"Jia you (Add oil, let's go!)": A Speech's Critical Discourse Analysis on the Use of Metaphors to Empower the Asian Community Against Hate Amid Covid-19

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Abstract

Following Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this paper presents a critical discourse analysis of the speech "We are GOLDEN" delivered at a Stop Asian Hate rally held in the U.S. in 2021.The analysis focuses on the use of adjectives and metaphors at the text, discursive practice and social practice levels, which demonstrate the speaker's strong criticism and opposition to violence, systemic racism, hegemony, and the power of white supremacy that became evermore present amid COVID-19. The results unveil the use of cultural and historical intertextuality from a resilient perspective to empower the Asian American and Pacific Islander community to promote social change and stand against hate.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, metaphors, Asian-hate, COVID-19, USA.

1. Introduction

Racism and the marginalization of some ethnic groups have been consistent throughout the world's history, but in particular in the United States with the so-called *White Supremacy* phenomenon. Fredrickson (1982) explains that it positions "attitudes, ideologies, and policies associated with the rise of blatant forms of white or European dominance over nonwhite populations" (p. xi). Some of the greatest racist demonstrations date back early in history with the slavery and segregation of the African-American community (Marks, 1987). Nevertheless, in recent times, racism had a significant peak during the year 2020 after the COVID-19 was firstly reported in Wuhan, China. Because of this, almost immediately after the news were shared, a wave of racism and hate acts surged that greatly impacted the Asian community, not only in the United States, but also at a worldwide scale (Putri & Irawan, 2022). As a response to this wave of Asian hate, and the accumulated fear of the virus that was leading to a general sentiment of anger, the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community based in the USA, began a movement of nation-wide rallies known as *Stand Against Hate Rally* to protest against the attacks suffered by members of the Asian community. These rallies became an outlet not only to expose the bullying, but they were also a vehicle to fight back and demand racial equality. Among many advocates,

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Alice Tsui participated as a speaker during the rally held in Chinatown, in New York city in March 2021. Besides being filled with emotions, her speech displays symbolic linguistic devices, such as metaphors in an attempt to confront the oppressors and empower her fellow members of the AAPI community.

> • Racism had a significant peak during the year 2020 after the COVID-19 was firstly reported.
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> • The COVID-19 pandemic not only harmed global health, but also served as a catalyst for a range of socioracial problems to grow.
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> • The *Stand Against Hate Rally*, organized by the AAPI community, was a vehicle to fight back and demand racial equality.
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> • Alice Tsui's speech *We are GOLDEN* displays symbolic linguistic devices, such as metaphors to confront the oppressors and empower her community.

This article's main objective is to analyze how linguistic metaphors are used in Alice Tsui's speech titled "We are GOLDEN" to express harsher truths regarding political views, and the speaker's previous experiences with hate, racist comments and actions. In addition, this study aims to explore how the metaphors included empower the AAPI community to stand together against racism. This speech was chosen because it gives an idea of Asian hate incidents that the community faces on a regular basis and how these acts have caused resistance to the oppression by defending their rights and beliefs. With this in mind, this article begins by discussing previous literature addressing Discourse Analysis (DA) studies about Asian-hate. Literature about Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is also discussed to better understand Fairclough's three-dimensional framework used for the analysis of the speech, followed by the discussion of the data. Finally, the conclusion focuses on the implications of the findings.

1.1 *Background of the speaker*

According to the website *alicetsui.com* created by Alice Tsui 徐晓兰 (pronounced \tɕʰɥˑɑɪ\). She is a pianist scholar and music educator born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. Identifying herself as Asian American/Chinese American, Tsui is the founding music teacher and arts coordinator at PS 532 New Bridges Elementary. She has a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance and an MA in Music Education degree by New York University (NYU), and is currently pursuing a PhD in Music Education at Boston University.

During her career as a musician, Tsui has worked in the public education system. She is also a Grammy Finalist music educator who promotes the freedom of expression through music. With her background as a public-school educator, and as a member of the AAPI community, she is a passionate advocate of Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist (ABAR) public music education and has exercised her activism participating as a speaker at rallies such as the Stop Asian Hate rally in New York.

2. Literature review

Racist remarks and acts of hate towards the AAPI community have been constant in the United States, showing a prominent augmentation ever since the outbreak of the COVID-19. There is a significant body of research focusing on diverse aspects of linguistic features related to Asian hate. The most prominent studies analyze the discourse used either by famous and influential individuals, or by the general public to express their negative sentiment towards AAPIs (Yeh, 2021; Wang & Santos, 2022; Nghiem & Morstatter, 2022; Zheng & Zompetti, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020). For example, Zheng and Zompetti (2023) write about how Donald Trump's blame

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on China through his social media served as a snowball effect on blatant xenophobia, racism and violence towards the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community.

