Grammar and Agency in U.S. News Media Constructions of Latin American and Latino Populations

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Abstract

Ethnic tensions in the United States reached a fever pitch leading up to the 2016 presidential election, particularly in relation to President Donald Trump's campaign, which explicitly referred to Mexican-Americans as rapists, drug-peddlers, and criminals. How can we understand such rhetoric from the perspective of critical discourse analysis? Critical discourse analysis assumes that language defines the limits of acceptable behavior in society, and it claims that texts' grammatical structures matter for allocating agency to societal actors. Academic literature on news media coverage of Latin Americans and Latinos has encompassed a range of methodologies, although no attempt has thus far been made to understand the grammar of news coverage of Latin Americans and Latinos in relation to the Trump campaign. This paper analyzes the grammar of the five most widely circulated U.S. print newspapers' coverage of Mexican-Americans during the week of Donald Trump's campaign announcement speech in 2015. It argues that texts portray Latinos through a process of collective subjectification, in which subject-nouns allocate agency to Latinos and Latin Americans, but their collective nature attributes the responsibility for the actions of individuals to the group as a whole. This process of collective subjectification essentializes an entire group of people based on their ethnic or national backgrounds, conceiving them as monolithic and culpable for social ills.

Keywords: Collective Subjectification; Critical Discourse Analysis; U.S. News Media; Donald Trump

1. Introduction

Among the deluge of news reporting following the results of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, some of the most interesting coverage dealt with the reactions of the many different groups on the receiving end of President Trump's rhetoric. Reports from Al Jazeera, the Los Angeles Times, NPR, and other sources highlighted the fear and uncertainty felt by, for instance, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who felt particularly attacked by then-candidate Trump's likening them to drug-pushers, rapists, and criminals.[1] The concerns felt by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans encompassed a broad scope of issues, from the value of the peso to deportations to ethnically motivated violence, especially as violent hate crimes were already being linked to the Trump campaign's rhetoric.[2]

How can we study such rhetoric from a discourse analytic perspective, and what does the (re)production of prejudicial language tell us about discourse theory generally? This paper studies the subject-verb-object structures of every news article covering Trump's campaign announcement speech published by the five most widely circulated U.S. newspapers during the week of his announcement. It quantifies every instance the papers refer to Latin American and Latino populations as either subjects or objects, as well as the plural or singular nouns used to refer to them.

This paper builds directly on previous studies that sought to understand the Othering practices present in dominant U.S. print media discourses and their treatment of Latin Americans and Latinos.[3] These studies find that media discourses portray Latin Americans and Latinos in the U.S. positively more often than they negatively.[4] However,

beneath surface level positives, "Latin Americans [were] implicitly, perhaps unconsciously, portrayed as hard working, but only in making arepas, on the rancho, and in assimilating to U.S. culture," thus Othering Latin Americans and Latinos by treating their hard work, in this example, as an intrinsically different form of ambition than that valued by U.S. society.[5] Some of these previous studies, however, confused several assumptions of discourse analysis and content analysis.[6] However, if previous papers deviated from "true" discourse analysis, then this paper seeks to apply more traditional discourse analytic methods to dominant U.S. print media's portrayal of Latin Americans and Latinos to question whether we can observe similarly oppressive discursive practices through different methods.

This paper argues against theories that foreground objectifying grammars in oppressive discourses and instead argues that Latin Americans and Latinos face the greater threat of collective subjectification. Collective subjectification attributes individual agency to plural subject nouns and thereby essentializes the target group in question. Rather than helpless objects, dominant news discourses portray Latin Americans and Latinos as active, directly hostile agents committing crimes and wrongdoings against other supposedly non-agential societal actors. News discourses, furthermore, function as complicit reproducers of collectively subjectifying language, serving to normalize such prejudicial rhetoric without necessarily intending to do so.

