

Development of Teaching Materials Using Propaganda Devices to Improve Critical Reading Skills for Thai University Students

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to develop teaching materials using propaganda devices on political news articles from four major news agencies from both the United States of America and the United Kingdom. This research employs the idea of propaganda devices to investigate different kinds of propagandas used in forty political news articles. The result from the study was analyzed using descriptive statistics to find the frequency of each device used in the news articles in order to determine how many types of propagandas were used in the articles and which types are being used more frequently. The result from the research will be applied to the creation of the teaching materials for the Thai university students enrolled in the English major to help improve their critical reading skills. Overall, the result of the study shows that identifying types of propagandas in news articles can be a good tool to help students gain more critical reading skills. Nevertheless, considering the English skill of the students, there will need to be some modification to both the types of news articles in order to fit with the context of Thai students.

Keywords: propaganda devices, propaganda techniques, critical reading, online news.

Introduction

In today's modern world, where almost every corner of the world is connected, the interaction between people and the information has reached its peak. Every day, people have to deal with all kinds of information ranging from easy digesting contents in short advertisements to more controversial pieces of information such as political or economic news. Although printed media had been around for centuries, the spread of the information is incomparable to the amount of information being transferred through the internet through all sorts of media. People no longer need to get out of their homes and seek out the information. On the opposite, all the information is being delivered to them in almost every second at the tips of the fingers.

With the vast amount of information available on the internet, people now are presented with a countless amount of materials that they can choose to engage with. Despite all the diverse materials and endless options for readers, most people still lack the skill that will help them select the pieces of information that are relevant to them as well as the skill to analyze how those pieces of information affect to their lives. Therefore, the skills in both critical reading and thinking are crucial in helping people digest the overwhelming amount of information being communicated through different kinds of media.

In conclusion, the goal of this research was to investigate whether propagandas techniques can be a useful tool for students to improve their critical thinking skills.

Problem of Research

An abundant amount of information available on the internet had changed people's behavior in reading (Liu, 4). Birkerts [1] stated in his research that children who grew up in the digital environment tend to lack the ability in deep reading, as well as the ability to be engaged in a reading activity for an extended period. Bolter [1] stated that "The shift from print to the computer does not mean the end of literacy itself, but the literacy of print, for electronic technology offers us a new kind of book and new ways to write and read (p. 701)." It cannot be argued that people now have a lot more options on what they choose to read in comparison to the pre-internet era. However, these free and infinite options had also shifted the way people perceive what reading should be.

Noble [6] stated in his research that the internet allows people to post any information on the internet, mostly without any regulations over the content they were posting. In other words, there is no guarantee that the open-source information found on the internet will contain no erroneous data or misinformation.

The result from the research "Metacognitive Online Reading Strategies among Thai EFL University Students" by Pookcharoen [9] showed that from the 111 Thai EFL students in a large university around suburban Bangkok area, many of them were having a problem concerning text evaluation. Many were finding it difficult to evaluate the reliability of the text they were reading. Critical thinking skill is, therefore, one of the crucial skills that students need to develop.

In the book titled “The Thinker’s Guide for Conscientious Citizen on How to Detect Media Bias & Propaganda in National and World News” by Paul and Elder [8] the researcher suggested that in order to detect propagandas in the news, people need to become critical consumers of news; possessing different critical thinking skills to help them analyze and interpret the news.

Propagandas are, therefore, considered one of the methods that have been used in communication throughout the history of humanity. Especially in this modern age of the internet where propagandas are being used in the most subtle ways. “The internet and social media have significantly increased the dissemination of propaganda, thus it is especially important to understand what propaganda is and what its capacities are” [3]. One can say that propagandas adopt several techniques to accomplish their goal in persuading people’s opinion towards specific subjects.

This research was aimed at investigating the types of propaganda used in current media and use the results in the development of the teaching materials for Critical Reading Classes for the English Major students at Rajamangala University of Technology Isaan, Khon Kaen Campus.

Research Focus

The focus of this research was to investigate the different kinds of propaganda techniques used in online news. The scope of the study was the news relating to the Korean Peninsula before the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the United States of America’s signatories for a new and peaceful relation. The news articles used within this research were taken from the following four news sources: Daily Mail, Fox, BBC, and Associated Press News.

