



Research Paper

Exploding the Myth of Hierarchy of Power among Social Actors in Business Letters: A Two-Way Mediated Communicative Genre

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Abstract

The present study seeks to address power relations in *Business Letters for All*, a book by Naterop (2005). As a means to exercise power among agents within different circumstances, *Political Discourse Analysis* by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) will be employed. In addition, this study proposes the possibility by which the individuals' values may become naturalized instruments to exercise power. Hierarchy of power is investigated in different kinds of arguments, reasonings and interactions in these letters. What has already been legitimized and naturalized in the interaction between the relational opposites is called into question. Thus, letter writing as a social practice becomes the mediating instrument between individuals who propel the conduction of events or actions on one hand and the organizations as structures on the other hand. That is, in a capitalist society, the owners and those in higher levels of social structure need to meet the individuals' needs to proceed and achieve the promotion required for their survival.



مقاله پژوهشی

افسانه‌زدایی از سلسله مراتبی قدرت موجود در بین بازیگران اجتماعی در نامه‌های تجاری

برای همه: یک ژانر ارتباطی دو طرفه

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چکیده

مطالعه حاضر به دنبال پرداختن به روابط قدرت در کتاب نامه‌های تجاری برای همه اثر ناتروپ (۲۰۰۵) است. کتاب تحلیل گفتمان سیاسی اثر فرکلاف و فرکلاف (۲۰۱۲) به عنوان چارچوب نظری در بررسی اعمال قدرت در بین افرادی که در این نامه‌ها نقش آفرینی می‌کنند مورد استفاده قرار می‌گیرد. به علاوه، این مطالعه بیانگر موقعیت‌هایی است که از طریق آن، ارزش‌های افراد می‌تواند به ابزاری طبیعی برای اعمال قدرت تبدیل شود. سلسله مراتب قدرت در انواع استدلال‌ها، بحث‌ها و تعاملات در این نامه‌ها بررسی می‌شود. آنچه قبلاً در تعامل بین تضادهای رابطه‌ای طبیعی تلقی شده است، به چالش کشیده می‌شود. بنابراین، نامه‌نویسی به عنوان یک فرایند اجتماعی به ابزاری واسطه‌ای بین افرادی که اجراکنندگان و فاعلین رویدادها هستند و سازمان‌ها به عنوان ساختارهای کلی، تبدیل می‌شود. در نهایت هدف پژوهش حاضر نشان دادن این مسئله است که در یک جامعه سرمایه‌داری، مالکان و کسانی که به لحاظ قدرت در سطوح بالاتر ساختار اجتماعی قرار دارند، باید نیازهای افراد پایین دست خود را برآورده سازند تا پیشرفت کنند و به این طریق به ارتقای کافی جهت ابقای خود دست یابند. در حالی که همین تلاش برای ابقا می‌تواند اثری معکوس داشته باشد و در واگذاری قدرت به گروه‌های پایین‌تر مؤثر واقع شود.

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1. Introduction

Regarding the main objectives of CDA, Kress (1996) suggests that “the intention has been to bring a system of excessive inequalities of power into crisis by uncovering its workings and its effects through the analysis of potent cultural objects-texts and thereby to help in achieving a more equitable social order” (p.15). Accordingly, the present study aims to evaluate the hidden power relations in the selected business letters. The context of our study is grounded in business letters. Applying Fairclough’s terminology (2003), letters in general are a type of “two-way mediated” communicative genre (p.77). Here, letter writing has been considered as a type of “discourse technology” (p.177). It is a kind of strategic discourse employed as an instrumental object to communicate purposes. Generally speaking, letters are a kind of conversation in which the speakers talk at someone rather than to someone.

Elaborating on Brown and Gilman’s (1960) definition of social relation, Fairclough (2003) articulates that “communication between organization and individuals is high in both social hierarchy (organizations tend to exercise power over individuals) and social distance (organizations operate on national, regional, or global scales whereas individuals occupy specific locales)” (p. 75). Although we observe an increase in organizations’ power over individuals, there might be some “virulent reaction” by the local communities and the individuals (ibid). That is to say, the very exertion of organizations’ power over individuals is threatening. Accordingly, this hypothetical argument is called into question by referring to the risk of delegitimizing this explicit hierarchy on the part of individuals.

Fairclough (2010) offers that there are two types of problems that could be addressed in CDA projects, one of them concentrates on “needs-based problems” and the other one is related to “problems with representations” (p. 555). However, in the present study, we are mainly concerned with the first type of the problem which emphasizes situations that go against people’s needs. Although we are living in a world with remarkable flexibility, invariability, and instability, the structures of business letters are

extremely stabilized and ritualized (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 72-73). There are some standards that should be followed. The instructions on how to write the letters act as a script that covers “more or less any interactional move that could occur” (p.73). These are “imposed detailed style rules” (p. 73). Accordingly, the business letters are of a generic structure and different domains within it formulate its sub-genres. We intend to explore the way “hierarchy of goals and hierarchy of values” determine the way agents operate within contexts that are saturated with power inequality (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012. P. 43).