2. From Theory to Empirics: Scholarship on Discourse, Media, Ethnicity, and Power

2.1. Discourse Theory And The Power Of Language

Some scholars argue that grammar serves as an accurate predictor of oppression, and that objectification advances oppressive discourses. Grammatically speaking, "the subject [in a sentence] designates the agent of the verb," while the object is devoid of agency.[7] In an experimental psychological study, David Heise asked individuals to rate the "agentic potency" of nouns and verbs in a variety of sentences, finding that "any word tends to be reduced in potency merely by occupying the object position."[8] Following this, Nick Todd found that psychology patients "sometimes deliberately construct themselves as being in an object position" to achieve certain desired social outcomes, such as reducing culpability for undesirable actions.[9] Yet, because English speakers esteem "the subject position […] over the object position," the allocation of agency away from people treated as objects advances an oppressive discourse.[10]

Critical discourse analysis' research agenda approaches "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships […] in language" in order to understand the production and reproduction of dominance, discrimination, power, and control in society.[11] Thus, critical discourse analysis fundamentally assumes that the symbols, words, phrases, meanings, ideas, concepts, knowledges, and affects produced by language and reproduced by particular linguistic utterances structure social life and empower or disempower different members of society. Crucially, individuals or groups involved in producing texts—conceived as vehicles for transferring meaning—inevitably input these values in their texts thus contributing to or resisting dominant political, cultural, historical, or otherwise extant social contexts.[12] Therefore, without necessarily intending to, we plunge into a complex political foray every time we use language, sending and receiving meanings within the context of myriad, subtle power struggles.

Discourse research assumes that news discourses matter because public figures' "discourses and opinions become influential […] through media accounts."[13] In other words, while politicians' speeches or public intellectuals' books may originate certain ideas, the media popularizes, serializes, and then normalizes them. The "societal and institutional macro-context" of Teun van Dijk's work, for instance, explains the persistence of ethnic and racial inequalities in society, assuming that discourses' power stem partially from their reproduction.[14] The distinction between "blatantly racist" news reporting on minorities in Spain and racialized portrayals of immigration produced by an overwhelming white *corps* of Spanish journalists, for example, illustrates an unconscious perpetuation of social inequality.[15] Racialized portrayals of immigration also relate to another theoretical approach to discourse research: Othering. Othering has a long tradition in discourse analytic research in all disciplines, including nursing, literature, international studies, and beyond.[16] Ultimately, its core tenet posits that discourses that treat social groups as monolithic collectives establish social in-groups that cast out-groups as an intrinsically different "Other" to the "Self." In essence, when news sources reproduce racialized portraits, they unconsciously Other the subjects of those portraits.

Discourse research further assumes that language defines the limits of acceptable behavior in society. By normalizing social norms, values, and assumptions, all discourse—not just news discourse—that reproduces ethnic and racial prejudice contribute to a larger system of internalized racism. Internalized racism refers to the "acceptance of stereotypes or beliefs that paint one's racial group as subhuman, inferior, incapable, or a burden on society."[17] Internalized perceptions of a given ethnic or racial group as inferior to another leads people to modify their behavior in an attempt to conform to the social values in question, going beyond feelings of "shame, fear, or anger" that result

from interpersonal racism.[18] Van Dijk describes the concept of the "discourse-power circle," where "privileged access" to centers of social power, such as wealth, fame, and authority, give individuals or groups control over discourse, which in turn helps consolidate control over perceptions of other people, thus leading to acceptance or resistance to the dominant discourse.[19] Discourse, because it reproduces the norms, values, and assumptions of the social structures within which it exists, influences behavior and either reinforces or challenges the dominant structures of society, thus reifying prior worldviews that lead people to take certain actions over others.

2.2. Empirical Studies Of News Media And Latin American Populations

In addition to theories of discourse, media, and power in society, a number of empirical studies have sought to address news media coverage of Latin American and Latino populations in the U.S. Methodologically, they tend to take two approaches. On the one hand, content analyses describe how news sources treat Latinos by testing for the presence of certain words or phrases and measuring how news content changes over time and varies between sources. On the other hand, discourse analyses go beyond the actual words and phrases used to describe Latinos, taking into account the historical, social, and political contexts within which a text is embedded. Neither content analysis nor discourse analysis, however, has attempted to explain the grammar of U.S. media constructions of Latinos.

