



The Representation of the New Generation of Thai Pro-Democracy Activists in Online English-Language News Articles

Walairut Sawasdee^a, Nuntana Wongthai^{b,*}

^awalairut.sawasdee@g.swu.ac.th, Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

^bnuntanaw@g.swu.ac.th, Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

*Corresponding author, nuntanaw@g.swu.ac.th

APA Citation:

Sawasdee, W. & Wongthai, N. (2023). The representation of the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists in online English-language news articles. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 16(2), 687-702.

Received
05/04/2023

Received in the
revised form
28/06/2023

Accepted
/07/2023

ABSTRACT

The current study concerns the new wave of pro-democracy activism in Thailand as an international political phenomenon in online news discourse. The investigation employs a critical discourse analysis approach to examine discourse strategies adopted to construct the representation of Thai pro-democracy activists and decode the underlying ideology hidden in the news articles reporting this controversial movement. Thirty English-language news articles reporting on the same incidents and published between October 2020 and March 2022 were downloaded from the Bangkok Post and Reuters websites and analyzed using the Ideological Square framework (van Dijk, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2013). Scrutiny was given to the use of lexicon, granularity, local coherence, superstructures, and syntactic structures as discourse features. The findings indicate that discourse strategies are ideologically used on the Bangkok Post website to construct a negative other-presentation of Thai pro-democracy activists. Such strategies are deliberately adopted on the Reuters website to fabricate a positive self-presentation of the activists. The study contributes to knowledge of how language is used to generate narratives and shape audience perceptions by shedding light on the ideological implications hidden in the discourse strategies employed by news sources.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, online English-language news, ideology, representation, the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists

Introduction

A new generation of pro-democracy activists emerged in Thailand in 2020, and this movement has become a controversial topic of discussion in the public domain (Phoborisut, 2020). Indeed, this new generation of activists has captured widespread attention because it is probably the first political movement led by educated Thai youths and because it is gaining enthusiastic support among Thais from different socioeconomic and professional backgrounds (Teeratanabodee, 2021). The movement, which has gained momentum from offline and online engagement, demands the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and his military-backed cabinet, revision of the constitution, and reformation of the monarchy (Phoborisut, 2020). This collective endeavor, which opposes the powerful military dictatorship and calls for the redrafting of one of the strictest government rules in the world, the lèse-majesté law, has polarized debate, attracting the attention of international netizens and news media organizations (Hewison, 2020).

Thanks to modern technology and the internet, domestic political unrest in Thailand these days receives greater attention from the online international mass media. However, noticeable differences exist in how each English-language news provider reports on the current pro-democracy movement in Thailand. Each website has its preferences when deciding which topics and information to emphasize, even when composing articles about the same events. These preferences are manifested through diverse English language uses and linguistic features (see Appendix). Fowler (1991) explains that news authors typically report events based on their respective institutional ideologies; as a result, they deliberately compose news articles using specific discourse strategies in order to convey an understanding of stories that fits their ideological positions.

Suppose discourse strategies are deliberately employed in order to construct messages that are intended to support the ideological outlook of the news outlet in question. In such cases, the social actors and their actions may be misrepresented and misreported in order to achieve this purpose. Subsequently, different representations of political actors in particular incidents led to confusion and misunderstanding among public news audiences. Since news providers have the potential to propagate political and ideological propaganda, the current study aims to examine ideological inclinations hidden in the linguistic nuances used by particular news outlets without judging their respective political orientations. The study aims to investigate the ways in which discourse strategies are used to construct the representation of Thai pro-democracy activists and decode the ideological implications of the content found in online articles related to the activists produced by two news agencies. One is Bangkok Post, a leading English-language daily, and the other is Reuters, an internationally-recognized global news agency.

Literature Review

The New Generation of Thai Pro-Democracy Activists

This movement emerged after the general election in 2019 failed to prevent the reinstallation of the military-monarchy alliance in Thailand (Melendez, 2020). Members of the public, unhappy with the outcome of the election and considering that the electoral process had been marked by a lack of transparency, started the discussion through the circulation of hashtags such as #WhatshappeninginThailand and #RespectThaiDemocracy on various social media platforms (Thomas et al., 2020). Throughout 2020, this social media movement eventually morphed into an online protest, in turn leading to major offline demonstrations at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, where activists publicly repeated their demands for the resignation of the cabinet, constitutional revision, and reform of monarchy (Phoborisut, 2020). From 2021 to 2022, the activists faced obstacles in conducting rallies due to a ban on public gatherings and a

government crackdown. However, online news media outlets have continued reporting on this controversial movement since some of the young people involved have faced legal action in relation to the computer crimes act and the lèse-majesté law, while others have been intimidated by the Thai authorities (see Appendix).

