



Silver Spoon by BTS: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

BTS has become a global phenomenon not only because of the different genres of their music, but for the messages conveyed in their lyrics and the cultural representation of Korean culture. This article presents an analysis of a BTS' song that addresses a social difficulty based on the struggle faced by young Koreans related to education. Another aspect that makes this band's music relevant is the complexity of their lyrics by using their mother tongue Korean and English in order to convey a message and target a broad audience when mixing both languages. The analysis of the song is anchored in critical discourse analysis following Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The results of the analysis demonstrate how flexible language use illustrates young Koreans' views on society and more specifically in education. In order to understand a social problem in their country, this paper analyses how the artist used language to illustrate and give voice to the generation they represent.

Keywords: cultural representation, social practices linguistic features, k-pop, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Korean culture has gained significant attention worldwide in the last decade due to the music bands, make up brands, tv shows, etcetera. The Korean music industry has been particularly influential for the representation of the country around the globe as young ambassadors of ONU and UNICEF and honored guests in the White House to discuss Asian hate. There is one group in particular, who will be describe later and who has accomplished to break the language barrier that may have stopped the Korean wave to spread in the past.

To begin with this article, the main objective of this work is to analyze the linguistic social references presented in the song "Silver Spoon" to demonstrate how BTS portray the values of mainstream Korean society. This song was chosen since it provides an idea of what the educational system, in the prior mentioned country, has denoted for the youngsters. This article presents an analysis of a song from one of the most popular bands in the K-pop industry nowadays. Continuously, the literature related to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be presented to understand Fairclough's model selected for the analysis of the song with my discussions and what a few authors have said related to my interpretations. Finally, my last comments will be presented in order to conclude with this article.

- The use of music to represent a social problem.
- BTS as a social phenomenon not only in music.

1.1 Background

BTS stands for *Bang Tan Sonyeondan* in Korean, and it is the name of a K-pop band that has reached a worldwide recognition for their popularity and the messages transmitted through their songs. BTS is formed by seven members who started the band in 2010 and debuted in 2013 in South Korea. Even if they are part of the K-pop genre, their music varies in melody and some of the songs are intended to raise awareness about mental health and social issues. These topics have been well received by their fans given their relevance in contemporary societies around the world, and particularly in Korea.

The band has won several awards and has gained recognition that has positioned them at the same level of artists such as Michael Jackson, The Beatles given the millions of fans and the massive sells of records and shows performed. Due to their popularity among young people, the BTS members became ambassadors of the “Love Myself” campaign for UNICEF, joined the United Nations as ambassadors of the youth and were invited to the White House to discuss Asian hate. These recognitions have been granted because of the band’s goal to demonstrate their discomfort of in social problems as well as mental health awareness using their music to make a statement in the world.

BTS’ discography demonstrates what type of message they want to deliver to their listeners. This goal has been influenced by their experiences on stage and the problems people their age, are facing. The beginning of their career was marked by the pressure that students in Korean had in education, believing that not having what is consider “good grades” will not allow them to aspire to a good job or a good social status. The song chose to conduct the analysis presented in this paper is about how the youth is treated by older generations. This song was released in 2015 in the album called “The most beautiful moment in life: pt. 2” when most of the members related to the students’ population in the stress implied in the nation examination tests for entering to a university. I now turn to previous research related to the group in the area of discourse analysis.

2. Literature review

Previous research has been conducted on BTS from the discourse analysis perspective. Hasanah et al. (2019) provided a CDA on the band leader, Kim Namjoon’s speech at the ONU assembly in which the authors decided to use Halliday theory of Systemic Functional Grammar to discover language, ideology, and power in his words. On the other hand, Kim (2021) created a multimodal discourse analysis related to Korean cultural formation and non-western and peripheral societies pertaining the global cultural sphere. Most studies are centered on the importance of the group, the wave of Korean pop (K-pop) and how they have achieved great popularity and recognition not only in the music community but also in society (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Cho, 2011; Cho & Maliangkay, 2015; Jin, 2016; Cho, 2018; Benjamin, 2019). Although this research introduces a general idea of the K-pop wave and their legacy in the music industry, it is important to consider BTS in particular because of the social and economic representation they provide to their country. Therefore, the analysis presented in this paper draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore one particular song that reflects the band’s main message and their use of language to describe a social issue. The next section offers an overview of CDA, the concepts related as well as the foundations of it.

2.1 Critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged in the late 1980s based on the work of Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk et al. Due to its importance in discourse analysis, it has been implemented in several research focusing on the linguistic aspects of language in society. CDA affirms that discourse is socially fundamental as well as socially conditioned. Therefore, the foundations of discourse are related to socio-theoretical practices, as well as the use of discourse in society. So, the main goal of CDA is to discover the links between language use and social practice (Fairclough, 2013).

