

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the contemporary world, the media plays an active role in the construction of identity (Krefting, 2002). While the electronic media stages the identity debate in various live shows, the print media follows suit by using poignant linguistic means in the form of writing. Women's preferred identity is contested and constructed like any other identities (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1999).

Formation of an identity may be culture specific, but it can also involve issues rooted in economy, power relations, patriarchy and values among others, which are often read as 'sacred' markers of a society; construction of an 'ideal' identity is deemed here an important issue (Kooi-Chin & Turner, 2007). Hence, there is an imperative that researchers of identity take notions of intertextuality and interdiscursivity seriously; while acknowledging that these notions are constructed mostly through linguistic means. Since the 1990s, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) within the paradigm of applied linguistics, evolved as a research approach that took special interest in showing how identities are a context-specific discursive formation (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) through selective reference to other texts and discourses.

Taking its root in critical linguistics (Fowler, 1997) CDA offers a linguistic analysis of an issue rooted in inequality, oppression, or misrepresentation of reality (van Dijk, 2001). Besides, CDA is an issue-based analysis of discourse; hence, it is also identified as critical discourse studies (van Dijk, 2009). The various schools of CDA (the lexicogrammatical school of

Fairclough, socio-cognitive school of van Dijk and the discourse-historical school of Wodak) may not have a homogeneous way of analysing data. The homogeneity lies in some common beliefs among the proponents of various schools: that discourse is mediated by society (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999); that discourse is an effect of a society at a specific time and space, also known as context (Wodak, 2009); and that discourse contains elements of power (van Dijk, 2001).

The three-dimensional approach of Fairclough (1995, 2001) has a specific relevance to the analysis of identity in a specific context as this approach underscores the notion of “members’ resources,” (Fairclough 2001, p. 9) among others. This Faircloughian approach can also be interpreted as exerting the values of applied linguistics in ‘ideal’ form as this approach begins with the analysis of linguistic items, i.e., a description of the linguistic items in the dataset. In Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework of discourse (1995, 2001), the data is interpreted at three different levels, i.e., textual analysis which describes the linguistic features of the text; processing analysis which interprets the discursive practices of the text; and social analysis which explains the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs.

Since CDA takes the text vitally (Fairclough, 2003), it may not be adequate to stop at realising the data as merely, language data. Studies within CDA also take a trans/multi/interdisciplinary approach (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 2001, 2009; Wodak, 2009). That is, it is imperative to realise the data in the manner of interdisciplinary principles. It is typical of any CDA study that multiple disciplines (e.g., political science, psychology, and media studies) are engaged in a cross-border methodological collaboration in the study (van Dijk, 2001). At the same time, the analysis of discourse in media studies (Mautner, 2008), for instance,

may contribute in developing a methodology in linguistic analysis of the discourse data to complement a CDA framework.

In determining the discursive practices and its re-production, the notion of social actor developed by van Leeuwen (1996) is perceived as an important concept. According to van Leeuwen, there are several categories that explain social actors, which are, exclusion, role allocation, genericisation and specification, assimilation, association and disassociation, indetermination and differentiation, functionalisation and identification. In a study of formation of identity it might be helpful to look into the notion of social actors in texts or discourses.

Besides the notion of social actors, it is equally important to refer to the notion of 'subject position' (Althusser, 2008) which stands as one of the main aims of this study intends to investigate. Davies and Harre (2001) defined subject position as the multiplicities of 'self' which means one subject or a person can have many positions or roles depending on the discursive practices she/he could engage in. Coulthard (1996) discussed the construction of women's subject position according to women's magazines – the general construction of women's subject positions according to women's magazines. Her study examined lives and desires, ideal careers and ideal relationships as they were reproduced by women in women's magazines.

On the other hand, McGarry (1995) and Child (1992) unearthed the position of career women and types of personalities that they embraced at work. They suggested that often women have difficulty handling stress at their workplaces and they even 'cry' to release the tension. At the same time, studies show that there is an opportunity women could survive in their profession although it was found in the study by McGarry (1995) that many male colleagues were complaining about their personalities.

Yet another example of career women with several subject positions, Hickey-Gramke (2007), has another explanation for the personality issue. His study found that difficulty in balancing working life and family had been the main barrier for women to advance themselves to a higher level in their professions. Therefore, based on these ambivalent accounts, this study had intended to investigate how a women's magazine like *Cleo* constructed career women in Malaysia embracing several subject positions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study looks at the discursive construction of career women in *Cleo*, (Malaysia edition) a women's magazine, which is also published in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Singapore. *Cleo's* main purpose is to inform the readers, particularly women of the new millennium the latest fashion, beauty tips, makeovers, fitness tools, shopping and online advice (askCleo.com.my). This magazine is published once a month and it contains a few sections such as *Beauty Spy*, *Product Reviews*, *Cleo Culture* (featuring several articles) and Q & A section. The career articles – labeled as 'Career Coach' by *Cleo*, presumably meant to give advice and to coach the readers regarding their career.