What meets the demands of a CDA project here is the hierarchy of power between the following oppositional pairs: payer (customer)/payee (seller) and employer/employee. In the first pair of these types of imbalances, some case studies on payment, notices, reminders, the extension of credits, acceptance or refusal of credit extension, complaints on unreasonable prices and poor service quality will be investigated. In the second pair the terms of employment, the agreement and signing the contract, the employer’s negative freedom, notices and the employees’ resignation will be scrutinized. Fairclough (2010) states that “poverty, forms of inequality, lack of freedom or racism” as social wrongs are detrimental to human well-being. (p. 235). Since the inequality between individuals and organizations counts as a social wrong and an appropriate subject to be evaluated via critical investigation, we have chosen such a context and problem to be explored through CDA approach.

Regarding the first pair (customer/seller), a kind of resistance on the part of the already dominated group could be easily observed. That is to say, the customers are becoming more powerful and move towards a status of authority. However, regarding the second pair (employer/employee), the boundary and the hierarchy of power between the employer and the employee is more tangible. In a capitalist society, people’s unequal access to resources could be observed. This unequal access sets the ground to have the enumerated oppositional pairs. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) postulate that “agents intend to transform

current circumstances into future state of affairs in accordance with the normative source that underlies their goals” (p. 236).

In the interactions between the customers and the sellers, the customers as agents have gotten more autonomy, and have achieved the power to transform the circumstance in order to meet their goals. Here, the concept of practical reasoning which is concerned with reasons about “what to do” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p. 35) is important to be elaborated on. “It arises in response to practical problems which are addressed to us as agents who are acting in particular circumstances and aiming to achieve various goals” (ibid).

Previously ritualized and legitimized power relations could be contradicted by offering situations in which values have propelled individuals to acquire more power to exercise over the organizations. Legitimization “sustains relation of domination” (Fairclough 2003, p. 207). However, the present study seeks to delegitimize this already established power relations by restructuring the established and sustained domination. Since Naterop’s book has been taught by the researcher in the present study for several times, along with being interested in studying the hierarchy of power and its transition in this genre, the selected sample of letters is considered here to be a significant space where the social wrong and its restructuring have been represented. Analyzing the business letters included in the investigated book provides us with the opportunity to represent certain elements revealing the issues raised by the social wrong. Applying the critical outlook in the investigation of power relationships in the business letters, the results may indicate some hierarchical subversions among social actors in society as a larger context. Furthermore, three levels of social practices introduced by Fairclough (2010) are touched upon to show how letter writing as a social practice becomes the intermediate instrument between actions/events (conducted by individuals) on one hand and the organization on the other hand (p.74). In fact, the-already-taken-for-granted hierarchy of power is delegitimized and “denaturalized” by demonstrating a modification in the hierarchical relationship between social actors. Accordingly, the

social wrong addressed in the present research is the power inequality between individuals (employees, customers, job applicants) on the one hand, and organizations on the other.

1-1. Research Questions:

The present researcher seeks to answer the following questions by exploring the main themes within the selected business letters as the samples.

- 1) How practical argumentations uttered by the agents turn them into active agents?
- 2) How power relations are restructured and reformulated to help the individual agents survive in a capitalist society?
- 3) How the voices of the subordinate individual agents are better heard in a capitalist society?

1-2. Objectives and Significance of the Study

The present study seeks to demonstrate power relations in two selected books on business letters. Hence, it attempts to uncover the hidden power relations within them. Letters play an instrumental role in either strengthening or weakening the interactional meaning-making relations among social actors/agents. In addition, it endeavors to vividly demonstrate the association of power and language which contributes to the domination of one party over the other. Furthermore, we extend our discussion to divulge cases in which naturalized relationships are deconstructed and subsequently denaturalized. Correspondingly, capitalism in which making a profit has become a value as well as a goal, acquires the characteristics of a dominant Ideological Discursive Formations (IDF) by which it is enabled to 'denaturalize' the already established hierarchy of power between individuals and institutions, by replacing the earlier IDF with a new one, it proves the opposite of the earlier status.

Most of the previous researchers on CDA have chiefly have focused on identifying the ideological interpretation of power relations between employers/managers and employees/workers, between teachers and pupils, between men and women, between people of working age and retired people, and between blacks and whites, etc. Besides, the present research does not only attempt to evaluate the inequalities in power relations but also seeks to

explain cases in which the already established hierarchies are called into question. Even, a reversal of power relation could be observed in a capitalist society, an economic system which relies highly on individuals or corporations as its customers.

2. Review of Theoretical Literature

Course-books on business letters have been studied by different researchers specifically from either a lexical or a grammatical point of view. In addition, many researchers have chosen newspapers, TV news, and dialogic communication in different disciplines as their objects of criticism. However, no research has critically analyzed collections of business letters from the view point of the well-known critical discourse analyst, Norman Fairclough. The following paragraphs offer a review of the earlier studies either applying Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) third framework to objects of criticism or applying CDA to sample letters.