CDA is also related to social movements, their implications in discourse and how they have change according to ideologies, such as feminism, globalization studies, etc. Since language is the means of communication it is important to remember that the main focus of language study is what it tells about society, because of that, structure of society should be considered when focusing on the insights of its use. Discursive practices are an essential part of social interactions which as Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) explain, contribute to the formation of a social world, which includes social identities and social relations. Because of discursive practices, social and cultural production varieties take place.

Some characteristics related to CDA are presented by Amoussou and Allagbe (2018) in their research. The first one is related to the inter and multidisciplinary scope of the approach, since it can be used in several areas and for different purposes as long as the goal of the relationship between society and culture is achieved. The second relays in the relations of power, dominance and inequality produced by certain social groups through the types of speech. Finally, CDA is committed to exploring and exposing the implicit and hidden treats within discourse. Furthermore, CDA provides different frameworks which have helped in approaching the goals from different authors' perspectives. The section below outlines the methodology used to conduct the analysis of the song.

3. Methodology

In order to analyze the song "Silver Spoon", Fairclough's three-dimensional model has been selected. This model is considered to be a useful tool to answer the proposed research questions for this article:

- What are the social practices of Korean society represented in the song?
- How is Korean culture portrayed in the song? What is the interpretation of Korean culture provided in the song?

3.1. Fairclough three-dimensional model

The discourse model developed by Fairclough is framed in a theory of ideological processes in society. In addition, for discourse is seen in terms of processes of hegemony and changes in power. It is central for this approach that discourse is an important form of social practice which both reproduces and changes knowledge, identities and social relations including power relations, and at the same time is also shaped by other social practices and structures. Therefore, text analysis alone is not sufficient for discourse analysis, as it does not shed light on the links between texts and societal and cultural processes and structures (Fairclough, 1989). The following image illustrates the three dimensions developed by Fairclough:

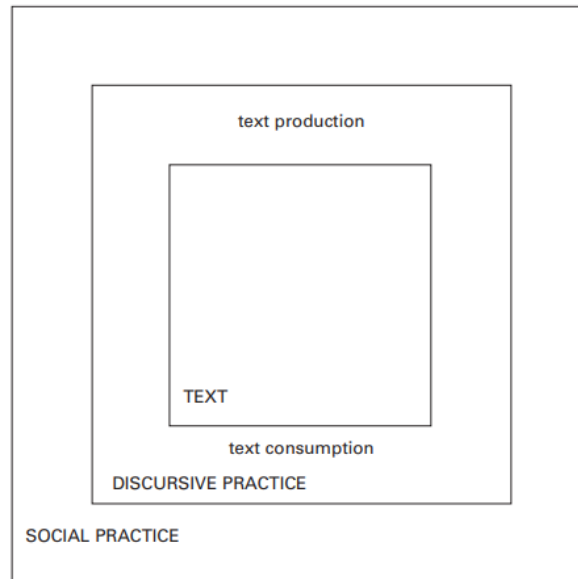


Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis (1992)

The general purpose of the three-dimensional model is, then, to provide an analytical framework for discourse analysis. The model is based, and promotes the principle that texts can never be understood or analyzed in isolation they can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts and in relation to the social context (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Fairclough's model comprises three levels represented by discourse and its different presentations and use; these features are explained below:

- Text Analysis

The first stage of the model focuses on the linguistic features and organization of discourse occurrences. Fairclough (2013) states that this section is related to the formalities of pure text since representation of the speaker's world is considered to be presented through vocabulary.

- Discursive Practice

The second dimension is discourse as something that is produced, circulated, distributed, consumed in society. It relates the text and interaction and consider the product as a referendum of interpretation (Fairclough, 2013). These characteristics allow to start creating meaning to what is produced by speakers, and how text helps to produce speech.

- Social Practice

The third dimension relates text with discourse and also social meaning to the use of speech. Fairclough (2013) declares that social construction is important to understand discourse since context, ideologies, traditions, and customs are part of giving meaning.

3.2 Steps for the analysis

In order to analyze data, I first analyzed other examples in which Fairclough's approach was used and how it was developed. I decided to selected parts of the song that could exemplified each section of the model in order to discuss the relationship and meaning of the lyrics and the dimensions of the approach. Additionally, to be able to comprehend the message conveyed in the song and what the artists intended to portray, I selected a reliable source to translate the

lyrics of the song. As mentioned in the background section, BTS mostly sings mixing Korean and English (with a predominance on their mother tongue Korean), because of that I consider necessary to translate the lyrics for this article. In the next section I will provide the analysis and discussions of the song.

4. Discussion and analysis

In this section I will present the data analysis elaborated based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model. This section intends to answer the research questions proposed at the beginning of this article in order to present of the Korean culture is represented in BTS's music or in this case a song. To deliver a clear discussion I consider necessary to state the general meaning of the song. In this case, the lyrics present a discomfort of adolescence who are constantly triggered by the past generation about how easy things like education, living expenses, etcetera, are for them. Thus, adolescents complain that it is not the case and instead, life in their country is more difficult than what it used to be. Mentioned that, I will continue with the first section of the analysis.

