

Critical Discourse Analysis of Jack Ma's Selected Speeches: Language of New Capitalism

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Abstract

“The meaning of a text [always] goes beyond its author” and “the text at all times represent(s) more than the author intended” (Bleicher, 1980, p. 111). In contemporary studies, critical discourse analysis and social research are integrated and cannot be separated entirely. Furthermore, the speeches of worldly influential people are worth analyzing since speeches of important people have been analyzed in order to alert meaning, to gain insight from, to understand logic therein, and to see, if possible, any contradictions in the discourse.

This study aimed to highlight the language of new capitalism through the selected speeches of Jack Ma in terms of some linguistic features, rhetorical techniques, and contradictions in new capitalism. The samples consist of twelve selected speeches of Jack Ma that were purposefully selected. The three-dimensional model built by Norman Fairclough was used as the analytical framework for this study.

Some linguistic features were analyzed including nominalization, passivization, modal verbs, personal pronouns, and text structures. The results reveal that each structure was used purposely for presenting his goals and attitudes. The second scope was the process of text: there were various keys of new capitalism that occurred in the selected speeches, such as the language of new technology, the free market, the role of government, and profit. The main part of this study also pointed out that Jack Ma's words and goals sometimes contradict practice in reality. Alibaba is a giant in the ecommerce world that has won over a number of entrepreneurs and small businesses. It is hoped that the findings of this study are beneficial for further studies.

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Introduction

A speech by a well-known and world-leading businessman is one of the best choices for this study as it is a key in terms of the businessman's perceptions, ideologies, and power and there are some hidden messages from the chosen words Pu (2007). Regarding previous studies on the speeches of world leaders, they have been analyzed for decades as a direct result of the rise of globalization and the development of modern technology. Consequently, speeches, in terms of formal public speaking, have the purpose of expressing ideas or crucial information so the relationship between the leader's words and their actions should be of concern in terms of the effect and influence on society (Wang (2010); Bayram (2010); Lande (2010)). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been applied to social research studies for a number of years especially regarding the speeches of well-known people from across the globe.

As the core of analysis is critical, CDA is applied as a framework of this study. CDA is an approach that is not just focused on how to use/construct or organize words and sentences, and this approach also looks into pragmatics and sociolinguistics, such as in political, cultural, educational, and economic spheres (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). CDA is a type of discourse analysis that studies social power, abuse, inequality, and racism and social and political contexts are also taken into consideration. Similarly, Gee (2011) stated that there are two significant approaches to conduct discourse analysis. First, is descriptive discourse analysis. Its purpose is to explain how language works in order to comprehend discourse. The current fashion of CDA points to the social change and globalization of new capitalism (Gee et al., 1996; Fairclough, 2002; Fairclough & Chiapello, 2002). Therefore, social transformations are the new era of language studies.

New capitalism is an inevitable issue that linguists pay attention to in the 20th century. Jessop (2000), who is well versed in political and economic studies, demonstrated that new capitalism (neo-capitalism) is the reform of old capitalism in terms of restructuring (the relation between an economic field with politics, economy, and art) and re-scaling (the relation between contrasting scales of social life). Notably, Adam Smith (1776) was the first theorist to mention capitalism,

particularly on self-interest. Capitalism is the economic system that focuses on the free market system, private property, no or minimal government intervention, profit motives, competition, and freedom. Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, which was first published in 1776.

New capitalism emerged from technological revolution and the market's internationalization in order to try to reduce those flaws found in old capitalism (Klien, 2000). However, there are still some critiques on new capitalism who claim that the attempt to fill the gaps and to decrease the disadvantages is largely unsuccessful as there is more inequality, a larger gap between the rich and the poor, more insecurity, more risk, and more injustice. The language of new capitalism is an essential aspect that should be explored. In a contemporary climate, language may have more meaningful aspects of modern socio-economic changes (Fairclough, 2001). Chiapello and Fairclough (2000) state that the main aspects of the critiques are stimulation (the bloom toward people), security (in workplace and reality), and justice (common goods and fairness).