Ideology

In this study, ideology refers to a system of beliefs shared among members of a particular group; indeed, such ideology establishes a group's identity with norms, values, and objectives (van Dijk, 2011). In contrast to knowledge, which is universally accepted and unquestioned by all members of society, ideology is considered fundamental and axiomatic within a specific community group; as a result, ideology shapes a group's understanding of what is permitted or prohibited in relation to a particular issue. Ideology, moreover, influences a group's behavior and expression (van Dijk, 2006, 2011). Ideology is manifested and conveyed in language and discourse in different social contexts. When a group dominates the creation of discourse, it can disseminate its ideology to less dominant groups.

Representation in News Discourse

Representation refers to the delineation of persons, objects, places, or ideas through the available language and discourses; however, such representation cannot mirror reality because the selection of appropriate discourses is influenced by the knowledge, norms, cultural values, and ideologies of the creators (Hall, 2013). In the news media, news authors decide how language should be used to construct representations of social actors in particular news stories through their experiences and acknowledgments of the world; as a result, social actors and actions are represented as the authors want them to be and how the authors prefer their audiences to understand them (van Dijk, 2008).

Critical Discourse Analysis

A useful methodology that may be employed in order to understand the discursive connection between language and ideology is the interdisciplinary known as Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA). CDA focuses on the use of language and discourse as a social practice that reflects the history and culture of a particular community. This approach seeks to establish and explain connections between language, discourse, and various social issues (Fairclough et al., 2011). Rather than being solely a research theory, CDA is sometimes regarded as a social movement among researchers and scholars. This is because the majority of CDA studies aim to observe how social issues (e.g., the abuse of power, discrimination, ideology, etc.) are manifested in or shape the language and discourse employed within a particular society (van Dijk, 2000, 2013). Furthermore, CDA research encompasses not only the study of verbal language but also extends to the examination of non-verbal communication, which serves as a medium for reproducing or resisting social issues. CDA, in other words, attempts to bridge the gap between the micro-level of analysis (i.e., language and discourse) and the macro-level of analysis (i.e., social issues). CDA, therefore, is a suitable approach matching the individual objectives of the current investigation.

The Ideological Square

CDA studies allow the application of suitable analytical frameworks related to language and discourse as well as relevant socio-philosophy theories to study relationships between discourse and social issues (van Dijk, 2013). In fact, van Dijk proposes the Ideological Square, consisting of ideological structures and discourse strategies, to study the discursive connection between discourses (i.e., online news discourse) and societal challenges (i.e., ideologies).

Ideological Structures

Under the theory of the Ideological Square, ideology is complicatedly embedded in discourse; however, its inclination has possible structures. According to van Dijk, writers express their opinions and understandings in discourse as if they were representatives of a social group. If they consider themselves members of particular groups, they tend to construct a positive image of these groups' goals, actions, and beliefs; in the same way, any negative attributes related to the groups tend to be hidden. On the other hand, if the writers oppose themselves to particular groups, they prefer to construct negative images of these groups. Indeed, the writers tend to highlight unpleasant actions or beliefs, while any positive propositions involving the groups are usually ignored. Four possible ideological structures in discourse are proposed under the notion of the Ideological Square (van Dijk, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2013).

Table 1.

Ideological Square (van Dijk, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2013)

Positive self-presentation	Negative other-presentation
Emphasize our good things	Emphasize their bad things
De-emphasize our bad things	De-emphasize their good things

Discourse Strategies

The four ideological structures are systematically organized through the selection of discourse strategies regardless of linguistic level; in fact, the current investigation focuses on the application of five discourse strategies (i.e., lexicon, granularity, local coherence, superstructures, and syntactic structures) adopted to construct representations of the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists. The definitions of each feature have been adapted from van Dijk (2000, 2006, 2011, 2013).

Lexicons refer to the preferred selection of lexical items. The selection of content words is ideologically influenced; indeed, writers consciously choose appropriate words based on their group ideology when naming social actors, describing their actions, or portraying their stories.

Granularity covers the selection of pieces of information a proposition related to a particular group should be included or excluded; moreover, it deals with the level of description in terms of providing general or detailed information when representing a group.

Local coherence refers to the connection of sentences in terms of causes and consequences. For example, statements and sentences in the news are coherent with one another reflecting ideological perspectives on whether particular factors are causes or consequences of particular issues.

Superstructures are the structures of the discourse. Headlines and leads are the essential elements in news articles. The topic and information in the most noticeable area of discourse are ideologically selected to control the writer's overall perspective toward a particular group in the news stories.

Syntactic structures are the grammatical structures of sentences. This study focuses on the preferential use of the active voice to emphasize the agent of the predicate and either the passive voice or nominalization to de-emphasize the doer of the action.

Thus, van Dijk's Ideological Square is suitable as an analytical device for the current CDA study because it permits the investigation of both ideological structures and discourse strategies.