As for the different types of propaganda that were being explored in the research, This research refers to the seven propaganda devices according to Miller [5] which listed the following devices: 1) The Name – Calling Device, 2) The Glittering Generalities Device, 3) The Transfer Device, 4) The Testimonial Device, 5) The Plain Folks Device, 6) The Card Stacking Device, and 7) The Bandwagon Device. Uudelepp [10] provided concise characteristics for each of the devices as follows:

- 1) Name Calling Device – ad hominem and/or ridiculing
- 2) Glittering Generalities Device – selecting of emotionally appealing words, selecting of emotionally appealing words, and/or call for altruism
- 3) Transfer Device – referring to accepted symbols and/or referring to accepted professions
- 4) Testimonial Device – emphasizing on authority and/or emphasizing on celebrity
- 5) Plain Folks Device – image based on the target audience and/or behavior based on the target audience
- 6) Band wagon Device – the creation of confident image and/or utilization of absolutes
- 7) Card Stacking Device – false inductivity, false causality, oversimplification, and/or manipulating with numbers

For this research, the researchers used the seven propaganda devices to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are the techniques of propaganda used in online news?
- 2) Which are propaganda techniques frequently used in online political news?

Methodology of Research

This research employs a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative for both the data collection and the analysis of the data. The researcher analyzed propaganda techniques through the use of qualitative analysis by referring to the seven propaganda devices by Miller [5] to help identify the different kinds of devices used within the political news within the Korean Peninsula ranging from 2017-2018 to identify the frequency of each of the techniques used for these political campaigns.

The news articles used within this research were chosen through purposive sampling technique [7] from four different news agencies. The news agencies were selected by choosing four popular agencies on both the United States and the United Kingdom side to avoid that bias that each country might have embedded in their reporting and information.

The content for each of the news piece will be analyzed using Miller’s [5] propaganda devices to detect all the hidden tools. The data was collected and ranked in terms of the frequency for each type of device. The result was presented in line graphs form.

Results of Research

The results from the study aimed at addressing the two research questions: 1) What are the techniques of propaganda used in online news? and 2) Which are propaganda techniques frequently used in online political news?

The following are the results from identifying the seven propaganda devices on forty news articles by four news agencies on the political news within the Korean Peninsula. Each of the following tables presents the information on the frequency for each of the devices used per each news article.

Table 1: Percentage of Propaganda Devices Used in Daily Mail News Articles

Devices	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Testimonial Device	32	28.07%	28.07%
Glittering Generality Device	29	25.44%	53.51%
Name Calling Device	24	21.05%	74.56%
Band Wagon Device	20	17.54%	92.10%
Transfer Device	4	3.51%	95.61%
Card Stacking Device	4	3.51%	99.12%
Plain Folks Device	1	0.88%	100.00%
Total	114	100.00%	

From the analysis of the news articles published by Daily Mail, The United Kingdom news agency, the result shows that all seven types of propaganda devices were used 114 times. Testimonial Device was the most frequently used device by Daily Mail in the selected ten news articles with the frequency of n = 32 (28.07%). Plain Folks Device was the least used device by Daily Mail in the selected ten news articles with the frequency of n = 1 (0.88%).

Table 2: Percentage of Propaganda Devices Used in BBC News Articles

Devices	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Glittering Generality Device	33	50.00%	50.00%
Card Stacking Device	16	24.24%	74.24%
Band Wagon Device	9	13.64%	87.88%
Name Calling Device	6	9.09%	96.97%
Transfer Device	1	1.52%	98.49%
Testimonial Device	1	1.52%	100.00%
Plain Folks Device	0	0.00%	100.00%
Total	66	100.00%	

From the analysis of the news articles published by BBC, The United Kingdom news agency, the result shows that six types of propaganda devices were used 66 times. Glittering Generality Device was the most frequently used device by BBC in the selected ten news articles with the frequency of n = 33 (50%). BBC did not use plain Folks Device in any of the news articles.

Table 3: Percentage of Propaganda Devices Used in FOX News Articles

Devices	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Testimonial Device	24	32.43%	32.43%
Glittering Generality Device	20	27.03%	59.46%
Name Calling Device	13	17.57%	77.03%
Transfer Device	11	14.86%	91.89%
Band Wagon Device	4	5.41%	97.30%
Card Stacking Device	2	2.70%	100.00%
Plain Folks Device	0	0.00%	100.00%
Total	74	100.00%	

From the analysis of the news articles published by Fox News, The United States news agency, the result shows that all six types of propaganda devices were used 74 times. Glittering Generality Device was the most frequently used device by Fox News in the selected ten news articles with the frequency of n = 24 (32.43%). Fox News did not use plain Folks Device in any of the news articles.