There are previous samples of language and new capitalism critiques in both books and articles. In the first era, the language of new capitalism was investigated in the scope of language use in the workplace, integrating with the styles of teachers in the classroom. Previous researchers highlight the words of managers and leaders in the companies because words might change the situation and even the success of the companies. For example, a book called *The New Work Order: behind the language of new capitalism*, written by Gee, Hull, and Lankshear in 1996, focuses on the workplace, team leaders, workers, and democracy while paying attention to inequality between individuals, nations, and continents. They reformed the educational system with the economic system in order to prepare the students living in the real world. Similarly, an article by Bialostok and Kamberelis (2010) focuses on the risks and insecurity in the language of the contemporary workplace and the classroom. In conclusion, the perspective in the language of new capitalism is placed in various fields including workplaces, houses, schools, and many individual organizations.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate some linguistic features and use of rhetorical structures of the selected Jack Ma speeches concerning the relationship between language, social action, ideology, or power.
2. To analyze Jack Ma's speeches to understand whether there are any contradictions in relation to new capitalism.

Research Methods

1. The introduction of Jack Ma

Jack Ma (Ma Yun) is a Chinese businessman who is one of the most successful people and his life inspires and motivates many people in many aspects, such as his background, his experiences, his patience, his determination, and his points of view. His life changed from being an English teacher at the University in China to a very successful businessman and ultimately the richest person in China. He attempted to move himself up the social status by using English as a tool. Jack Ma became the founder of Alibaba (China's biggest ecommerce company). At first, his knowledge regarding the Internet and ecommerce was minimal. Ma's business did not reach the goals he envisaged and he failed numerous times because of the lack of financial support, the global economic crisis, national policies, and other key elements. He tried to improve his business tactics until he finally found success with the start of Alibaba in 1999. Within three years, his company would be competing with Amazon and other world-leading ecommerce companies.

2. Selected Speech

The speeches of Jack Ma are selected by the duration of time, from 2011–2018. The first criterion specifies the range of time because the scope of the speaking might range within globalization, social changes, and technological developments. Even though new capitalism emerged well before 2011 and Alibaba was launched in 1999, the timeframe is specific to 2011–2018 as it is the years that the Alibaba Group and Jack Ma have been most established. It's the time that Ma's business has seen the most successful and has continually gained massive profits. Furthermore, it is when the Alibaba Group has been an international corporation on the international market. The second criterion is the purpose of the speaking. Jack Ma's speeches, which were delivered at various events, can demonstrate the different aspects of language. Jessop (2000) suggests that new capitalism can lead to many contexts. It

shows the relationship between an economic system and politics, education, culture, and art. Therefore, the events of the speeches are not restricted to economic conferences. The third criterion is the location and place of each event. There are various countries and different situations. New capitalism is an international issue and doesn't focus on a small scale. The fourth criterion is the elements of speech—each speech will be selected based on the elements of new capitalism (free market, fair competition, private property, and gaining profits).

Therefore, twelve speeches have been selected to cover the different genres, such as economic conferences, educational events, and promoting the Alibaba Group, and these speeches are listed from the Group's early years to the most recent talk delivered by Jack Ma, which are as follows:

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTION OF THE SELECTED SPEECHES OF JACK MA

Samples	Length (minutes)	Tokens	Types of Event/Topic	Place	Date D/M/Y
1 st speech	56	8,047	educational event	Stanford Graduate School, USA	09/30/2011
2 nd speech	10	1,279	educational event	Hong Kong University	11/08/2013
3 rd speech	17	2,546	promoting Alibaba Group	Economic Club of New York, USA	06/09/2015
4 th speech	15	5,890	economic conference and promoting Alibaba Group	APEC CEO Summit, Philippines	11/18/2015
5 th speech	12	7,726	economic conference and promoting Alibaba Group	Germany	09/25/2015
6 th speech	42	4,600	economic conference and promoting Alibaba Group	Zhejiang, East China	06/09/2017
7 th speech	54	1,663	economic conference and promoting Alibaba Group	Detroit, USA	06/21/2017
8 th speech	18	2,958	economic conference and promoting Alibaba Group	New York, USA	09/20/2018
9 th speech	32	6,682	economic conference and promoting Alibaba Group	Toronto, Canada	09/25/2017
10 th speech	12	2,610	educational event	De la Salle University, Philippines	10/25/2017
11 th speech	19	1,333	educational event	Vietnam University	11/05/2017
12 th speech	12	1,500	promoting Alibaba Group	Thailand	04/19/2018
Total	299	46,834	3 purposes	7 countries	2011-2018