   Content analyses of U.S. news media coverage of Latinos hold significance due to the impact of media priming on public opinion. News sources use certain frames when reporting on Latinos that prime their audiences' thinking by highlighting inter-group differences and "activat[ing] racial attitudes, [thus] boosting their impact on political judgments."[20] For example, in 1994, the year with the highest increase in U.S. media sources' reference to specific Latino national and ethnic identities, "the impact of White-Latino affect […] spiked," demonstrating a statistically significant correlation when controlling for the economic interests, age, education, income, union membership, party identification, and employment status of the media consumer.[21] Other content analyses typify the issue of news coverage of Latinos as one of justice, arguing that criminal representations of Latinos "solidify and exacerbate the impact of the law and enforcement practices."[22] Moreover, content analyses that focus on media coverage of anti-immigration policies targeting Latinos argue that elite news media sources often fail to fulfill their "watchdog function" of reporting on policies before they become law, instead settling for a passive role reporting on already enacted policies.[23] Therefore, content analytic claims that measuring the substance of frames, priming methods, word counts, and so on betters helps us understand the media's effect on political consciousness and important questions of justice for U.S. Latinos and those prejudiced against them.

   The notion that news media content exerts influence on politics and justice similarly applies to Spanish- and English-language sources. Marisa Abrajano and Simran Singh, for instance, find that a higher percentage of respondents who only use Spanish language news "were aware of a specific immigration policy proposal, guest worker proposal, support a guest worker program providing legal status, and believe that illegal immigration helps the economy."[24] Still other scholars dispute argue that elite U.S. media coverage in either Spanish or English minimally difference in the number and type of articles published about the Latino community.[25] Okamoto et al. find that—among the events covered—"English-language newspapers operate much like Spanish-language newspapers" in characterizing events relevant to the Latino community as thematic rather than episodic.[26]

   If content analysts rely on discrete packets of language in the form of words or sentences, then discourse analysts reject those as fundamentally unstable units of linguistic analysis. According to van Dijk, "there is no strict distinction between content analysis on the one hand and explicit discourse analysis on the other hand."[27] Both methods, in other words, can show the biases that reinforce and perpetuate racism in a media context. However, discourse analysts reject "the possibility of any stable and consensual definitions or evaluations" of the linguistic codes used to refer to Latinos in a news media context.[28] In fact, coded references to Latinos may comprise the bulk of linguistic utterances about them, meaning that searching the "content" of a discourse yields incomplete results. Generally, discourse analysts agree that language matters because it defines the limits of socially acceptable action. In U.S. politics, media coverage (or the lack thereof) allows some groups to accumulate excess cultural and political capital and therefore navigate the socio-political structures and institutions of their country more effectively than others.[29] News discourses further matter for discourse analysts because they have legitimizing power, lending support for one or another policy given the ways they construct the elements of political "problems."[30] Whereas content analysis studies what media sources say about Latinos, discourse analysis studies how they say it through coded meanings, concepts, and ideas.

   Still other studies of U.S. media portrayals of Latinos argue that, while the content of news reporting may give an overall positive representation, they nonetheless contribute to a fundamentally unequal system of power relations that excludes Latinos from the dominant culture of the U.S. Chuang and Roemer, for instance, find that 2010-2012 coverage of the DREAM Act deployed "exemplar" portrayals of Latinos, often highlighting the hard-working and

high-achieving characteristics of Latino youth.[31] Yet the deployment of exemplars, juxtaposed with "signifiers of poverty and financial need with those of 'the same values and ambitions of the dominant culture' implies that it is through the assimilation of Americanness that Latino/Latinas overcome their 'deficits' of being Other, poor, and undocumented."[32] In Kakenmaster's terms, this juxtaposition suggests that even positive media representations of U.S. Latinos tokenize them in the service of dominant societal institutions, co-opting Latino identities in order to reinforce a narrow, idealized conception of American identity.[33]

Taking as its theoretical foundation the assumptions about media discourses, power, and oppressive language from section 2.1, this paper seeks to address an important empirical gap in the literature. The approaches from section 2.2 do not analyze the grammatical formulations news discourses employ when referring to Latin American and Latino populations. How are Latinos constructed as either objects or subjects in the news? The scholarly literature heretofore tells us much about the treatment of Latinos as and in relation to other nouns but it is utterly silent on how news media's nominal portrayals of Latinos relate to their verb structures. This study seeks to rectify this gap in the literature with the goal of understanding how news sources allocate agency.