Khamees Khalaf (2020) has identified the grammatical cohesive devices employed in letters for the construction and importance of Falluja bridge (in Iraq). He has adopted Halliday and Hassan's (1976) model of grammatical cohesion and their discursual value. Mattbeis (2016) has applied Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) analytic framework of political discourse as argumentation to scrutinize the statute as a realm of ideological contestation. Furthermore, Integration Revenue Replacement Advisory Task Force was established to address the role of the public schools in observing racial inequalities among students and to call for a change in the dominant policy. In another study, Iqbal, T., et al. (2013) have analyzed a formal letter in the light of two different approaches in discourse analysis including CDA and Cohesion. They have deduced that the letter is well-knitted and well-structured according to the aforementioned approaches.

3. An Introduction to CDA Approach

The present study seeks to address the above research problem by applying a critical investigation from the view point of Norman Fairclough, one of the well-known founders of this approach. Description, interpretation, and explanation are three main dimensions introduced by Fairclough (2001). For the first stage, he

states "Description is the stage which is concerned with formal properties of text." In other words, linguistic features of the text are taken into account in this stage. For the second one he argues that "interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as recourse in the process of interpretation," and finally, for the third stage he offers the following definition "Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context with the social determination of the process of production and interpretation, and their social effects" (pp. 21-22). Since business letters as a social practice can be taken into account to express the dominant ideologies and discourses, their effects are valuable enough to be discussed through inclusive dimensions and frameworks.

Regarding the historical origin and the associations of CDA, Wodak (2014) asserts that CDA emerged in the late 1980s but officially began with Van Dijk (1990). It became "a well-established field in the social sciences. CDA can be defined as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research program" (p. 302). In addition, she claims that CDA doesn't study linguistic units in isolation, but social complex phenomena. CDA is interested in "demystifying ideologies and power relations through the investigation of semiotic data including written, spoken or visual" (ibid).

3-1. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

We have applied a qualitative inductive approach to the present study. The selected objects of critique include a variety of correspondence subjects, following the usual practice in CDA, we have mainly worked on the ones in which a kind of duality and inequality could be observed. We are going to analyze and then evaluate the practical arguments in our own object of analysis by making some references to or on the basis of components (i.e., premises and conclusion) of the frameworks of practical argumentation introduced in Fairclough and Fairclough's third version of their approach to CDA (2012). The key terms which are frequently referred to in this article need to be clearly defined. They include: discourse, social practice, power relations, ideology,

delegitimization and denaturalization. By CDA, Fairclough (2010) means “discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes” (P.93).

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) define discourse as “social use of language in social contexts” (p. 81). In addition, it may be used in different senses including “(a) signification as an element of the social process; (b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice (e.g., ‘political discourse’); (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective” (ibid). These three senses are not revealing totally different elements in the definition of CDA, however the first one seems to be the most abstract and general of them. Fairclough (2001) postulates that “Power relations are not reducible to class relations. There are power relations between social groupings in institutions” (p.28). Likewise, power relations are primarily demonstrated in institutions that include individuals acting in business letters.

Elaborating on naturalization and the generation of common sense, Fairclough (2001-) suggests that “if a discourse type so dominates an institution that dominated types are more or less entirely suppressed or contained, then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary [...] and will come to be seen as natural, and legitimate because it is simply the way of conducting oneself,” he add that “naturalization is a matter of degree, and the extent that the discourse types which embody them become naturalized” (p.76). Therefore, naturalized discourse” refers to words, sentences that have become commonsensical in their linguistic embodiment. Furthermore, Fairclough (2010) claims that when we have naturalized implicit propositions “people are generally unaware of them and of how they are subjected by/to them” (p.26). Here some power relations are naturalized, and our purpose is to “denaturalize them” (p. 30). “Denaturalization involves showing how social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures” (ibid).

The term “critical” dates back to the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. It means “to separate” or “make distinctions” (Wodak, 2014, p.304). She clarifies a misunderstanding that exists about the aims of CDA and the term critical. The latter does not mean negative. It means challenging a phenomenon, especially its surface meaning and not taking it for granted. Fairclough (2010) stated that “ideologies are primarily located in the “unsaid (implicit propositions)” (p.27). In fact, CDA attempts to explicitly say whatever is implicitly referred to. That is to say making explicit the implicit relationship between discourse, power, and ideology.

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) suggest that “argumentation is also understood as a social and rational *activity* of attempting to justify or refute a certain claim, and aiming to *persuade* an interlocutor” (p. 36, italics in original). Similar to what is defined as the aim of argumentation, in the correspondences between the agents, argumentation is made for the sake of four reasons: to accept, to refute, to justify, and to persuade the interlocuter. Furthermore, in the context of business letters, “counter-argument” which means “reasons against doing the action” could also be observed (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012 p. 236). It is used when individuals are expected to do some actions, but they resist by offering reasons that support the nonconduction of the action. In addition, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), argue that “understanding political discourses as argumentative offers an adequate understanding of the way in which structures interact with agency: *discourses (and orders of discourse, as structures) provide agents with reasons for action.* The same connection between agency and structure is evident” (p. 237, italics in original).