Other articles focus on the effects that anti-Asian discrimination has had in the AAPI community not only during the COVID-19 outbreak, but also to the present time. These emphasize societal changes that have sharply increased anti-Asian hate crimes, particularly in the USA. An example includes people refusing to receive medical care by Asian health providers (He et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2020; Han et al., 2023; Lee, 2021). As a result of the consistent marginalization of AAPIs, Wu et al. (2020) studied the impact that the pandemic had in Asians' mental health to raise awareness on the importance to tackle hate, discrimination and violence. In particular, research utilizing critical discourse analyses has focused on exploring written and oral texts, as well as visuals to analyze the negative aspects of how discourse has been used, changed and/or modified through racists remarks (Wu & Wall, 2021; Hu et al., 2024; Chaufan & Hemsing, 2023; Wang & Catalano, 2023). Nevertheless, there is a lack of CDA research from a more optimistic perspective. In this line, we have Putri & Irawan (2022) who explored the use of discourse topics and strategies that the AAPI community include in their discourse while defending themselves against racism.

Since this article aims at analyzing features of discourse, it is pertinent to define the conceptual framework that guided the analysis.

2.1 *Conceptual framework*

2.1.1 *Discourse analysis*

According to Stubbs (1983) discourse is "language above the sentence or above the clause" (p. 1), but it is also considered to refer to language in use. Usually, it is considered to be a process that has to do with language use in social contexts (Candlin, 1997). Fairclough (1992), however, sees discourse as language that is eminently "shaped by relations of power, and invested with ideologies" (p. 8).

In this article, we take these three descriptions to understand that discourse, and therefore discourse analysis, refer to the attempts to study language in use in social contexts, which bear a subjective meaning to the ideologies of the speaker(s). Language that in turn, may be written or spoken, or language that goes beyond utterances and is represented with graphics, gestures, and (isolated) sounds that are understood in a particular situation, by a particular group of people.

2.1.2 *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*

Critical Discourse Analysis is one of several approaches to the study of discourse. Rogers (2011) identifies CDA as a "problem-oriented and transdisciplinary set of theories and methods" (p. 1) that serve as tools to study language from a critical lens. CDA is grounded on the idea that discourse is more than expressing reality, and that it is a way of constructing a certain ideology. Thus, discourse is seen as a social practice that constructs reality, social identities, social structures, and social relations (Fairclough, 1992). Moreover, Jorgensen and Philips (2002) mention that critical discourse analysts see discourse as "a form of social practice which both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices" (p. 61).

Subsequently, in CDA, language-as-discourse is a form of action in two ways: 1) one through which people intend to make a change in the world, and 2) one that is socially and historically situated, which also has a connection with other social aspects. Hence, CDA is often used to research discourse derived from social contexts such as feminism, hegemony, racism, etc.

Simply put, the main focus of CDA is to engage in finding associations between language use and social practice. This is also supported by Van Dijk (2015) who explains that CDA essentially studies the ways in which "social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted" (p. 466). Therefore, its principal objective is to contribute to social change in order to promote more equal power relations in society and in communication.

2.1.3 *Intertextuality*

Jorgensen and Philips (2002) describe intertextuality as "the condition whereby all communicative events draw on earlier events" (p. 73). In other words, when other people's words and phrases are used as a link to prove or reinforce what is being said. Fairclough (2011) emphasizes that intertextuality can be, in the most obvious way, quotations taken from other texts. However, the less obvious forms of intertextuality can be presented in indirect quotes, such as making use of reported speech to rephrase or summarize what someone else has said or written.

2.1.4 *Interdiscursivity*

Interdiscursivity is considered a form of intertextuality, which happens through the merging or articulation of different types of discourse and genres in the same communicative event. These can be identified in two forms of discursive practices: (1) in a creative form, where diverse types of discourse are combined in new and perhaps more complex ways, and (2) in a conventional manner to try and stably preserve the dominant discourse and social order (i.e. following a format that is well known and well received by the target audience) (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002).

3. Methodology

This study followed Fairclough's (1992) CDA framework to analyze the speech *We are golden.* The three-dimensional model is a useful resource to answer the target research questions for this article:

> What is the speaker's sentiment towards the social change post COVID-19 denoting Asian-hate?

> How are metaphors used to empower other members of the AAPI community?

