World War One, World War Two, the Vietnam War, and 911 combined' (Remarks by President Biden on the Anniversary of the COVID-19 Shutdown on March 11, 2021).

Example (2) shows that people have shared cultural experiences within the same culture and can recognise the severity of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the cultural community, Biden emphasised the significance of tackling and defined COVID-19 as a war. Biden's cultural experience motivated hearers to take precautions. Therefore, the content of the discourse closely relates to the speaker's cultural experience, and Biden subjectively linked COVID-19 to a war.

Speaker's Mental Model

Linguistic subjectivity is based on the human's mental cognition, presenting the cognitive performance of speakers. The speaker's mental model is connected with the speaker's mental cognition. The speaker constructs mental cognition through the mental model and makes connections to the social reality in which speakers live to form their mental stance and mental emotions toward social events.

Speaker's Mental Stance

The speaker's mental stance refers to speakers expressing their personal opinions, views and attitudes on things in the communication process. The notion of mental stance is grounded on the communicative dimension of socio-cognitive relations, representing the speaker's mental stance. In social communication, the speakers usually express their personal views, ideas and attitudes about social events.

(3) 'About how after a long dark year – one whole year, **there is hope and light of better days ahead**. If we all do our part, this country **will** be vaccinated soon, our economy will be on the mend, our kids will be back in school' (Remarks by President Biden on the Anniversary of the COVID-19 Shutdown on March 11, 2021).

Example (3) demonstrates Biden's firm stance. By saying '*There is hope and light of better days ahead*', Biden pointed toward a hopeful future if we continue to work together. Throughout Biden's speech, he used the modal verb '*will*' associated with the adverbial clause of condition to indicate his determination that all people can be able to unite and fight the pandemic. When Americans work together, they will soon resume their everyday lives and can overcome all adversity.

Speaker's Mental Emotion

The speaker's mental emotion is a mental model in which the speaker expresses the content of the discourse in a particular communicative situation. The speaker elaborates on the content of the discourse, transmits emotions to the participants and establishes a cognitive mechanism based on mental emotion. In addition, the speaker's discourse usually embodies subjective components that convey communication purposes to the participants and achieve a certain degree of mental resonance.

(4) 'Today, we mark a **tragic** milestone: one million American lives lost to COVID-19. One million **empty chairs** around the **dinner table**. Each is an **irreplaceable** loss' (Statement from President Joe Biden Marking One Million American Lives Lost to COVID-19, May 12, 2022)

Example (4) illustrates Biden's pessimistic mental emotion toward one million Americans lost due to COVID-19. Biden mentioned that the U. S. surpassed one million COVID-19-related deaths. Biden used the emotional adjectives '*tragic*' and '*irreplaceable*' to show his emotional attitude toward the public and demonstrate the process of constructing Biden's mental model. Biden also adopted metaphors to turn intangible thoughts into tangible entities. For instance, Biden expressed his profound sympathy and heartfelt condolences by employing the metaphor '*empty chairs*', implying the people who have passed away, and '*dinner table*', representing a unit-ed family. COVID-19 is seen as a misfortune, and everyone, even the whole nation, has suffered the pain. The above discourse has prompted the public to develop shared mental emotions.

Speaker's Social Communicative Model

The speaker's social communicative model is represented in the speaker's social communicative situations. Specifically, the speaker combines linguistic expressions in the communicative process to achieve communicative intention and practice, where the form of linguistic expressions can be divided into parole, such as vocabulary, syntax and choice of discourse features, or non-parole, such as facial expression, posture and dress. Evidently, apart from explaining what the speaker says, a social communicative situation also indicates how the speaker says it. The discourse plays a communicative role in specific social and cultural contexts. A social communicative situation is oriented to the speaker's social communicative intention and practice that rest on the social communicative model. In political discourse, the speaker fulfills the speaker's social communicative intention by giving speeches on different occasions. Similarly, the speaker's communicative practice is influenced by social communicative intentions.

Speaker's Social Communicative Intention

The speaker communicates in the language community with a certain communicative intention to achieve the desired communicative result. The construction of discourse is based on the social context, in which the speaker chooses appropriate discourse to describe the events according to the context and the communicative intention and establishes the social communication with the participants. The speaker's communicative intention contributes to their interpersonal dimension with discourse and society.

(5) 'These vaccines are safe and effective and are approved after extensive scientific review by the Food and Drug Administration – the FDA – and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – the CDC. But **I know** some parents might have questions. **I encourage** you to talk to the doctor – after you make a plan to get your child vaccinated – for your children older than five years of age. For everyone else: Get your shots. Get your boosters' (Remarks by President Biden on COVID-19 Vaccines for Children Under Five, June 21, 2022).