4. Method

4-1. Object of Analysis

Business letters have been chosen as the objects of Analysis in the present study. Both single-agent and multi-agent arguers show their status either as dominated or dominant parties. The context of the letters is not neutral that is to say a kind of biased orientation could easily be observed in them. Power relations in Naterop

(2005) is viewed and addressed through the lens of correspondents as social actors. The objects of critique have been selected among the most frequently used books for the course of Letter Writing which is a two-credit course for undergraduate students in English Language departments. The included letters require a reply by the receiver; therefore, ideologies of the involved correspondents are available and assessable.

Fairclough (2010) asserts that discourses may be operationalized in three dialectical aspects. "They may be enacted as new ways of interacting, they may be inculcated as new ways of being (identities), and they may be physically materialized" (p.233). In the present business letters, the discourse is put into practice through all these aspects, the discourse is both enacted, and inculcated. Since a type of "interaction between the managers and workers" exists, and a new type of managers (being) appear in a capitalist society, as well as the physical realization of the discourse through letters, this genre is operationalized in these three aspects respectively.

4.2. Genre or Mode and Rationale

Business letters have almost always been viewed as a bias-free genre. We probably have not expected them to include political, social, and ideological reasoning. However, the analyses provided in the present study reveal their biased nature. For instance, an organization which is going to hire a person as its employee predetermines some requirements that if they are not met, the individual won't be admitted and employed. In addition, if in a transaction the wishes of one side are not fulfilled, the transaction will be nullified. Here, one side becomes the decision maker and the other one is subjected to the decisions made by him/her. Thus, the analyzed letters are used as means of exercising power relations.

We attempt to apply Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) framework of practical argumentation to certain selected practical arguments included in those letters to find out the manner in which and the extent to which the agents employ deliberation in their discourses and in order to come up with normative decisions. This analysis and evaluation would, in turn, hopefully allow us to

disclose the rather obscured manipulative and ideological functioning of our object of critique.

5. Discussion

Fairclough (2010) declares that his objective in CDA is “to develop ways of analyzing language which addresses its involvement in the workings of contemporary capitalist societies. The focus on capitalist societies is not only because capitalism is the dominant economic system internationally..., but also because the character of the economic system affects all aspects of social life” (p.1). That is why we have chosen to exemplify the dominant concepts of CDA through business letters in a society dominated by capitalist interests. In all letters, there is a relatively clear and predictable generic structure.

Referring to structure in a tight sense, Fairclough (2003) introduces the term “obligatory elements in an obligatory order” (p. 75). Furthermore, “the sequence of elements in the body of the text is topically controlled” (p.75). Therefore, the object of critique we deal with here follows a well-defined order and is a consistent discourse within which the relations of power will be exemplified. In our analysis, we don’t only deal with the body, but the sender, the receiver, and the signature. In a letter from a building contractor to a manufacturer of bathroom showers, the contractor asserts that “if your equipment is of good quality, and we receive a favorable offer, we may be able to place our large orders with you” (Naterop, 2005, p. 13). Thus, the communicated message is about the possibility of a transaction between two parties. O’Connor (1951) reflects that “we must therefore rely largely on the grammatical structure of a sentence as a guide to its logical and semiotic powers” (p. 351).

Accordingly, the message is communicated by the means of an if-clause. The kind of thinking that underlies this conditional sentence bears some connotations of power. The transaction will come true only if the terms and conditions set by the customer (the contractor) are met, otherwise it will be nullified. Subsequently, the manufacturer has to please the customer in order to succeed in his business. The agreement to do a transaction has become a value in business. By offering a reasonable price, the manufacturer

provides the contractor with enough incentives to put large orders with him/her. To succeed, the manufacturer has to employ “anticipatory thinking” a term used by Klein, et al. (2011) offering “a critical metacognitive function of individuals and teams (Abstract).

Klein alludes to three varieties of anticipatory thinking: Pattern Matching, trajectory tracking, and conditional ones, among which the last one is more applicable to our discussion. “This type of anticipatory thinking requires us to see the connections between events” (p.3). If we take the transaction as an event here, there are some interdependencies that will affect the way it is actualized, this kind of thinking requires “mindfulness” (p.3). Mindfulness affects the performance of individuals and teams. Here, the manufacturer, should give full attention to what is demanded and what is required to be done to satisfy the customer. The conditional sentence shapes a kind of communication and connection. The significance of the transaction is conditioned by the fulfillment of the contractor’s wishes by the manufacturer. This is a sort of social bond that is rooted in power relations.

The previously stabilized superiority of organizations over individuals is deconstructed and delegitimized by the customer. To achieve his own goals, the salesman has to give careful consideration to whatever is a “value” for the customer. Fulfilling the customer’s wishes has become a “means” to achieve the “goals” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012. p. 45). Most of the letters require the agents to do an action. “Agents deliberate either by themselves or together with others” (Fairclough and Fairclough, p. 50).

That is to say, there might be either an individual deliberation or a collective one. If such deliberations are successful, they may have diverse effects. They may either lead to the maintenance of the already established hierarchy or cause a radical change and reversal in the status quo.

