

Rhetorical Discourse Strategies Used Against Immigrants

A critical discourse analysis of an American conservative magazine *National Review*

1. Introduction

As direct racist expressions have become socially unacceptable in the modern world, alternative strategies to criticize minorities were developed. In other words, the overt “old-fashioned racism” was replaced by a more covert form, which was referred to by Barker (1981) as the “new racism.” Thus starting from the 1980’s, a number of researches were carried out in order to explain how and why those discourse strategies were manipulated. According to Augoustinos and Every (2007: 123), the “denial of prejudice” is currently one of the most pervasive forms of the strategies, and it is manipulated to justify the opinion and to protect the addresser from criticisms for being racist and prejudiced.

This paper presents a critical discourse analysis on articles of an American conservative magazine *National Review*, in which new forms of strategies to attack minorities are used. However, the analysis shows that the “denial of prejudice” is not pervasive, and that different types of strategies are used for different objections in this case. Without containing the “denial of prejudice,” the strategies of *National Review* appear to be more direct and blatant, thus contradicting from the research of Augoustinos and Every which argued that:

Negative representations and evaluations of minorities are commonly preceded by ubiquitous disclaimers such as “I’m not racist but...” or “I have nothing against migrants but...” Contemporary race talk, therefore, is strategically organized to deny racism. (Augoustinos and Every 2007: 125-126)

The reason why *National Review* does not contain such disclaimers is arguably because the readers are mostly limited to conservative people, making the editors more confident in expressing their opinions. Also, since editors often do not have political status to protect and can communicate anonymously or by using pseudonyms, they have less eagerness to protect themselves. For these reasons, they put more effort into other objections (such as convincing the readers) than in protecting themselves from possible criticism for being racist and prejudiced.

Instead of the “denial of prejudice,” the discourse of *National Review* contains strategies such as: (1) the use of an exceptional example, (2) the irrationalization of the opposing viewpoint, and (3) the identification of interests through social categorization. This paper analyzes each of these strategies, by quoting some extracts from the articles of *National Review*. Although the analysis of this study is primarily qualitative, a brief quantitative overview is shown also. (See Table 1.)

Before presenting the analysis, however, it must be clearly stated that this study does not intend to judge whether the discourse of the magazine are racist. Instead, it regards every discourse which expresses negative sentiments on immigrants as empirical evidence of the production and reproduction of social inequity. This idea of the connection between journalism and social inequity is discussed in the next “Methodology” section.

2. Methodology

This research shares the same perspective on the function of journalism with Richardson (2007: 7) which stated that “journalism exists to enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position(s) in the world.” Indeed magazines and newspapers are read because readers assume that those journalisms reflect at least some aspects of their society. Reading magazines with such assumption more or less affects the readers’ view of society. This process was explained by Richardson (2007: 10-14) as the “(re)production of social reality.” Therefore, the process of magazines being published and read is at the same time the process of the production and reproduction of social reality such as social status, identity and power relationship.

Given this idea of journalism and society, it is logical to assume that negative opinions on immigrants expressed in *National Review* are contributing to the production and reproduction of social inequity between immigrants and American citizens, or between illegal and legal immigrants.

In order to examine the empirical evidence of this process, the rhetorical strategies of *National Review* is analyzed through critical discourse analysis (CDA), because the method is most suitable for this study for the following reasons: First, the aim of CDA is “to link linguistic analysis to social analysis” (Woods and Kroger 2000: 206). Second, CDA “seeks to have an effect on social practice and social relationships,” (Titscher et al. 2000: 147) particularly on “relationships of disempowerment, dominance, prejudice and/or discrimination” (Richardson 2007: 26).

Thus CDA enables us to focus not only on the linguistic structure of discourse but also the social backgrounds, relationships, and objections hidden under it. This feature of CDA

makes it possible for this study to accurately analyze how and why the rhetorical strategies to express negative opinions about immigrants are manipulated in *National Review*.

This analytical research is carried out, because if we could understand how and why rhetorical strategies are used in journalism that (re)produces social reality, we could better be able to judge whether the journalism is fulfilling its raison d'être "to enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position(s) in the world." (Richardson 2007: 7)

3. Data and quantitative overview

3.1 Data

For the research, 61 articles related to the immigrant issue in the magazine *National Review*, from 1991 to 2008 were analyzed. The 61 articles are mostly editorials which include the words "immigrant," "immigrants" or "immigration" and were observed through an online database named GALE CENGAGE Learning (2008).

The data was chosen for the following reasons: First, magazines include more of the author's subjective opinions than newspapers, enabling us to find more genuine samples. Second, *National Review* describes itself to be "America's most widely read and influential magazine and web site for Republican/conservative news, commentary, and opinion." (Scott Budd 2008) on its official web site; it had to be a conservative magazine so that more opinions which negatively position immigrants could be found.