In example (5), Biden improved the credibility and authority of discourse by citing the FDA's and the CDC's favorable comments on the COVID-19 vaccines. If Biden had not quoted from the authorities and directly indicated his communicative intention, it would have made his opinion too subjective and made it difficult to increase the credibility of the discourse. The first-person expressions, such as '*I know*' and '*I encourage*', bring the speaker closer to the participants and indicate Biden's subjective attitude. He knew parents' questions and concerns about vaccines and reassured them. Thus, Biden's communicative intention was obtained.

Speaker's Social Communicative Practice

The speaker who participated in communicative practice could express the speaker's thoughts, claims and proposals in a manner accessible to the public under a suitable situation. The communication of social members is the social act of using discourse as communication, giving subjective views and opinions about an event, and proceeding to the next intersectional practice according to the intention of the purpose expressed by the speaker, and then achieving the intention through the communication practice.

(6) 'So, **please**, **please**, **please** get vaccinated now. You know, **we've reduced** the number of American adults without any shots from 90 million to about 35 million in the past six months. **But** there are still 35 million people who are not vaccinated' (Remarks by President Biden Before Meeting on COVID-19, January 04, 2022).

In example (6), the repetition '*please, please, and please*' highlighted the urgency of vaccination at present, showing Biden's communicative practice that Biden required the public to be vaccinated as soon as possible. The present perfect tense '*we've reduced*' combined with the detailed data strongly convinced the public that Biden's administration took a positive action to call for most people to get vaccinated. The transition construction '*But*' emphasised that despite the remarkable efforts of Biden's administration, there are still a small number of adults who are not vaccinated. Namely, Biden transmitted the cognition of a favourable government image in the public's inner mind through communicative practice.

CONCLUSIONS

An analytical framework of subjectivity in discourse from the philosophic perspective was constructed to analyse the speaker's social and cultural experience and mental model in regulating the speaker's perception and cognition in the communicative situation. The framework is highly instrumental in apprehending the speaker's experience, mental and communicative models. The conclusions can be drawn as follows:

(1) The constructed analytical framework can clearly show the social characteristics of subjectivity in discourse. That is, discourse can be considered the experience, mental and communicative models.

(2) The experience model, that is, the speaker's social repositories, is divided into the speaker's social and cultural experiences. In society, with social and cultural experiences, including knowledge, ideologies, beliefs, values and perception, speakers can effectively produce discourse to interact with participants. (3) The mental model is construed as the speaker's mental cognition, reflected by the speaker's mental stance and emotion. The speaker's mental cognition can help speakers to understand cognitive perception. Similarly, the speaker's mental emotion can help speakers to express their emotions, feelings and attitudes toward the public.

(4) The communicative model, the speaker's communicative situation, is represented by the speaker's social communicative intention and communicative practice, including appeal, command and announcement. Accordingly, speakers can select the theme of discourse and choose discourse to complete their communicative activities.

This study adopts the philosophic perspective to explore the characteristics of speakers as subjects in discourse. The proposed analysis framework can give insight into speakers' subjective meanings and communicative intentions behind the discourse. However, the research only took some discourse concerning the COVID-19 Pandemic by US President Trump. In future research, subjectivity in discourse should be dealt with based on additional examples and broader social situations.

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Diskurso subjektyvumas filosofiniu požiūriu

Santrauka

Kalba ne tik padeda objektyviai išreikšti mintis teiginiu, bet ir parodyti kalbėtojo emocijas, nuostatą ir požiūrį į teiginį. Tyrime tai vadinama subjektyvumu. Subjektyvumas yra viena pagrindinių filosofijos temų. Subjektyvumo reiškinys daugiausia aptariamas žodžio, konstrukcijos ar sintaksės lygmeniu lingvistikos požiūriu. Siekiant pagerinti kalbėtojų, kaip subjektų socialinėje praktikoje ir kognityvinėje veikloje, bruožus, analizuojama subjektyvumo diskurso struktūra filosofijos požiūriu, tiriant subjektyvumą diskurso lygmeniu. Buvo ištirti trys aspektai, t. y. patirties, psichiniai ir komunikaciniai modeliai. Rezultatai rodo, kad 1) sukonstruota analitinė sistema aiškiai parodo socialines subjektyvumo ypatybes diskurse; 2) patirties modelis skirstomas į kalbėtojo socialinę ir kultūrinę patirtį; 3) mentalinis modelis yra interpretuojamas kaip kalbėtojo psichinis pažinimas, atspindimas kalbėtojo psichinės pozicijos ir emocijų; 4) komunikacinį modelį reprezentuoja kalbėtojo komunikacinis ketinimas ir komunikacinė praktika, įskaitant kreipimąsi, komandą ir paskelbimą. Tyrimas suteikia analitinę sistemą, leidžiančią išsiaiškinti subjektyvų kalbos pobūdį ir santykius tarp kalbėtoju, visuomenės ir diskurso. Šis tyrimas taip pat papildo subjektyvumo ir diskurso analizės tyrimus.

Raktažodžiai: subjektyvumas, diskursas, filosofinė perspektyva, patirties modelis, mentalinis modelis, komunikacinis modelis