The agents involved in the production and/or reception of the samples, act deliberatively and consciously; therefore, “they are trying to make a reasonable decision by considering reasons that

support various possible courses of action, or count against the proposal they originally thought of” (p. 50).

This statement represents a confusion of two minor steps in 2012 framework which entails Examining both if premises lead to the conclusion, and if the means is likely to lead to the achievement of the stated goal. Henceforth, exploring the way premises such as values, goals, circumstances, means as well as agent’s deliberation may finally lead to the achievement of particular goals and decisions is a point of significance here. In addition, the study will clarify if agents’ deliberation will cause any change in the established hierarchies or not.

Since there is not a face-to-face interaction within a letter, power relations are usually hidden. It is not as clear as the power relations in dialogues. In the present case study “there is obviously a close connection between requests and power, in that the right to request someone to do something often derives from having power” (Fairclough, 2001, p.46). The request to assign a reasonable price to the goods is asserted through a conditional sentence indirectly. It is not expressed in an imperative form of articulation.

The inequality addressed here is a sociopolitical one. Fairclough (2010) states that social wrongs can be “ameliorated if not eliminated” (p. 235). In the present study, the social wrong is not eliminated but refined. Practical argumentation could be demonstrated via business correspondences. Furthermore, “Practical argumentation feeds into people’s decisions about how to act” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p. 3). In the business letters, the agents’ choices are announced through their correspondences. In the confliction between interests, different parties try to “make their own particular choices, policies, and strategies prevail (ibid). The very attempt to prevail one over the other sets the ground for the inequalities and imbalances in the present study. The socioeconomic relationship among social actors in business letters creates a particular ideological discourse that seems to favor the organizations but be against the individuals. The superiority and inferiority are going to be deconstructed when the

individuals are given the right to make themselves understood to the organizations they interact with.

Elaborating on the distinction between oligarchy and democracy, Fairclough (2012) refers to “aporoi” and “euporoi,” as two terms which had already been offered by Ranciere (1995). The former is used to refer to those who have no means, and the later refers to those who have them. (p.240). These two do not exist per se. “What we now call democracies are actually oligarchies in which government is exercised by the minority over the majority. What makes them specifically democratic is that the power of oligarchies rests upon the power of the people” (Fairclough, 2010, p.240). That is to say in a hierarchical structure, one won’t be considered as higher or lower without having its opposite, the existence of one is the prerequisite of the other. It seems that the power to sell a product is in the monopoly of a specific group. If we look at the issue from a naive perspective, we may consider the sellers as the dominant group and the buyers as the dominated ones. Whereas in the contemporary time there is a struggle against privatization and the public/private division. The concept of centrality already attributed to the sellers is questioned and a newly created balance and dialectical interaction comes to prominence.

The interaction between the sender and the receiver in business letters is comparable with that between the author and the reader. Berner (2018) suggests that the author classifies the discourse as: “a) authoritarian: the author intends to make the reader do; b) factual: the author intends to make the reader be; c) scientific; the author intends to let the reader know; d) persuasive: the author intends to make the reader believe” (p. 92). Since we have correspondence in this business letters, the interaction is not of a close-ended type, in fact the interaction will continue as many times as the numbers of correspondences. Therefore, once a customer receives a letter from the seller, he/she will reply and will become the author of the recently sent letter. Although the two parties (sender/receiver) follow opposite directions in their interaction with the messages, the very right to authorize a text, questions the mainstream ideology that gives centrality to the

sellers and marginality to the customers, or employer/employee pair.

The signatures define the position of the authors and the source of ideas and each author has some degrees of authority. That is to say, the signature legitimizes the authority. Accordingly, the actors in any correspondence, either the sellers or the buyers, are authoritative to declare themselves. Another point which demands a close inspection is the “absence of responsible social agents,” which is a “characteristic of economic change in the modern world.” These agents are either “abstract or inanimate” (Fairclough, 2010, p.247).

Using Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) terms, some of the business letters are composed by a single-agent, while others are multi-agent. Either viewing them as individualistic channels through which ideologies are expressed or collective ones, the deliberation is employed to assert and actualize the purpose through the communicated message and in the generic structure of the business letters.

“Inclusion and exclusion are not to be considered as static categories: the person who is excluded today may belong tomorrow, and vice versa. Although membership can always be redefined, important gatekeepers decide who will have access: new laws, new ideologies, and new borders” (Wodak & Chilton, 2005, p.131-132). In the business letters, the individuals are included in the social action. In addition, they enjoy some newly gained rights to speak and to be heard. Since they have the authority to make decisions and act based on their own will, they are reincorporated into the social structure, they are added as members.