3. Methodology, Model, and Methods

At its most basic level, discourse analysis refers to the study of language in context, both in terms of the meanings people give it and the meanings it imparts in turn on people's lives.[34] It studies language through its presence in "texts," which serve as vehicles for transferring meaning from one person to another, and which may encompass verbal or non-verbal language depending on the assumptions of the analyst.[35] Within the texts they study, discourse analysts attempt to discern how "empty signifiers" are fixed to different nodes and incorporated into grammatical structures by political actors attempting to hegemonize the values, symbols, and affects represented by their worldview.[36] In short, discourse analysis studies the ways that people structure their language and link different meanings together.

This paper considers Latin Americans and Latinos as empty signifiers and attempts to model the agency allocated to them by U.S. print media discourses' assignment of object or subject markers. Agency is understood in the model as the capacity for action that belongs to subjects, not objects. Thus structuring a sentence or phrase such that it treats discursive actors as subjects implies their necessary action generally or in regard to a particular object. Conversely, if discursive actors are treated as objects, (if they are "objectified") it implies that some other subject must necessarily be acting on or in relation to them within the discursive conception of the actor in question. In his seminal *Language and Power*, Norman Fairclough gives an example of a similar model where S refers to subjects, V to verbs, O to objects, and C to complements used to describe S.[37]

Table 1. Fairclough's model of agency in discourse

S V O	Reagan(S)	attacks(V)	Libya(O)
	South African police(S)	have burnt down(V)	a black township(O)
	contras(S)	have killed(V)	many peasants(O)
S V	Reagan(S)	was fishing(V)	
	a black township(S)	has burnt down(V)	
	many peasants(S)	have died (V)	
S V C	Reagan(S)	is(V)	dangerous(C) (or: a dangerous person(C))
	many peasants(S)	are(V)	dead(C)
	Libya(S)	has(V)	oil(C)

The important part for Fairclough concerns the fluid nature of active and passive voice that can express reasonably similar meanings despite treating different actors as either subjects or objects. In the first row, the hypothetical text treats the South African police as a subject and the township they burnt down as an object whereas, in the second row, the text treats the township itself as a subject, while the South African police disappear from the grammatical formulation altogether. This eliminates any capacity for action—and indeed any responsibility for action—belonging to the South African police. Or, in Fairclough's terms:

> [R]epresenting the death of Nicaraguan peasants as an action with responsible agents, an event, or an attributed state, are choices with clear significance; similarly the representation of the burning of South African townships as an event or an action on the pan of agents. Such choices to highlight or background agency may be consistent, automatic and commonsensical, and therefore ideological; or they may be conscious hedging or deception.[38]

All social scientific models have limitations and this one, being no different, has two. Firstly, its focus on subject-verb-object structures allows for an analysis of *agency*, not *power*. This paper assumes no necessary or inherent connection between the two because of the nature of passive grammatical structures' treatment of subjects.[39] Even in Fairclough's model, the agency allocated to the "black township" burnt down by the South African police only comprises the capacity to be burnt down, an obviously powerless exercise of agency. Secondly, this paper employs a static model of discourse rather than analyzing its change over time, the purpose of which is to compare different texts' grammatical constructions of the same event.