3.1 *Fairclough's CDA three-dimensional model*

Fairclough's three-dimensional model has as central focus the analysis of discourse and how discourse shapes society's ideological standards. This approach allows researchers to concentrate on the signifiers that construct a text, in addition to the particular linguistic choices, format, genre, etc. Figure 1 depicts the three dimensions considered in Fairclough's CDA model, which are known as text, discursive practice, and social practice.
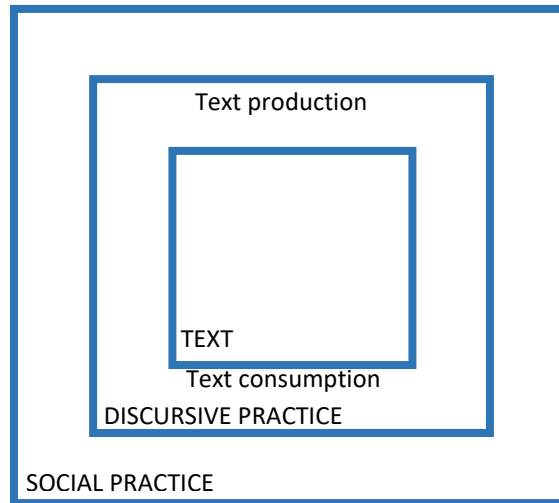
Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional model for Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough (1995, 2012) sees the critical aspect of this analysis to making "visible the interconnectedness of things" (p. 36) (i.e. lexical choices, grammatical structures, pronunciation, etc.) within language. As a result, the main concern of this model is to offer a framework that can organize and separate the analysis of discourse at three different levels, to later identify when and how the intersections of language occur, and what connections are visible to the social context (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002). The three dimensions are therefore described below:

Dimension one: Text

The first step is conducted at a word-level. It focuses on the text as a product, which could be in the form of a speech, written text, images, videos, or a combination of all the aforementioned. This dimension is also acknowledged by Fairclough (1989) as *description* and is defined as "the stage which is concerned with formal properties of text" (p. 26). These encompass linguistic features such as lexical choices (vocabulary wording), language structures (grammar), and text structure (topic, genre, layout). At this level, the analysis is conducted in a more detailed and systematic manner.

Dimension two: Discursive practice

The second step is conducted at a text level. It deals with discourse as the production and consumption of texts in society. Here, the central focus is on the interpretation of the text, the relationship among the discourse, its production, and its consumption. Additionally, as part of the discursive practice, attention should be put towards not only the text's purpose and intertextuality, but also to who is producing the text, and to whom this text is intended for.

Dimension three: Social practice

The third step focuses on the contextualization of the text. It is about the rationale behind the use of a text. The meaning that a text acquires from the standards, ideologies, traditions, culture, and context of society (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002). This dimension is also identified by Fairclough (1992) as "the social matrix of discourse" (p. 237). In particular, this dimension intends to analyze whether the discursive practice and linguistic choices served their purpose of contributing to the maintenance of social behaviors or provoking social change by challenging unequal power relations and positions.

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3.2 Analysis process

To conduct the analysis, I first visited Alice Tsui's website, to access the transcript of her speech. Then, I divided the speech into lines in order to easily identify where each sample was located. I then started to manually analyze the text at a word level, keeping a record of codes in a systematic way (using labels such as: verb, tense, vocabulary, metaphor, etc.). After that, I started to keep a record of the extracts in excel with sections such as dimension, extract, line in text, code, and interpretation. This document helped organize the extracts and count the total number of items found in each dimension.

It is important to mention that I also looked at the whole speech's transcription in an effort to identify the general genre and layout in a more reliable way. In addition, I categorized the samples by dimension in order to discuss those which are relevant to answer both research questions. Therefore, the following section includes the discussion of the data as well as the findings in the same order as in Fairclough's three-dimensional model.

4. Discussion of findings

During the analysis of the data, there were four sections found in the speech that characterize different style and structure of the text: (1) as a poem, (2) sharing the speakers' personal experiences facing racism, (3) a call for action, and (4) the use of affirmations. Each section served a particular purpose, where the speaker organized the way she wanted to address the audience. In general, there were twenty tokens identified at the text level analysis, seven regarding the speaker's discursive practice, and six for social practice, from which only six were linked to metaphorical references. Here, I begin to discuss the main themes following the order in which Fairclough's three-dimensional model is structured in each one. In addition, this section aims to answer the research questions stated at the beginning of the methodology section. The objective is to provide examples of how the APPI community has dealt with hatred, social change, and mental health prior, during, and post COVID-19.