The association between Status functions and deontic powers is another significant issue that needs to be elucidated. “Status functions carry *deontic powers*, i.e., they carry rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorizations, entitlements etc.” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.72. italics in original). This is the status function that enables the endowed person to be a particular one with the capacity to perform a task. For instance, “a certain plastic rectangle can be a bank card and it cannot be a bank

card just in virtue of its physical properties, just in virtue of being a plastic rectangle” (ibid). The status function makes the individuals behave in a particular way. In one of the business letters which exemplifies a notice letter, the sender’s status function determines how he should function due to his status. This is the position that gives power to its agents. These agents are equipped with the right for justification which is a “potent tool for emancipation from structural to relational; forms of domination” (Azmanova, 2018, p.68). Answering a complaint about poor service, the person in charge of the inconvenience justifies the absence of the repairman by offering a through explanation of the situation. He claims that: The clerk handling your complaint arranged for a repairman to come to your home on the following Tuesday, but on account of illness he was not able to come until Monday, March 25. However, on arrival at your address he found no one at home, and was not able to carry out the work until a new appointment had been made. (p.59)

Non-domination is a term applicable to situations in which each party has almost equal rights to justify itself. It is a tool at the hand of anyone equipped with reasons to justify their behavior. Non-domination questions the binary opposition between the stronger and the weaker. Power asymmetries exist but they cannot be easily cut as superior and inferior. In these sample letters, the market economy seeks to succeed in the competitive world of production-profit making. The individuals in the organizations or the social structures do not possess power themselves. The structure and the framework within which they work, direct and constrain their freedom in action. They play a role ascribed by the structure. Thus, this is the structure that exercises power. All the social actors are subordinated to the general logic laid within the system. As cited earlier, the final goal is the successful participation in competitive production-profit making.

The agents of the status function must follow whatever is generally recognized as the norms within that institution. They should follow the collective intention. They should behave the way they are required to. “Institutional structures enable people to do things which they could not otherwise do, but they also provide a

deontology that constrains them to do things which they would not otherwise do” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.73). It is mostly related to those individuals who are an internal member of the organization and together with other members form the overarching term the *organization*. The way the individuals act justifies the system’s objectives. Their maintenance within the system is dependent on their effort to lead the system towards success. To put it differently, the way individuals act reflects the way the system has affected them. What seems to be an agent-oriented action is in fact a system-orientated one.

The system’s norms are internalized; accordingly, they are taken as valid values for its agents, it does not necessarily mean that the individuals are passive administrators of the organization’s objective. They can represent their individuality whenever they seek to get out of the system. They are “free rational agents” in that if they are disinclined to act, they can leave the bigger organization. (p.73). However, by the time they work for that organization, they should align their actions with that of the organization. An individual who works in the credit department of an organization should follow the rules in conducting his responsibility. The status function makes him become more serious step by step rather than addressing the customer with a harsh tone from the very beginning. Here is an example for politely reminding a customer about his outstanding balance. First, the person from the credit department should send a reminder letter, then a second notice and finally the final notice. Let’s see how the individual as the representative of the organization correspondences with the bad payer, or the uncommitted customer. The following are letters taken from Naterop (2005, pp:50-51)

Reminder

TTG Industries
550 Broad Street
Harrisburg, Pa. 17105

Mandarin Importing & Exporting Co.
No. 64 Market Street
Singapore 1.

February 6, 19—

Gentlemen:

We would like to draw your attention to the enclosed statement, which shows a balance in our favor of \$3,750 as at December 31, 19--. May we remind you that our terms are 30 days net.

Kindly send us your remittance as soon as possible. Should you however have settled the account since this letter was written, please disregard our reminder.

Very truly yours,
Mary J. Adams
Credit Department

Agents' goals might not be in line with those of the organization they work for or deal with, whereas they may succumb to it for the sake of fulfilling the organization's wishes. The status function here, being an employee in the credit department, determines the role of the person in that position. Since the payment is overdue, it is the status function that makes this person send the reminder letter so that the customers will settle their account in the meantime. After failing to get a reply from the bad payer, the person from the credit department as the representative of the reorganization has to pursue his duty by sending a second notice.

Second Notice

TTG Industries
550 Broad Street
Harrisburg, Pa. 17105

Mandarin Importing & Exporting Co.
No. 64 Market Street
Singapore 1.

February 28, 19—

Gentlemen:

Three weeks ago, we reminded you of the outstanding balance in our favor of \$3,750. According to our records, you have not yet settled the account.

Please give the matter your immediate attention and let us have your payment by 15th March.

Very truly yours,

In the above letter, two companies are involved, one is the customer and the other one is the provider of a service, a seller here. After another three weeks, the account has not been settled yet, that is what makes the credit department to send a final notice.

March 20, 19--

Gentlemen:

We have asked you repeatedly to settle your outstanding account for \$3,750. Unfortunately, we have received neither a reply from you nor your remittance.

Unless we receive your payment by March 31, 19—we shall be compelled to place the matter in the hands of our lawyer. As such a step you would damage your credit standing, we sincerely hope you will send us your check immediately.

Very truly yours,

The final notice includes a direct and a threat of legal action. They should have sent a cheque by now, or at least have explained the delay in payment. It is announced that if the amount of money owed is not paid back, then the case will be handled by the lawyer. The lawyer of this organization is another status function. Similar to the person in charge of the credit department, the lawyer has to work in line with the final objectives of the organization, which will most probably be used to keep the customer rather than missing them. Although the tone of the final letter is firm, we observe that the late payment is given other chances to be made. It indicates that the credit department does its best to keep the interaction going on rather than being stopped. If such an interaction were not important for the seller, they would not have elongated the moratorium for the payment. Therefore, the buyers are becoming important entities in the process. The affairs are controlled and directed by the individual payers rather than the organizations as a whole. It is what secures the lasting of a capitalist society.