Table 4: Percentage of Propaganda Devices Used in AP News Articles

Devices	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Glittering Generality Device	37	28.24%	28.24%
Testimonial Device	35	26.72%	54.96%
Name Calling Device	22	16.79%	71.76%
Transfer Device	19	14.50%	86.26%
Band Wagon Device	10	7.63%	93.89%
Plain Folks Device	4	3.05%	96.94%
Card Stacking Device	4	3.05%	100.00%
Total	131	100.00%	

From the analysis of the news articles published by AP, The United States news agency, the result shows that all seven types of propaganda devices were used 131 times. Glittering Generality Device was the most frequently used device by AP in the selected ten news articles with the frequency of n = 37 (28.24%). Plain Folks Device and Card Stacking Device were the least used devices by AP in the selected ten news articles with the same frequency of n = 4 (3.05%).

In summary, all the propaganda devices were used by all the news agencies except Plain Folk Device, which was not used by either BBC or Fox News.

The total frequencies of the propaganda devices used with all the forty news articles are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: Frequency for Each Type of Propaganda Devices Used in All the News Articles.

Propaganda Devices	Frequency	Percent
Glittering Generality Device	119	29.75%
Testimonial Device	92	24.25%
Name calling Device	65	17.25%
Band wagon Device	43	10.75%
Transfer device	35	8.75%
Card stacking Device	26	6.5%
Plain Folks Device	5	2.25%
Total	385	99.5% (≈100%)

The overall analysis of the news articles published by all the news agencies shows that propaganda devices were used 385 times in the forty articles by four news agencies. Out of the seven propaganda devices that were used, Glittering Generality Device was the most frequently used device by the selected four news agencies with the frequency of $n = 119$ (29.75%). Plain Folks Device was the least used device by the news agencies with the same frequency of $n = 5$ (2.25%).

Discussion

To identify propagandas within news articles, the researchers adopted the following methods suggested by Jowett, G. S., & O'donnell, V. (2018) in their research. It can be noted in the research that out of the 40 news articles that were chosen randomly by the selected news agency shows that three devices were used less than 10 percent while two of the devices were used more than 20 percent.

From the research, the use of Miller's framework did help identify the propagandas used within the articles without many difficulties. One of the main problems that the researchers encounter while experimenting was that many of the political news tend to use political/economical context specific words which can become an obstacle that prevents Thai students in detecting the propagandas since identifying the propagandas also requires the understanding of the article as a whole.

The researcher can try to select the simplified version of the news to use as teaching materials if those are available. However, one problem with simplified materials was that the original intentions of the writers, as well as some of the devices that were used in the articles, might also no longer be there through the process of simplification.

Some of the devices rely heavily on the word choice for the articles. Glittering Generality Devices, for instance, rely on the selection of emotionally appealing words to be used in the article to create the glittering effect. However, if some of those emotional words were to be simplified, or the sentence was restructured for easier understanding, one can assume that the device itself will no longer be there, or it may be more difficult to detect.

Another problem that could hinder that Thai students in completing the assignment was the understanding of the political context of the countries mentioned within the news.

This had proven to be the problem even amongst the researchers. Political news articles often refer to specific incidents in the past or specific characters that might be important in understanding the story behind the articles.

Teachers need to keep this problem in mind while creating the teaching materials for students. Thai students have always had a problem understanding general English, adding the context that is students have no understanding off can potentially lead to the failure in teaching.

Recommendations from the researchers was to select the materials that students do not need to do extra research in order to understand the back story, but can just focus on looking up some of the words that they do not understand and identifying the devices that are being used in the articles. For instance, for political news, the articles should be about Thai politics where all students have at least the minimal understanding of the situation without extra research.

This research focuses on the political news, however, other types of news also employs propaganda devices in their articles. It might be possible to find other articles to be used for the classes instead of limiting the materials to political articles. Advertisement is also another source of materials that employs the use of propagandas devices.

Future research might have to do with identifying news or article or other genre that employs similar devices as political news and can be understood within the context that students understand.

In addition, in developing the teaching materials, using only the top four propaganda devices that were employed the most often the news agencies should be sufficient enough as oppose to including all the seven devices. This will help reduce the limitation of the resources since teachers do not have the need to identify the news articles that contain all the seven devices, but only identifying the ones that contains the four devices.

Conclusions

The result from the result from the study shows that propaganda devices prove to be useful tools in helping students develop their critical reading skills. However, due to some limitation in terms of the difficulty of the text on both the vocabulary, grammar, and the unfamiliar context of the story, it would be more beneficial to choose the materials that will be eliminate all the limitations and while allowing students to focus on identifying all the devices in the articles.

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