Among the benefits of this model is that it allows for a thorough analysis of small datasets. Whereas Kakenmaster attempted an macro-analysis of all texts produced by dominant U.S. print media sources about Latinos in 2015, this paper restricts its dataset to news stories produced by the five most widely circulated print newspapers covering then-Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's campaign announcement in which he likened Mexicans to drug-pushers, rapists, and criminals.[40] Trump's campaign announcement is taken as a lynchpin for ethnicized political rhetoric that directly associates a specific subset of the Latino population with criminality. The newspapers from which texts were collected include the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *USA Today*. Mass circulation serves as an indicator of political influence to the extent that increased circulation produces and reproduces certain narratives within American political discourse.

The dataset consists of sources from a composite, cross-referenced search of five databases: LexisNexis Academic, NewsBank Access World News, Factiva, ProQuest U.S. Newsstream, and Google News. Sources collected had to fulfill three criteria: (1) sources were published between June 15th, 2015 and June 19th, 2015, (2) sources included both "Trump" and "Mexic*" anywhere in them, and (3) sources explicitly referenced Trump's campaign announcement speech. Excluding opinion editorials, reprints of Trump's speech, blurbs less than 100 words, and duplicate stories, 21 texts fit those criteria. After collecting the data, texts were imported into QSR NVivo 11, coded for every reference to any of the signifiers as either subjects or objects, and the results were totaled for comparison.

4. Collective Subjectification of Latin Americans and Latinos

4.1. Results

Immediately, two important trends emerge from the texts. First, Latinos are subjectified more often than they are objectified. This trend holds even when controlling for repetitions of the same grammatical structure in each news source selected. Second, when the texts do subjectify Latinos, they often do so in the context of Trump's announcement speech and implies both collective action and responsibility. The principal conclusion of this suggests that news sources allocate agency to Latinos, although attributing individual agency to the group as a whole by using plural subject-nouns. Figures 1 and 2 depicts how often texts refer to Latinos as objects or subjects.
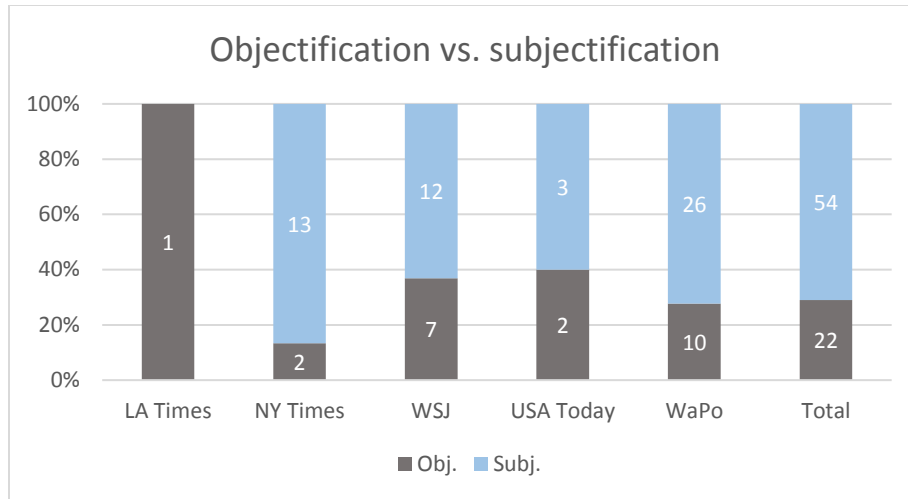
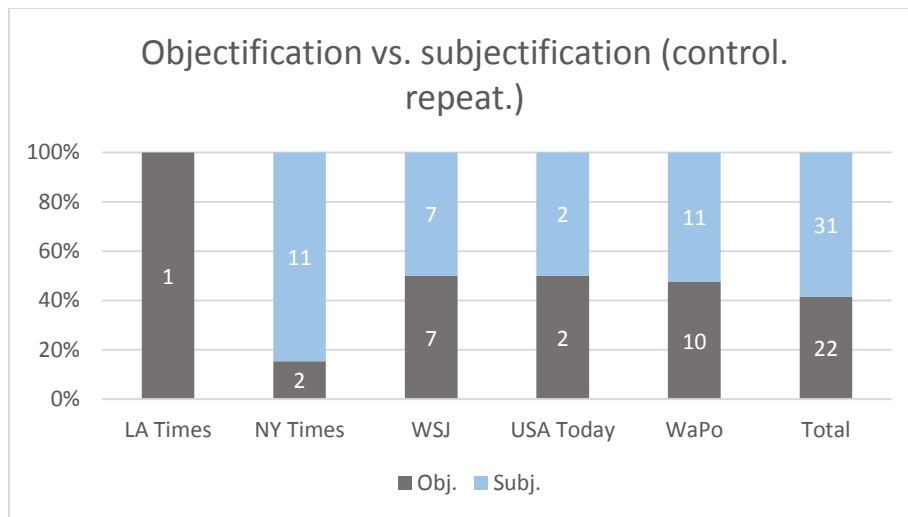Figure 1. Objectification vs. subjectification