4.1 *"When you looked at my face and shied away from my gaze"*

This first theme makes reference to the poetic structure found within the initial section of the speech. The speaker makes use of a variety of vocabulary words to create rhymes and a stronger meaning of the message to deliver. Taking the title of this section as an example, the words *face* and *gaze* besides sharing a similar pronunciation, word stress and intonation, when they are put together in the phrase *"When you looked at my face and shied away from my gaze,"* it could be interpreted as society's rejection towards individuals from a particular community, in this case everyone with stereotypical Asian features. This phrase makes reference to her gaze as people were demanded to use face masks, and thus, the only visible facial feature were people's eyes.

Another example is "used to regard me by my Asian *persuasion*, I remind us that we're all part of one *nation*" used to showcase the use of labels to divide and differentiate social groups based on looks and the rejection of such categorization. Later, we find the use of *peas/peace/please* and *introspection/reflection/direction*, the combination of these are further examples of the speaker's wordplay not only to create rhymes, but also to expose and criticize how people continue to marginalize the Asian community.

Besides the strong reliance on lexis and rhymes, it was found that the speaker predominantly uses the present simple tense in this section. The use of the present simple indicates statements and truths. According to Jorgensen and Philips (2002), the modality of truth implies that the speaker is committed to the statement, where her claims are a result of

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experiences. Another way of modality to express truth could be linked to the speaker's often energetic intonation, where the speaker shows no hedging throughout her words.

4.2 *"Remember the sun doesn't shine in only one direction"*

The second section of the speech relates to the speaker's personal experiences with facing racism. The speaker shares how in her workplace, which is a public school in Brooklyn, she was not exempt from being labeled. She recalled "a 5th grader stopped me and said 'Ms. Alice, someone said you had coronavirus'", and in another occasion "a 4th grader called me 'China'". After sharing these occurrences, she explicitly elaborated on how she felt at that moment by using the expressions "I could feel my extreme rage… at the systems of our world that have led my students to say this," "the toxicity of systemic racism," and "specifically – white supremacy for dividing the two Black girls who said this and me." From these samples, it is evident that the speaker had two different objectives. The first one aiming to cause a reaction in the listener by using lexical resources such as intensifiers (adjectives) to display the serious negative effects that derive from the constant slandering of AAPIs. The second objective was to convey her frustration as a teacher and as a member of society to have witnessed the speed with which such offensive remarks were being normalized among children. What is more, it uncovers the strong hegemony and power that stakeholders have at school to censure this matter, in addition to how their compliance allows broader social practices of racism and discrimination to be reproduced within schools.

Through stating her frustration and her experiences, it is also noticeable how the speaker turns the narrative from negative to positive by using the metaphor *"the sun doesn't shine in only one direction"* as a way to position her ideology regarding equality and inclusivity of all human beings, as opposed to just one superior group. Here, it is understood that she uses the word *sun* to say that the when the sun shines, the sunlight distributes light and warmth equally to the world. Later the phrase *"and instead of hate, we can shine in one direction"* uses the verb *shine* once more to refer to the sun in the aforementioned metaphor to request equal treatment. This second phrase calls for unity and challenges the stablished roles in society to have a positive change and to make the world a better place.

Within this section, the author also uses wordplay in the sample *herose, sherose, theyrose* and *they rise, we rise* combining vocabulary, pronunciation, and the use of the verb "rise" changing from past to present. At first with the word *herose*, when said, it has a similar pronunciation to the word *heroes*. However, the wordplay takes place by combining the personal pronoun "he" with the verb in simple past "rose". There are two interpretations here: (1) the speaker showcases gender equality within her speech by also using the pronouns *SHE* and *THEY*, and (2) uses grammatical structures of the verb "rise" from past to present tense to express how the spike in anti-Asian hate crimes is still relevant at the present time (in 2023 when the speech was delivered).

In addition, features of intertextuality were found in the speech. The author mentions the names of two famous activists in history, Maya Angelou and Yuri Kochiyama. Angelou was an American activist, poet, singer, essayist and scholar, who is recognized in Black history for defending and fighting for the Black community's civil rights. She received awards and above fifty honorary degrees during her lifetime. Kochiyama, an American activist from American-Japanese descent, was known for her political civil rights involvement. Although she is considered a hero among the AAPI community, her activism and advocacy spanned struggles for other social groups such as the Latin American community. She believed that there was a major need for solidarity to fight against inequalities. Mentioning these two historical personalities could be recognized as a tribute to the women activists who may have inspired Alice Tsui to follow their legacy and take action against the growing problem of hatred during the COVID-19 outbreak.