Naterop (2005) suggests that “when writing a letter of *application*, the applicant would like to say what job and

conditions he or she would like to have. But a good letter of application should contain facts the prospective employer wants to know” (p. 80, italics in original). It seems that the employer is in a higher status, however, being given the opportunity to persuade the prospective employer indicates that the applicant has achieved authority in a sense. The very act of persuasion demands being powerful on the side of the interlocutor, the persuader here.

In one of the sample letters, the employee seeks to justify the reasons due to which he might be employed. He states that “As you can see from the enclosed curriculum vitae, I have selling experience in pharmaceuticals and cosmetics-a very competitive field” (p. 82). One way to justify the significance of his presence within the organization is though the curriculum vitae he has enclosed. Being given the very right to justify oneself indicates power possession for the applicant.

The applicant wants to justify the employer by enumerating on his experiences in selling. He uses the term “competitive” to attract the employer’s attention in the profit-oriented world. This letter turns out to be a discursive procedure of justification. The applicant has the authority to make himself heard. In the same letter, he asserts that “my present position is subject to one month’s notice, after which I would be able to train in London and, if necessary, relocate to any part of the country” (ibid). Here, the applicant clarifies that the end of his status function is when he is done with his present job or “when the notice is over.” Subsequently, he will be free to move to any organization he wants. Forst (2012) postulates that:

Human rights should not be seen as rights to goods necessary for the “good life. Rather, they should be seen as rights that put an end to political oppression and the imposition of a social status which deprives one of one’s freedom and of access to the social means necessary to being a person of equal standing. (p. 92)

Justification for the non-presence of a repairman is discussed in the letter written in response to a complaint about poor service. An agent from the claims department writes back to a customer, “of course you should have been notified of the delay. We *apologize* for failing to inform you in time” (p.59, my emphasis). The word

“apology” signifies the importance of the customer for the company. They need to keep such an interaction; therefore, a thoughtful apology is used to mend the relationship.

Lipani (2018) offers that “apologies are interpersonal tools that individuals employ to repair damaged relationships” (p. IV). Apologies are influential ways to amend one’s mistakes. Here, the apology is delivered by an individual but on the behalf of the organization. That is to signify the importance of the customer for the service provider. Willingness to apology indicates that the apologizer doesn’t consider himself/herself in a higher position.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, as cited in Dierking, 2019) suggest that apologies are transmitted between “spatially and temporally dispersed people” (p. 20). However, in a capitalist world, the customer and the service provider should not be dispersed and the apology is used as a repairing instrument. Hence, the apology blurs the boundary between one party as more dominant and the other one as less.

Speculation on apology is also repeated in another correspondence when a controller has overlooked the exact color of the ordered clothes; consequently, the manager of the company replies the complaint letter by reporting that “please accept our apologies for the oversight” (p.58).

Since there is an urge to work, the employees may ignore their own priorities just to be employed. To put it differently, the subordination becomes a problem for the employees, they attempt to make themselves heard by bringing about changes within the system and opposing the rules via resignation. Accordingly, the interests and needs of the dominated group will be emphasized and secured.

In one of the letters, an applicant has applied for the position of a salesman, when he succeeds to please the employer and his application is confirmed, a contract of employment is sent to him (Naterop, p. 85).

1. Hours are from 9.00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday.
2. Overtime is not paid, but should employees be requested to work outside normal working hours, time off will be given in lieu.
3. Three weeks' annual holiday plus usual statutory holidays. Annual holidays to be arranged through head of department.
4. One month's notice is required by either party after three month's trial period. One week's notice is required during the trial period.
5. Membership of trade unions is encouraged by the company, but a final decision on this matter is left to the employee.
6. Any complaint should be made through the head of department.

Remuneration of Field Staff

(Salesman, Maintenance Staff)

—7. during the first six months of induction and training a salary of ... per annum will be paid.

8. Subsequently a salary of ... per annum will be paid, plus %10 commission on normal sales and %15 for all new customers. Service increments are payable after two years. Performance bonuses are awarded at the discretion of the sales management.

9. Car expenses of... are paid per week/per month/per annum, and are reviewed every two years.

W. & T. Avery Limited
Employee

In the context of employment, the framework (a set of rules for employment) is defined by the employer. The very act of limiting borders, defining and determining a framework, demonstrates an asymmetrical interaction. Choosing a framework and a set of criteria needed to be met in order to be employed signify a mode of social control. Through this framework, the employees have to adjust and regulate what is expected to finally admit and include an applicant as a member. The employers give themselves legitimation to set and define rules. Succumbing to or deviating from the rules shows if the employees remain as the dominated party or not. The intensity in power relation is becoming less and the organizations become regulatory rather than controlling.