Figure 2. Objectification vs. subjectification (control. repeat.)

   At the same time that the texts subjectify Latin Americans and Latinos, collective subject-nouns are used far more frequently to refer to Latin Americans than other subjects. Figures 3 and 4 depict the singular or plural noun usage when referring to Latin Americans as either subjects or objects. When Latin Americans and Latinos are subjectified, they are described using collective nouns two-thirds of the time, whereas when the texts objectify Latin Americans and Latinos, they only use plural nouns to describe the subject of the sentence approximately 27% of the time. The model assumes that when the texts deprive Latin Americans and Latinos of agency by objectifying them, they necessarily imply the capacity for action of non-Latino subjects. Strikingly, then, it seems texts use plural nouns to refer to Latin Americans and Latinos at a rate of almost 5:1 compared to non-Latinos when controlling for all explicit references to Latin American and Latino identity markers.
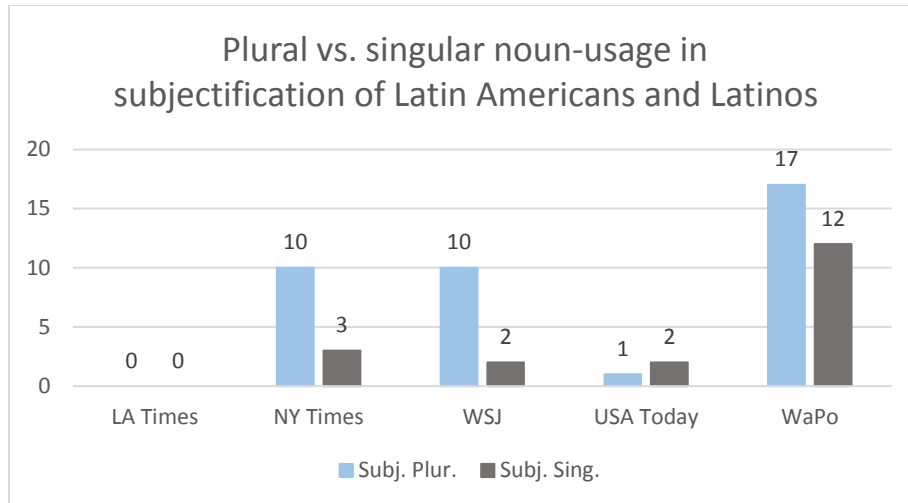
340

Figure 3. Plural vs. singular subject noun-usage in subjectification of Latin Americans and Latinos
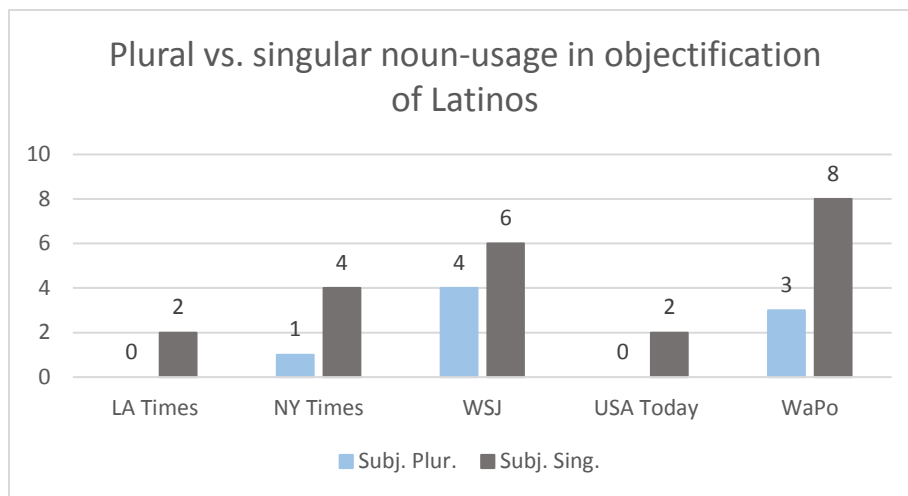