In order to explain *Cleo's* construction of career women, the three-dimensional lexicogrammatical framework of Fairclough (2001, 1995) within the wider framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA), was adopted. CDA and, especially, the lexicogrammatical approach were chosen as frameworks for analysis because of their emphasis upon language as a form of social practice (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Using CDA, this study intended to go beyond an investigation of linguistically produced texts to interpret the

discursive practices produced and constituted by the text as well as investigate and explain the socio-cultural effects of these texts.

This study investigates the subject position of a career woman, her working culture as well as her problems and struggles at work in terms of job performance, attitude and personality. In a study by Hickey-Gramke (2007) showed that women were the majority of those who were against night meetings, sporting events as well as working out of town. Therefore, it had affected their performance as they could not put themselves on par with their male counterparts and this issue can be seen as one of the problems faced by the women at work. However, a study by Olsson and Walker (2003) supported the culture of women in business and being at executive level. The findings by Hickey-Gramke (2007) and Olsson and Walker (2003) were based on studies in the USA and New Zealand respectively. Hence, I believe that it would be interesting to study the working culture of career women in Malaysia and how they are constructed by *Cleo* when they have other subject positions to meet.

A status report produced by Women's Aid Organization (WAO) Malaysia, "Women's equality in Malaysia", shows that the percentage of female workers in Malaysia was still lesser than men especially in the professional fields (WAO report, 2001). The report claimed that most women were in clerical and productions sectors and apparently, in the private sectors, they continued to collect lower salary compared to their male colleagues. However, in places like Hong Kong female officials were found to display a positive picture of women in professional fields (Lee, 2004). In fact, the women over there were seen as 'perfect' by the media because they could 'balance' their career and family 'successfully' and seemed not to face any problems in gender competition.

The problematization of the construction of career women in existing literature reveals that the construction of women as professionals had been done extensively. However, the issue has been theorized from the perspective of a single discipline (e.g., media studies, sociology and feminist studies). This study, on the other hand, uses a discourse analytical approach that subsumes other disciplines in order to explain the context-specificity (Wodak, 2009) of such formation of identity.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are two-fold, which are: (1) to identify the linguistic means used by *Cleo* to construct the subject position of a Malaysian career woman and (2) to identify the linguistic means used by *Cleo* to construct career women's negotiations with workplace values.

1.4 Research Questions

This study poses two research questions and the second one is divided into sub-questions.

1. What are the linguistic means through which *Cleo* constructs the subject position(s) of career women?
 - a. How are the subject position(s) of career women constructed in legitimate/non-legitimate terms by *Cleo*?
 - b. How are the subject position(s) of career women constructed in normative/non-normative terms by *Cleo*?

2. What are the linguistic means through which *Cleo* constructs career women's negotiations with workplace values?
 - a. What are the linguistic means through which *Cleo* constructs career women being competitive at their workplace?
 - b. What are the linguistic means through which *Cleo* constructs career women being co-operative in a team at their workplace?
 - c. What are the linguistic means through which *Cleo* constructs career women tackling problems and struggles at their workplace?

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study has its scope and limitations in presenting its data to the readers. First of all, only 12 articles had been selected (from 12 different issues of *Cleo* in a section labeled as 'Career Coach'; which cover 12 months, starting from August 2007 till August 2008) to present the data of this study. Therefore, the scope of the finding is rather limited to represent the construction of career women in Malaysia according to a women's magazine.

Secondly, all 12 articles were selected from the same magazine, i.e., *Cleo* which may not precisely present the idea of the construction of career women as other women magazines do not come in account. Therefore, this study cannot generalize the construction of career women in a women's magazine.

1.6 Theoretical framework

This study is pure qualitative as it focused mainly on textual analysis using the framework of CDA. There are many approaches towards textual analysis in CDA. This research used the framework of Fairclough (1995, 2001) to analyse the data. It is known as Fairclough's three-dimensional framework which analysed the texts as well as the context that contribute to the production of the texts. The analysis interpreted the data in three different levels of analysis, i.e., text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and finally social analysis (explanation) (Fairclough, 2001).