3.2 Quantitative overview

Table 1. demonstrates that other rhetorical strategies are more pervasively used than the “denial of prejudice” in the articles of *National Review*.

Table 1. Number of articles including each strategy (61 articles total)

denial of prejudice	4
use of an exceptional example	12
irrationalization of the opposing viewpoint	25
identification of interests	18
none of the above	25

Note: The sum exceeds the total number of articles, since some articles contain more than one strategy.

Although the quantitative overview of each strategy is introduced in Table 1., it must be emphasized that this study focuses on the qualitative aspects of discourse than on the quantitative aspects. In other words, this study analyses the social characteristics of rhetorical strategies that cannot be understood through observing the frequency of the occurrence of those strategies.

In addition, there are difficulties in focusing on the quantitative aspect of rhetorical strategies. For example, sentences such as “I’m not racist, but I think it is unfair that illegal immigrants are offered housings” can easily be found and judged as a “denial of prejudice,” while sentences such as “the liberals do not hesitate to criticize the immigration control enthusiasts as racist” can be interpreted in several ways. One way to interpret the latter sentence is; “the liberals call us racist, but they are wrong. We are not racist and have nothing against immigrants.” According to this interpretation, the sentence is a “denial of prejudice.” Another interpretation is; “the liberals call us racist, but we must not be afraid

of the criticism. We must continue to support lower immigration.” According to this interpretation, the sentence appears to be bolder against criticism, far from having any intention to protect the addresser. (Table 1. includes the numbers of articles which are interpretable to be manipulating a rhetorical strategy, such as the latter sentence, as well as the obvious ones.)

According to Richardson (2007), in order to narrow down the interpretations and make the judgment clearer, detailed criteria to record “exactly ‘how’ words, phrases, concepts and arguments are employed in texts” must be established. Then at some point, the criteria “will be so complex that they become unworkable” (Richardson 2007: 18-19).

Therefore, applying a quantitative analysis into the study of rhetorical strategy is a difficult task, and Table 1. should only be regarded as a *general* quantitative overview of this analysis.

4. Qualitative Analysis of the rhetorical strategies

4.1 Use of an exceptional example

One of the most prominent strategies employed was the use of an exceptional example. Using this strategy, the author attempts to convince the readers into thinking as if the example written in the article represents all other immigrants. This following extract comes from an article titled “New York is a "sanctuary city,"” in the issue of April 21, 2008.

(Extract 1)

New York is a "sanctuary city." Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Executive Order 41 forbids city employees from reporting an illegal immigrant to federal Immigration and

Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents unless the immigrant has committed other crimes. So Palestinian Waheed Saleh, an illegal immigrant, has filed a complaint against a New York City police officer for reporting him to the feds. Mr. Saleh, who drives an unlicensed cab, seems to have a short fuse: Police have broken up at least two fights he got into. In retaliation, he filed complaints against the police. He then found himself in the custody of ICE, and claims that city police retaliated for his complaints by reporting his immigration status, in violation of the mayoral order. Our latest news is that he is out on bail, whereabouts unknown. Should you encounter him, do not alert ICE, unless you want to find yourself at the receiving end of another lawsuit. ("New York is a "sanctuary city"", April 21, 2008. *National Review*)

The purpose of this article to impose negative sentiments about all other immigrants upon the readers is obvious, regardless to whether the use of an exceptional example is morally correct or not.

Referring to terrorism in order to support immigration control can be categorized into this strategy also. The title of the article "Welcoming the Enemy" (December 9, 2002. *National Review*) in the special issue named "Invasion: How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals, and Other Foreign Menaces to Our Shores" well displays the use.

4.2 Irrationalization of the opposing viewpoint

As Augoustinos and Every (2007: 123) suggested, one of the primary goals in using rhetorical strategies in contemporary race discourse is to present the addressers as rational and reasonable, in order to defend themselves from possible charges. On the contrary, *National Review* puts more effort in convincing the readers than in protecting themselves from possible charges. However, the aim to rationalize themselves is shared in both cases, and the magazine achieves this aim by irrationalizing the supporters of the opposing view.

It is evident in the next extract from an article in the edition of October 13th 1997, titled “More to come.”

(Extract 2)

Although NR and the immigration reformers have won the intellectual argument, we have clearly lost the political argument for now. We know this because the Wall Street Journal’s Paul Gigot has told us so. In an August 22 column, he blamed us for alienating the Hispanic immigrants he sees as otherwise clamoring to cut the capital-gains tax and vote Republican. Was Mr. Gigot taking the day off? Not only did Hispanics vote overwhelmingly Democratic long before immigration became an issue, but they are also now (thanks to that paradoxical selection system) a poverty population with a direct interest in transfer programs.