3. Analytical Framework

Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1992:1995) is used as the analytical framework because Norman Fairclough is one of the key linguists who distributed the concept of the language of new capitalism and social change. Fairclough's book (2004), *Analysis Discourse; textual analysis for social research*, discusses language in new capitalism and a number of articles have been published continually from 2000 until present. Therefore, this framework has been adapted for this study because it can reach and answer the objectives of the research. In other words, it can unveil the hidden messages and the social practices. However, some aspects are deleted because some linguistic aspects couldn't be focused (limitation of time and objectives of the study). Fairclough's three-dimensional model includes three parts: description (text), interpretation (production, interpretation, and consumer), and explanation (socio-cultural practice). The main focus of each stage is explained as follows:

3.1 Description: Textual Dimension

Lexicalization: This refers to the choice of words. Vocabulary is not just words, phrases, or idioms; it covers many aspects, such as parts of speech, how each word is used in communication, and its culture. There are various procedures for analyzing lexicalization but the point of this study is to only focus on nominalization. Nominalization is specific in this part and is the way to turn verbs, adjectives, and adverbs into a noun. Fowler et al. (1979) show that using noun phrases over verbs is often ideologically charged. Nominalization also associates with ideological features such as removing agencies, managing unequal power, and adding information.

Grammar: This is the linguistic detail—when more of the linguistic details are relied upon so that the differences of the linguistic functions are specifically analyzed. There are three main parts to this analysis: active-passive voice, modal verbs, and pronouns. In sentences, language use will show the perceptions and opinions of speakers through the world and society.

First, passivization focuses on choosing a passive voice over an active voice. The aim of an active sentence is changed to the subject of the corresponding passive sentence. Passivization is built when insistence is given to the object. In cases when the subject is not significant and comprehension need not be referred, sentences are better in the passive voice. Second, modal verbs use appropriate techniques for

persuading and expressing inner feelings. In addition, modality shows the level of politeness and ordering. Fairclough (1994) divides modal verbs into three levels of politeness, including low politeness (can, may, could, might, dare), median politeness (will, would, should, shall), and high politeness (ought to, might, need, has/have to). Third, personal pronouns (I, we, you) will be studied as they can show the relationship between the speaker and audiences as well as society as a whole—and it also shows the power of the speakers.

Textual structure: This aims to analyze linking between a situation and language itself. This part also investigates the movement, cohesion, and organization of the context/speech. Furthermore, internal organization and coherence of the text are one of the most significant aspects that will illustrate the purpose of the speech.

3.2 Interpretation: Discursive Dimension (Production, Distribution, and Consumption)

Interpretation Stage (Processing Analysis) focuses on the interrelationship between text and interaction and it cannot be isolated with textual analysis. This stage covers the progress of text production, distribution, and consumption. This second dimension aims to reveal the messages (social identities, social relationships, knowledge, and concepts) and to comprehend and interpret the relevance between messages and its producers or speakers (Fairclough, 1992). The features of new capitalism will be studied.

3.3 Explanation: Social Dimension

The societal level is analyzed in this part because it links the language in the text with economic, political, and cultural systems. The text will demonstrate the contradiction in new capitalism. Social matters in real life can be compared with the goals of the speaker.

Research Results

1. Textual Analysis

The first dimension of the analysis is the properties of the selected speeches, including nominalization, passivization, modal verbs, personal pronouns, and text structure. Each part will be described briefly.

Nominalization

Lexical items in language of new capitalism occur in the speeches frequently, such as communication, consumer, payment, investment, commitment, failure,

organization, difference, judgment, complaint or development. Fairclough (1992) mentions that nominalization helps to delete the agency of the sentences. To illustrate, the following excerpt shows the form of using nominalization in the speeches by Jack Ma: *...ecommerce is about communication...;* *...globalization only helped 20% of the development of countries...;* *they worry because there's complaint...;* *...it's judgment and understanding and treating.*

Passivization

Passive voice is used frequently in the speeches as Ma wants to emphasize the objects of the sentences. It creates the significance and values of actions and objects, but the subjects or agents are less major. For example, he said: *“Globalization was controlled by few emperors and kings...;* *...in the past 20 years, globalization was controlled and manipulated by sixty thousand big companies...;* *In the past, goods were made separately...;* *...they were solely ‘made in China’ or solely ‘made in Thailand’.* *In the future, goods will be ‘made on the Internet instead...”* It shows that globalization is receiving the action and the subjects of the sentences are turning into the negative ways.