Figure 4. Plural vs. singular subject noun-usage in objectification of Latin Americans and Latinos

Collective subjectification is subjectifying in the sense that it allocates agency to Latinos and Latin Americans—it does not objectify them. However, it is also collective in the sense that it refers to Latin Americans and Latinos as monolithic, collective subjects. Thus, while the texts engage in a process of collective subjectification that constructs Latinos and Latin Americans as actors, they also necessarily attribute responsibility for the actions to the collective. Tables 2 and 3 give key examples of objectification and collective subjectification.

Table 2. Key Examples Of Objectification

Key:	Subject	Verb	Object
	He	*will build* a wall across the continent and *make*	Mexico […]
	He	*promised* to *require*	Mexico […]
	He	*claimed* that	all Mexican immigrants […]
	He	*called*	immigrants from Mexico rapists.

Table 3. Key Examples Of Collective Subjectification

Key:	Subject	Verb	Object
	They	're not sending	their best.
	They	're bringing	drugs.
	They	're bringing	crime.
	They	're	rapists.

4.2. Discussion And Analysis

The collective subjectification of Latinos and Latin Americans in U.S. news discourse holds two crucial implications. On the one hand, it allocates agency to Latinos and Latin Americans, but only individual agency later distorted and applied to the monolithic, uniform imaginary of the group as a whole. On the other hand, it frames ethnic relations in the U.S. in pugilistic, us versus them terms that both underscore inter-group difference and exacerbate tensions. Furthermore, beyond a supposedly neutral mode of communicating information on important political events like Trump's campaign announcement, news sources' unconscious reproduction of collectively subjectifying portrayals of Latin Americans and Latinos normalizes such discourse to dangerous effect.

In the first place, collective subjectification unsurprisingly subjectifies Latin Americans and Latinos, thus attributing agency to them. In other words, it conceives of Latin Americans and Latinos as agents capable of action, such as sending, bringing, and being. Similar to Todd, but in contrast to theories of objectification, racial and ethnic prejudices bear out in the subject positioning of the targets of prejudice.[41] Recall Todd's finding that some of his patients would "construct themselves as being in an object position."[42] Similarly, news media constructions of Latin Americans and Latinos as subjects and non-Latinos as objects imply the former groups' culpability for supposed crimes and moral failings. Thus, the agency of the individuals forms an oversimplified picture of group behavior.

By implying collective responsibility for individual agency, news media discourses foment a burden of representation that lends support for the utterly artificial idea that individual members of Latin American and Latino populations represent those populations as a whole. Scholars like John Tagg and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. advance the idea of the "burden of representation," or "the homely notion that you represent your race, thus that your actions can betray your race or honor it."[43] In recent years, this same concept has precipitated into popular political debates as bloggers and independent writers decry similar pressures to speak for all members of one's race, ethnicity, nationality, or other such social group.[44] Collectively subjectifying discourses place a "burden of representation" on Latin Americans and Latinos by inflating the actions of one or a few individuals and translating the action of some individuals smuggling drugs across the border into the language of "They're bringing drugs." Repeatedly, we observe how vulnerable groups in society are expected to speak for and represent the entirety of the social groups to which they belong, including Latinos and Latin Americans. The collective element of collective subjectfication thus eradicates the notion of the individual agent by applying individuals' agency to the collective.