“The debate should be over,” Mr. Gigot instructs us. What debate? The Wall Street Journal editorial page has not run an article opposing its open-borders zealotry in years, while NR has repeatedly published immigration enthusiasts like Ron Unz and Julian Simon. The Journal has yet even to report the existence of the NAS report or the Rand study. Surely Mr. Gigot does not want to be classed with the multicultural censors at, say, the San Jose Mercury, which in its editorial on the NAS report said, amazingly, that “there is some news in this report that becomes alarming in the wrong hands.” (“More to Come”, October 13, 1997. *National Review*)

In extract 2, NR (*National Review*) claims its rationality by criticizing *Wall Street Journal* for being unreasonable. This “irrationalization of the opposing viewpoint” is one of the strategies which enables the magazine to present itself to be rational, without containing the “denial of prejudice.”

This following extract from the article “Economics as she is spoke” (January 29, 1996) also irrationalizes the opponent in order to present the magazine to be logical.

Being an immigration enthusiast means never having to say you're sorry, or deal with facts or logic. (“Economics as she is spoke”, January 29, 1996. *National Review*)

4.3 Identification of interests through social categorization

In his analysis of political discourse on refugees, van Dijk (1997: 31-64) suggested that the idea of “bogus refugees” is a key political strategy. Speakers such as politicians who promote restriction on refugees use this idea to create the social categorization of “real” and “bogus” refugees, saying that “real refugees are to be pitied and saved, but not the bogus ones.” By doing so, the speakers avoid criticisms, while at the same time appearing “reasonable” and sympathetic toward refugees (Augoustinos and Every 2007: 129-132). Augoustinos and Every (2007: 132) also argued that the “deployment of very specific and particular social categorization is a powerful way of justifying oppressive practices--by defining the boundaries of a group, a speaker defines the entitlements of that group.” Therefore, the employment of the idea of “bogus refugees” is an effective strategy in presenting negative opinions on refugees.

National Review utilizes a similar strategy in the following two extracts: it creates the “social categorization” such as existing/future immigrants and skilled/unskilled immigrants. However, the feature of this magazine which does not primarily seek to avoid criticisms causes its strategy to be peculiar: creating those social categorizations, *National Review* claims that the interest of the magazine coincides with that of already existing and/or skilled immigrants.

(Extract 3)

Majorities of immigrants, Hispanics, and Hispanic immigrants all support lower immigration. (“America or Utopia?”, March 25, 1996. *National Review*)

(Extract 4)

The common-sense conclusion to draw from these studies is that we should reduce total immigrant numbers (to discourage the rise of linguistic enclaves), ensure that within the reduced total more immigrants have high skills and speak English, and reform our assimilative mechanisms to produce Americans rather than anti-Americans. None of this is currently being considered. Indeed, the current Republican approach is to purchase an increase in skilled immigration by promising ethnic pressure groups an increase in other categories too, thereby adding disproportionately to the social costs of immigration. Our children -- and the children of immigrants already here -- will pay the price. And so, in lost elections, will the GOP. (“Give me your Democrats”, April 20, 1998. *National Review*)

In extracts 3 and 4, the magazine manages to construct social categorizations within immigrants. Then in extract 3, *National Review* claims to share the same opinion, which is to lower immigration, with the already-existing immigrants. The strategy is more clearly used in extract 4, since it elaborately places the “skilled” immigrants against unskilled ones, and at the same time positions the “immigrants already here” as shouldering the same burden (“the price”) with the conservatives.

What must be emphasized in analyzing this strategy is that the “interest” of the conservative magazine directly refers to the “interests” of the conservative readers. That is why such expression as “our children,” which simultaneously refers to the children of the writer and the readers is possible. By employing this strategy, the magazine is identifying the interests of the *readers* with those of existing/skilled immigrants. Thus the strategy empowers the magazine to become more appealing and convincing, making the readers able to relate themselves to the opinion.

5 Conclusion

This qualitative study has shown that the strategies used in *National Review* have different characteristics from those discussed by Augoustinos & Every (2007). This is because the society in which each discourse takes place inevitably affects the discourse, while the discourse influences the society as well. For example, since *National Review* is aware of the fact that most of its readers are conservative, it does not put emphasis on avoiding possible criticism for being racist and prejudiced. Rather, the magazine intends to influence the readers by manipulating strategies such as the “identification of interests through social categorization” which is most effective in circumstances where the political interests of the addresser and the addressee are identical.

Therefore, this study suggests that we be more aware and critical of the rhetorical strategies used in journalism. By critically analyzing the strategies, readers will be able to disclose the social backgrounds, relationships, and objections hidden under the discourse.

References

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