Modal verbs

MODAL VERBS (Fairclough, 1994)

	Low politeness	Median politeness	High politeness
positive	can, may, could, might, dare	will, would, should, shall	must, ought to, need, has/had to
negative	needn't, doesn't/didn't need to/have to	won't, wouldn't, shouldn't, isn't/wasn't to	mustn't, oughtn't to, can't, couldn't, mayn't, mightn't, hasn't/hadn't to

	Low politeness		Median politeness		High politeness	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
positive	315		518		168	
negative	4		60		57	
total	319	0.68%	578	1.23%	225	0.48%

The average modal verb use is 2.40% for the combined speeches, which is suitable for speech (Wang, 2010) because modal verbs are easy for listeners or audiences to comprehend and identify with. The listeners have no time to revise and

to think about the words of speakers so simple sentences and the use of modal verbs is an appropriate technique for persuading and expression inner feeling. For instance:

...but in the future, my dreams and aspirations would be for Thailand's revenue to come from everything that is from Thailand.

...those people who are very small today, they will be big in the future and they will be the people standing here speaking and most people will listen.

Personal pronouns

Personal Pronoun		Number
First person	I (me)	1,295
	We (us)	1,496
Second person	You (you)	1,133
Third person	He (him)	43
	She (her)	9
	It (it)	471
	They (them)	354
Total		4,801

From the table, the results show that first-person pronouns are the most frequently used in the combined speeches. Jack Ma always referred to his life, his past, his experiences, his business, and his goals, so the key part of the speeches is from a business context. It is also the reason why the pronoun "we" occurs most regularly in the speeches because he always groups his teams and SMEs with himself. Furthermore, Saj (2012) states that personal pronouns make a link between the listeners and speaker; it also shows the interpersonal function in the language. "So", "I" and "we" will close the distance of the speaker and the listeners regardless of their status, their nationality, or their profession. This technique creates a good relationship and encourages the listeners to feel as though they are connected to the speech. When listeners feel good or respectful about his speech or words, they will believe and trust in his persuasion. The following sentences illustrate this: *We will continue to promote free trade. We will continue to promote globalization.*

Text structure

Focusing on the move of the speech, language in the spoken text is linked to the situation or his status at the present time. Ma always compares his life in the past and the present. He walks into the next step of his goal, which is to promote and

develop the Alibaba Group. Ma has organized most of his speeches coherently and appropriately for the audience. He refers to his experiences or what he has had to face before with many situations in the past and then gives more suitable examples supporting the concept of the new age of capitalism for the new generation. Furthermore, the genre of the speeches is informative and covers many different contexts including the economic, politic, and educational spheres.

Furthermore, gestures and pauses are expressed in the selected speeches. It appears that silent pauses can speak louder than words. Therefore, pauses can be analyzed in various ways. In the speeches, he pauses for 3–5 seconds to breathe or to recall one of his memories; he would also pause to accept the appreciation from the audience when they applauded or stood to appreciate his powerful words. Another technique he employed was in his behavior as his calm and confident demeanor, as well as his discourse and language use, are appropriate in formal speech. He also offered warming smiles and laughed out loud with the audience and he always looked at his audiences to draw them in.

2. Discursive Analysis

Technological development and globalization

The main feature of new capitalism is technology and innovation as it creates the new economic system and new language is also produced. In Ma's speeches, he always mentions the significance of technology and globalization between people worldwide. One interesting point to note in his speeches is the advantage of the Internet for making money and running businesses. For example, he said: "...most people who were born in the 1980s, have made their business based on technology-based innovation...; Today, we are using mobile phones, we are not using computers. Computers are very complicated." Therefore, some activities in globalization can be done successfully based on the advancements in technology. It also leads to economic growth.

Free market and competition

The free market is promoted to answer the freedom of selling products and services of suppliers. The scope of the free market includes competition and free of compulsion. Jack Ma is a businessman who is a role model for promoting the free market and free trade, which is highlighted in his words: "I'm a strong believer of free trade...; ...we will continue to promote free trade...; ...we believe in free trade...; ...we believe in improving trade activities." Furthermore, the competition between the

suppliers also shown in some parts of the speeches, such as: “*...it's like the year 2003 when we just a brick even we started to compete with eBay, you're small it's difficult for you to compete locally.*”

The deregulation of the government is one of the main terms for free trade as capitalists believe that restricting trade is not the right thing to do (Bernanke, 2007). To illustrate this, Jack Ma mentions the role of the government in the economic sphere: “*I think, as business people like us, we have to tell the government about our confidence and why we believe the future's better and the government should work with us and listen to us.*”