4.3 *"My racially occupied mind POUNDS with rage"*

The third section of the speech emphasizes on calling the AAPI community to join forces and to act against violence and racism. In this part of the speech, the speaker addresses the audience directly to invite them to take action in order to actually have a change in society. Taking into consideration the use of expressions such as "My call to action to you, everyone here…," "Acknowledge and teach Asian American history, lives and arts – including and beyond Lunar New Year," "To my fellow Asian American educators – take up SPACE", it is a clear *exposé* of the systemic racism, hegemony, and the power of white supremacy that colonizes education in the U.S. The speaker uses the phrase *"including and beyond Lunar New Year"* as an example of the stereotypical perception of Asia in the west. Thus, the speaker makes it clear that her demand for the acknowledgement of Asian culture in schools should not be limited to just one holiday.

Furthermore, these phrases could be an indicator of the speaker's ideology as an educator and activist. At the text level, all the extracts use verbs in the present tense, which are also known as imperatives. The use of imperatives is related to give instructions and/or commands. Therefore, these may be examples of the strong position of the speaker as a person with authority over a group. The rationale behind the use of imperatives in this section may be linked to the pressure and frustration over the violent acts that were taking place in 2023 against elderly people across the USA or in X state in particular. Considering the latter, the speaker also turns to other members of the audience who are not from Asian descent by saying "To the allies, accomplices, and co-conspirators, I see you as we stand together in solidarity". This expression includes the word "co-conspirator" which may be interpreted in its partially negative connotation of plotting in secrecy, nevertheless, according to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), this word also takes the meaning of a person that joins efforts towards a particular goal. With this in mind, it confirms that the main purpose of the speaker is to challenge the power-relations in society and to make the AAPI community be respected.

4.4 *"You shine bright with your GOLDEN LIGHT"*

The final section of the speech comprises the use of affirmations to build a connection with the audience through empathy, and to empower the AAPI community. Some samples of affirmations include "I want to tell you that you matter," "Your feelings matter," "Your identity matters," "Everything about who you are matters," which are used as a medium for motivating and convincing her fellow AAPI members that regardless of the way they are being treated and how society perceives them, they are worthy of affection, care, and peace. To solidify these past affirmations, the utterances "You shine so bright with your GOLDEN light," "I shine bright with my golden light," and "We are GOLDEN" are used as a metaphor to make her community feel empowered and valued, first as an individual and then as a group.

In the previous three utterances, there is a repetition of the word *golden*. According to Wei and Deydier (2001), in ancient Chinese, the color golden means power, wealth, longevity, and happiness. By considering the meaning of the word in Asian culture, this phrase could be interpreted as the speaker's wishes for others to grow mentally stronger, so that they prevent that their value and own perception of themselves change or diminish in any way.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing this speech, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic not only harmed global health, but also served as a catalyst for a range of socioracial problems to grow and get out of control. Nevertheless, the author of this speech takes on the responsibility to advocate for her

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community, to send a message of hope and resilience. The main style used throughout the text is the expression of emotions through metaphors.

At a text level, there is a high use of adjectives that represent anger, frustration, resistance and desperate need of change. On the other hand, there is use of metaphors that evoke eagerness, motivation and empowerment over oppression and marginalization. Furthermore, the rhymes included depict a strong link towards the anti-Asian sentiment from its historical backgrounds until the present cause (the post COVID-19 era/context). And it is clear that the only two tenses used, present simple and past simple, represent a stronger sense of the reality of an unclosed past. Within the discursive practice level, this text is a speech that was delivered during an anti-Asian hate rally. The text was produced as a reflect of the hefty burden of the constant violence the AAPI community has experienced ever since the pandemic. The consumers are in first instance, the Asian community that resides in the U.S. and allies of the cause. Secondly, this text was also directed to the oppressors and to the bystanders condemning the hegemony. Regarding the social practice, this text contributes to social change and challenges power positions by mentioning the violent acts members of the AAPI community are subject of. It questions the power relations and positions of the ever-present white supremacy. It uses metaphors and intertextuality by referencing other recognized civil-rights activists in order to have a stronger impact on the audience. The speaker also shares her personal experiences to build a bond with the community who could perhaps relate and sympathize with her. Also, this speech is used as a call for action to persuade and move a social group to make a change in society in and beyond the U.S., as her speech is shared in social media and streaming platforms.

All in all, the text exposes a strong sense of the speaker's idealism regarding the inclusivity and acknowledgement of different social groups and her passion towards pursuing race and gender equality. Finally, rather than portraying a victim position, this text takes a stand against the further spread of a more dangerous virus in humanity – hate.

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