Additionally, collective subjectification can exacerbate inter-group differences by creating an artificial us versus them dichotomy between members of different social groups. Othering theory asserts that collective subject frames used to refer to members of a perceived out-group "attribute negative characteristics […] that set them apart as representing that which is opposite" to the Self.[45] In discourse theory, Othering entails manipulating the elements of a text, including grammar, in such a way as to construct the values, beliefs, practices, and symbols of the out-group as intrinsically different the in-group.[46] Thus, given the way that "discourses are articulated in the context of socio-cognitive structures," engendering support for the notion that somehow, some way, "they" differ from "us" simultaneously helps rationalize the values, beliefs, practices, and symbols of the in-group.[47] From a theoretical perspective, deploying collective subjectification that refers to a racial, ethnic, national, or cultural out-group as a collective "they"—as indeed the texts studied often do—serves to construct "them" as a necessarily different and inferior Other to an imagined Self.

The point, lastly, has equally to do with the type of texts studied as it does the content of the discourse the texts reproduce. Certainly, the presence of collective subjectification in Trump's campaign announcement matters for establishing Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Latinos generally as an out-group to his own perceived in-group. It also matters because it contributes to a burden of representation. However, other layers of text in society, including news media, form part and parcel of a discursive regime complicit in normalizing such language.[48] In fact, discourse analysts treat language in society "as a manifest cultural and social product in and through which meanings and ideologies are expressed or (re-)produced."[49] The easy notion of attempting to understand the allocation of agency in official and policy discourse might lead one to focus solely on Trump. However, it is quite a bit harder—though no

less significant—to address the normalization of discursive patterns in other segments of society that reproduce problematic depictions of entire groups of people based on race, ethnicity, or nationality.

5. Conclusion and Future Research Agendas

This research sought to interrogate one microcosm of U.S. political discourse—dominant U.S. print media—and understand how its grammar allocates agency either away from or to Latin Americans and Latinos. It has two principal findings. First, agency is allocated to Latin Americans and Latinos more often than away from them. Otherwise stated, when news sources refer to Latin Americans and Latinos, they do so mainly as subjects, meaning Latin Americans and Latinos are not objectified as often as they are subjectified. Second, when Latin Americans and Latinos are cast as subjects, news sources do so referring to them using collective subject-nouns more often than they do using individual subject-nouns. Agency, the capacity for action, also implies responsibility for any actions that result from the subjects of a given discourse. The use of collective subject-nouns therefore attributes the agency of individual Latin Americans and Latinos to Latin American people as a whole. Texts thus essentialize the drug-smuggler coming from Mexico, relegating *individual* actions to the background while foregrounding *collective* social identity.

While this paper's scope only encompassed an analysis of U.S. print media in the week of Trump's campaign announcement, future research agendas could take several directions. Within media studies, researchers could broaden the timeframe of analysis or include texts from other, non-mass mediated sources. Future research could also index the persons quoted and compare the grammar of those indexed with the grammar of the reporters themselves to understand if the problem of collective subjectification stems from the discourses' reproduction of other texts or from the media's language itself. Trump has given discourse analysts a mountain of data to sift through, and we ought to make good use of it to understand structures of ideology and oppression embedded in language.

Hidden behind grammatical structures, discourse analysts witness a new species of power emerging—one that is unconscious, automatic, and hegemonizing. By peering into one microcosm of the habitat this new species occupies, we can begin to understand grammar's relation to agency. It may seem strange, unorthodox, and difficult to imagine, but analyzing grammar in discourse allows us to observe how the language we use imbues people with the capacity for action or lack thereof without necessarily intending to do so. Treating other people as agents or not in turn reinforces and reifies unequal systems of power whereby those with the ability to define the grammar of a text also define the identities and characteristics of others in society. This new species of power in discourse delimits not only the bounds of human action and interaction, but also the way we perceive others' actions in favor of our pre-given notions and beliefs. Language, in sum, is indeed important for politics, international relations, and society.

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