Profit Motive

All of the operations of businesses are launched to make money and gain an advantage. It is the basic concept that everyone knows and tries to gain as much profit as they can. The competition and development of business tactics have been produced for benefit and interest. It can be seen in the following: “*Alibaba you know opened the sesame for the other people to benefit to take advantage of the Treasury. So, we think Alibaba means 'Open Sesame Online.' There are so many treasures.*”

The discursive dimension covers language use and the discourse of new capitalism that occurs in the selected speeches. Language is used purposely because Jack Ma wants to show his ideology and goals through his words. There are three points of new capitalism that were highlighted, including the advancement of technology, the free market, and fair competition without restriction of government, as well as the profit motive.

3. Social Analysis

In Jack Ma's selected speeches, contradictions between new capitalism's concept and practices in reality were accentuated; there are some specific points that reflect the results of new capitalism in the society. Fair competition cannot exist completely in practice because there are many factors for business achievement, such as knowledge, marketing plans, business tactics, and financial support. This was illustrated in this statement: “*...rich companies are richer, big companies are bigger and small companies, small countries, and SMEs are in trouble.*” In the new period of capitalist society, it cannot be ignored that there are two classes of people including the capitalist class (owner of means of production) and the working class (labor). The distance between the poor and the rich cannot be solved. Both large

companies and small companies have different financial support, market access, and so on. These conditions link to the issues of fair competition. In a contemporary capitalist society, small businesses are heavily affected indirectly because consumers almost always choose goods and services based on their demands and their decisions are made based on many factors, such as brand name, quality, pricing, reputation, accessibility, and packaging.

Jack Ma has always claimed that his business will help promote the benefits for small businesses as well as the working class. This is backed by a number of statements from the selected speeches: (1) ...*Alibaba can help small businesses and young people*; (2) ...*we are interested in changing and improving the world, instead of making money. Money does not advance humanity*; and (3) ...*China's market is one of the biggest and most powerful markets in the world, where Thailand will gain greatly from accessing China's market*. However, his words and practices are sometimes contrastive so that his company will gain a lot of interest and have an advantage over small countries and businesses.

It cannot be stated that Alibaba is the sole cause of the bankruptcy of many small businesses in China as there are a number of factors why small businesses are bankrupt. However, as a giant corporation, Alibaba is one of the contributing factors. In addition, there are many counties where fair competition has never existed. In Thailand, for example, giant retail businesses and groceries stores such as Big C, Lotus, and Seven-Eleven have destroyed small retail business throughout the country (Muangpongsa, 2014).

Research Discussion

Language use and the styles of Jack Ma's selected speeches were analyzed by the three-dimensional model by Norman Fairclough. The features of Jack Ma's speech can be summarized as follows. First, he uses relatively easy words and simple sentences. Colloquial language is a common technique that most speakers use because it is easy to understand and reflect any messages. Nominalization is used since it is helpful to eliminate unnecessary information. Modal verbs are used to convince audiences appropriately. First person pronouns (in this case, "I" and "We") help shorten the distance between listeners and the speaker and sometimes to highlight the power of the speaker. Furthermore, internal organization and coherence of the text are significant aspects that illustrate the purpose of the speech.

It should be noted that the language of new capitalism has been a primary concern in this study; therefore, some features of new capitalism can be seen through the language use of Jack Ma, such as advances in technology and innovation, free trade and competition, deregulation of the government, and other interests. However, in a modern capitalist society, some key goals of new capitalism cannot be put into practice. Jack Ma regularly discusses boosting small business but big companies always gain more benefit over small business because of a number of factors and conditions. Therefore, monopoly from an economic context still exists because the giant groups have more power to manipulate the growth and direction of the economy, leaving many small businesses and the working class in financial trouble.

Research Suggestions

This study contains references for the researchers who pay attention to critical discourse analysis in the linguistic field. Researchers who are interested in speech analysis using CDA will be able to expand their ideas and could possibly integrate the result of this study with other related areas. The language of the new capitalism, in particular, is one of the new trends for an analysis based on the international communication and technological development. This study offers another aspect of CDA studies, which is language and new capitalism as most previous research studies focused on politics, gender equality, and discrimination. Moreover, it shall complement English language learning skills as well as the social world, which can't be separated from the language itself. In addition, there are various scopes of analysis in terms of linguistic features such as metaphor, transitivity, lexical items and so on.

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