This study analysed 12 articles from *Cleo* about career women. The articles – labeled as 'Career Coach' contained issues which were divergent in terms of working performance, problems and struggles at work as well as providing information and knowledge towards the women. The articles were analysed textually and contextually according to the CDA framework. This study focused on content analysis (linguistically) as well as the social and psychological factors it might have in terms of how the texts relate the women to the society.

The articles were selected from 12 issues of *Cleo*, starting from August 2007 till August 2008 (the latest issues published when I started to embark on this study) as this study aimed to examine the current construction of career women in Malaysia in the selected magazine.

The collected texts were analysed thoroughly according to the chosen framework which included the conditions of its production based on the lexical items as well as the contextual factors affecting it. Therefore, the analysis answered the research questions this study intended to investigate.

1.7 Significance of the study

This study is important because it questioned the typical notion of a women's magazine such as *Cleo*, which generally contains information about fashion awareness and beauty guidelines for women (<http://www.marketing-interactive.com>). *Cleo*, however, had blended the two discourses, i.e., of beauty and career in one genre to surpass the readers' typical perception of a women's magazine.

Secondly, in this era of globalization, Malaysia encouraged its female workforce to join the working environment as it is on its way to becoming a developed nation. Since the notion of women coping with the working environment was regularly addressed in *Cleo* by featuring it monthly in 'Career Coach' section, it would be wise for this research to investigate the current working issues articulated in this magazine and to what extent it could affect career women in Malaysia.

Furthermore, this study is significant to know how countries like Malaysia has undergone the impacts of the modern and globalised discourses of management, as it is found that the country engages in global economy vigorously, which requires the workers to exceed their usual performance. Due to the onslaught of capitalist mode of production, many of the professional workers in Malaysia are facing conflicts to perform accordingly to the current management discourse, while the working environment is getting more challenging and competitive that resulted to the 'negligence' of the 'ideal' performance. Thus, this study intends to investigate to what extent career women in Malaysia are struggling with this issue and the impacts that may arise when they tend not to meet the 'ideal' performance.

Finally, this study is indeed useful at reporting the research gap in relation to the construction of career women and their discursive practices constructed by a women's magazine, in Malaysia.

1.8 Concepts and Definitions

This study adopted several concepts, which are used in the categories of analysis in Chapter Four which should reflect the Research Questions of this study and what it intends to investigate.

a. Legitimate / Non-legitimate

Legitimation, is defined as the “widespread acknowledgement of the legitimacy of explanations and justifications of how things are done” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 219). It is considered as a set of actions and behaviours which are socially accepted and understood by the society which serves to answer the question of “why do we do what we do and why do we do it in this way?” (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 93). Legitimation is concerned with the notion of ‘rightness’ of doing things which are meant to be obeyed (Cap, 2008). In contrast, delegitimation is considered as denying, excluding and marginalising the existing legitimate ways (Chilton, 2004). As related to this study, this concept is used to investigate the legitimised/illegitimised behaviours or actions practiced by career women in Malaysia as being constructed by *Cleo*.

b. Normative/Non-normative

Normativity relates to the norms or practices which are approved by the society. In other words, it refers to the sets of practices or norms, which are considered ‘normal’ to be practiced by everyone in the society. Harbers described that normativity relies on ‘good rules’ and the rules are applied under ‘agreed-upon conditions’ approved by the society (2005, p. 268) Thus, non-normativity can be positioned as discursive activities that ‘defy’ normativity and this study intends to find out the normative/non-normative activities or behaviours defined and practiced by career women in *Cleo*.

1.9 Organisation of the Study

This study comprises five chapters. This introduction chapter discussed the introduction of the data and its tool of analysis, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions and research scope. It also included the significant of the study and concepts and definitions pertaining to the research.

The review of literature is presented in the second chapter, which contains four main sections. It starts with the nature of career articles presented in *Cleo*, background of the methodology framework, relevant studies related to the current studies by looking at career women’s subject position(s) and career women’s personality and behaviours. The final section presents literature, which discussed the tool of analysis used in this study.

The third chapter draws attention to the methodology and research tools used to conduct this study. It discussed the theoretical framework and how the data was analysed using the framework.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. The analysis was divided into three main sections; how career women were identified, labeled and the rules that circumscribed them at the workplace. This chapter also provides the summary of the findings.

The final chapter, Chapter Five concludes the research and summarises the findings, highlights the limitations of the study, as well as the implications for further research.

1.10 Ethical Considerations

I took special care in the selection of texts under analysis as the data was published publicly in the magazine and made available for sales and accessible by anyone who has read the magazine. Therefore, there was no scope of breaching confidentiality when the data was collected.