The very act of signing a contract determines negative freedom for the employees. However, later on, they show their power and agency by assigning terms and conditions for their superiors. It

seems that individuals are free in capitalist markets and no one is forced to work if he/she does not want to. Although, the inner need to work makes them succumb to conditions even if they don't agree and dislike the set terms.

Negative freedom means freedom from coercion. Individuals have negative freedom when no one directly commands them to do things against their will. Individuals have autonomy to direct their own actions unless they voluntarily agree to follow the orders of someone else.

Referring to (Gauthier, 1963), Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), draw a distinction between two types of concerns including, prudential and moral argument that motivate action. However, in the context of the contract, the former is more observable in that,

Prudential arguments take the agent's desires (wants), needs or interests as premises: if the agent desires a certain course of action, ...then a certain course of action is recommended; if he doesn't desire the outcome (or thinks the outcome is not in his interest), then he has no reason to do the action. (p. 178)

The content of the contract resembles a prudential argument in which the employee can sign it if the conditions fulfill his desire; otherwise, he can leave it.

Choon and Embi (2012) articulate that: Subjectivity acts as an unfair element that causes the unfairness in the performance appraisal. "ratees' performances are unable to be measured quantitatively as it is mostly a qualitative phenomenon. In an ideal performance appraisal, the performance elements are to be quantified in order to make the overall process more objective. Public sector organizations are interested in the matter of raters' errors because the final decisions and results of ratees' performance appraisal depends heavily on the raters' subjective judgment. (p.189)

The status function of the sales management could be taken as the rater and the employee as the ratee. In number 8 of the contract, it is documented that the bonuses will be awarded if the management agrees and decides on it. Thus, subjectivity is unavoidable and the manager may violate commitments to justice

that he should be concerned with. Subsequently, the inequality of employees' bonuses may not be tolerated and may lead to resignation as a reaction against it later on. Although he has promised to realize the-agreed-upon terms, he can override them due to being polluted by subjectively designed norms. Shifting from negative to positive freedom is what makes us assign the labels of autonomy and authority to the individuals who work for a bigger structure. It is a well-known fact that no discourse is innocence, or free of ideological inclination. That is to say, when the already dominated group, e.g., the employees and the customers resist their superiors in a capitalist society, the newly created discourse which works for them is saturated with its own ideological tendencies. Thus, we don't have elimination of power exertion, but a reproduction of it in a new form.

The inequality still exists, it is not eradicated, but transferred from the already dominant group to the dominated one. (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.42). Fairclough (1995) argues that since the interests of the dominant group might be at stake and the new structure may be detrimental for their well-being, still there is a social wrong (p. 18). The rationality of one group (the employers and the sellers) is criticized and another kind of rationality by (the employees and customers) comes to prominence. Although the asymmetry still exists, a mutually beneficial kind of interaction is formed.

6. Conclusion

Here, the analyzed sample letters are ideologically biased discourses in that the letters are not neutral regarding the cultural, economic and sociopolitical issues. In all the investigated sample letters in the *Analysis Section*, the agents have to act in particular circumstances. So far, we have investigated cases in which contractor/manufacturers, sellers/buyers, senders/receivers, aporoi/euporoi, employers/employees and rater/ratee have interacted. In addition, concepts like irresponsible social agents, anonymity, status function, deontic power, the right for justification and apology have been scrutinized. For instance, in the case of payment letters, the agents have to decide on the amount of payment, their possible dissatisfaction with prices or service quality and the due time to make

the payment. In the context of employment, agents decide to either sign the contract or not. In all of the explored situations, individuals are agents by whom actions could be carried out. They make the actions happen. The individuals' values and concerns affect the way they act. Their actions are the offspring of their reasoning. The business letters entail argumentations which are used by the agents to come up with conclusions.

In the present business letters, the structures in which the individuals act as agents may either enable or constrain their agency. More often, a type of resistance on the side of the individuals is observed. The phrase "agent's reasons for action" is frequently repeated in Fairclough and Fairclough (2012). It is suggested that "citizens can effectively use their rights to challenge government in a way that lead to changes in government action" (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p. 238). According to what has already been stated, if we take the individuals as citizens and the organizations as the governments, the individuals can make changes within the organizations. That is to say, power could be exercised from bottom to the top. Regarding one of the samples that was illuminated, it was the customer that defined the terms and conditions for a transaction to be actualized. Furthermore, the payers have the authority to extend the credits of the payment by choosing the final due time for making the payment themselves.

Being provided with an opportunity to argue for what they need; the individual agents employ reasoning and argumentation in their correspondences. Hence, the letters become a vehicle to bridge the gap between the already unmet desires and the alleged-to-be-achieved demands. The pairs discussed in the sample letters are so tightly associated that are better to be called complementary rather than oppositional. Furthermore, the channel through which authority and power is exercised is not a one-way structure anymore, but as the nature of the investigated genre implies, it is a two-way structure to transfer the voices of both sides. All in all, the mainstream ideology to take the imbalance between the individuals and the organizations is questioned and a new promising structure which seeks to endow equal power status to the entities is emerging. Consequently, the myth of the hierarchy of power will be exploded and reconstructed.

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