4.1 *"The generation has given up"*

In this section I will analyze the first feature of Fairclough's model which is related to text. In order to analyze this section, I will categorize the most common grammar structures used in this song and interpret what is the meaning of its use. As part of the linguistic features, each word being used in discourse involves a representation or characterization according to its intended use.

Throughout the song there are two grammar tenses presented constantly, past simple, and present perfect. The first tense tells us about an action that already happened and the second represents something that started in the past and continues in the present. Based on this, the song states actions that already happened for example, "My teachers **were** born with it all", when there is this interpretation of what past generations used to have. Present perfect states a continuous state of the new generation, for example when BTS states "Our generation **has had** it hard" is how they expressed that this is something that has been around them for a period of time. The use of this type of sentence helps to provide the difference between generations that is being constantly compared in the song.

Additionally, negatives are utilized in order to mark limitations in what adolescence cannot do anymore or are not allowed to do. Modal verbs are also part of the negation in the song as a form to interpret what this generation is able to do. Another utterance in the text is the use of the suffix "**-er**" in a few adjectives to increase the emphasis on the word in which is being used, for example, "**try harder**". This denotes an intention in exaggeration in certain words to create the notion of not being enough. In general, these are the structures that are constantly repeated throughout the lyrics which can help in the next section to understand its relation when being part of a larger structure.

4.2 *"Try harder"*

In this section I will establish the discussion related to the combination of text and its use in the Korean society to create a reasonable meaning to the lyrics of the song and what may represent for listeners. In this section I selected excerpts of the song that could be used in social interaction and that could give us an idea of the intention of the song.

Initially, the sentence "**Our generation has had it hard**" restates the idea of comparing the past with the future and affirms that it is difficult for the adolescents nowadays. As

described in Shin & Koh (2005) the Korean education is quite strict and parents do everything possible to help their children study. However, the song also mentions the pressure they receive if they are considered to not study hard enough. The part that declares: **“stop going on about effort and more effort”** exemplifies how they are constantly triggered by the word effort to have it as a pillar in their everyday performance. Another example says **“the generation that's given up”** which I consider expresses that sometimes their effort is not enough and what the public in general observes is that they do not care because the best results are now showing.

In order to reaffirm that the sentence providing examples of interaction are related to education, I will conclude this section with the following sentence **“My teachers were born with it all”**. This statement makes me believe that the constant complaining about the adolescents' lack of effort does not only come from the parents but teachers as well. In the end, youngsters are surrounded by critiques which could be noted in this excerpt of the song presented by BTS. I consider that this song marks a valuable view of Korean culture in education focus on this new generations.

4.3 *“My legs are shorter, so how do you expect me to keep up?”*

In this section I will establish how the song represents a social ideology and the struggles young citizens face in the Korean society. Continuing with what has been presented before, the following excerpts of the song are more related to the context in which is being used and the representation of certain idioms that are also related to the culture of the country.

For this part of the analysis, I decided to use a longer section of the song, since I consider it helps me to exemplify this section better. The first statement is the next, **“I have crow-tit legs, and you have stork's legs”**. This sentence uses these two animals to refer to how fast or how long they have walked through life and that the new generation is just learning and exploring while the past generation has already lived. Continuing with this, the next examples mention the following **“their legs are worth a million bucks”**, in here I believe that money is another form to see time, since their legs are longer, have gone through much, that is why they have more value. Furthermore, the song continues with the following **“My legs are shorter, so how do you expect me to keep up”**, in here it reminds us that they are not as experienced as the past generation, so they are not able to do as much as they did.

All through the song, we can see how there is a constant representation of how adolescents feel in Korea related to what is expected from them, from society, the school, and their parents. As Shin and Koh (2005) elaborated, education in Korean culture is a system that concerns the whole country, as in most places, but the pressure put in this society is sometimes bigger than others. The final excerpt shows how young people's situation is seen according to the ones who belong to the past generation, **“They call me silver spoon”**. This phrase is similar to saying that you have everything you need but you do not take advantage of it. Which I consider it perfectly reflects the fact that past generations are not conceiving how difficult it is for new generations to study and make a living in Korea, but they only see what they did not have in their time.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that there is much to say about a society that is growing and has achieved more interest in foreigners in the past years. I also consider the importance of sociocultural knowledge to understand representation of culture. For this article I had to read other authors who investigated the topic of education in Korea in order to understand what aspect of culture the song was representing. In this case, all the influence of Korean culture through media may infer our view of this culture since several perspectives about the same topic are

involved in the representation. I believe necessary to inform ourselves from the people who really intends to present their country in the most realistic form. The big role of BTS in representing a complete society and using their power to spread other messages is what I believe has made them the band they are now and has given them the acknowledge of a worldwide public.

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