Related Studies

A few linguistic studies on political turmoil in Thailand were recorded. Viboonchart & Gampper (2014) studied how the media portrayed Red-shirt protesters—left-wing working-class people fighting against a coup and calling for democracy and equality—in newspapers. The study compared the ways in which Thai English-language and American newspapers selected direct quotations to represent Red-shirt demonstrators. The study revealed that the semantic representation of Red-shirt protesters through the selection of direct quotations was ideologically based. In addition, Aungsuwan (2017) applied the corpus analysis approach and appraisal theory to study representations of and attitudes toward Red-shirt demonstrators in Thai English-language newspapers. The authors concluded that the news providers held a negative attitude toward the Red-shirt protesters, using terms such as *stupid*, *uneducated*, and *hard-core*. The current investigation, therefore, differs from the previous studies in terms of its interest in social actors, discourse strategies, the selection of discourses, and the analytical framework.

Methodology

Data Collection

News media with high levels of engagement have the capacity to reach a significant number of readers and spread certain messages to their audiences. For these reasons, the current study selected two English-language news websites (i.e., Bangkok Post and Reuters) as examples of public sources of information due to the large number of visitors to both sites. According to Digital News Report (2021), Bangkok Post, a Thai English-language news outlet, has retained its trustworthiness, with over seven million monthly online page viewers, even though it has been claimed to be a right-wing conservative media. In the same way, Reuters, the international information provider, has attracted roughly forty million monthly visitors to its website and has been globally acknowledged as a reliable news organization by observers with varying political interests. In this study, Wodak and Meyer's criteria (2009) were applied in order to avoid cherry-picking data. Fifteen English-language news articles written about the same events (i.e., pro-democracy rallies, confrontations between activists and police, and the arrest of activists) and published between October 2020 and March 2022 were downloaded in August 2022 from the Bangkok Post and Reuters websites respectively. In total, thirty news articles, approximately 13,351 words, were investigated.

Data Analysis

The thirty news articles were downloaded from the Bangkok Post (BKP) and Reuters (RT) sites and presented as document files (see Appendix). Then the selected news articles were analyzed according to the analytical framework of the Ideological Square (van Dijk, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2013). Indeed, the focus of scrutiny was initially placed on the application of lexicons, granularity, local coherence, superstructure, and syntactic structures in the construction of the representation of Thai pro-democracy activists. In addition, the 4th edition of the Online Cambridge Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>) was used to ensure the accurate meaning of discourse features. Ideological implications were then decoded based on the application of these discourse strategies in the construction of either positive self-presentations or negative other-presentations of Thai pro-democracy activists.

Findings and Discussion

Discourse Strategies

Findings related to discourse strategies are divided into five sections: lexicons, granularity, local coherence, superstructures, and syntactic structures.

Lexicons

A lexicon analysis reveals that the news authors of the Bangkok Post and Reuters sites share similarities in their selection of content words when representing the new generation of pro-democracy activists and their actions.

In selecting the lexicon to represent the activists, the nominal lexicons employed to name the activists are plural nouns (i.e., *people*, *students*, *activists*, *protesters*, and *supporters*). Moreover, the writers sometimes adopt adjectives (i.e., *pro-democracy* or *anti-government*) to modify nouns referring to the activists. The total numbers of tokens are calculated in terms of percentages and illustrated in the following table.

Table 2

Lexical Variants Representing the Activists

Nouns	Bangkok Post	Reuters
people	28 (21.54%)	23 (18.70%)
students	11 (8.46%)	7 (5.7%)
activists	21 (16.15%)	16 (13.01%)
protesters	64 (49.23%)	69 (56.1%)
supporters	5 (3.85%)	4 (3.25%)
Thais *	1 (0.77%)	4 (3.25%)
Total	130	123
Adjectives	Bangkok Post	Reuters
pro-democracy	10 (47.62%)	7 (46.67%)
anti-government	11 (52.38%)	8 (53.33%)
Total	21	15

According to Table 2, the most frequent use of a content word to refer to the activists is *protesters* on both the Bangkok Post (49.23%) and Reuters (56.1%) websites. In the same way, the most repeated adjective is *anti-government* on both the Bangkok Post (52.38%) and Reuters (53.33%) websites. Therefore, both news websites represent the activists as a group of young people who are protesting against the military-backed government with the expectation of strengthening democracy in Thailand.

Despite these similarities in the lexicons used to refer to the activists, it is noticeable that while both sites utilize the plural noun *Thais* when composing news articles related to the new generation of pro-democracy activists, the lexicon *Thais* represents different social groups on the Bangkok Post and Reuters websites. For instance, in the following excerpt (1) from Bangkok Post,

the plural noun *Thais* is used to refer to Thai people who possess the highest respect for the institution of monarchy:

- (1) “Former leader of the now-defunct People's Democratic Reform Committee waited for the royal motorcade of His Majesty the King and joined other *Thais* to show loyalty to the monarchy. He denied mobilizing yellow-clad supporters to counter the anti-government protesters.” (BKP1)

In contrast to Bangkok Post, Reuters uses the plural noun *Thais* (4) to refer to a group of Thai people protesting against the military-backed regime and the royal institution. In the following excerpts (2) and (3) from Reuters, *Thais* refers to a group of Thai activists who are aiming to reconfigure the constitutional monarchy with the King as head of the state:

- (2) “Thousands of *Thais* took to the streets of the capital on Sunday demanding reforms of the monarchy.” (RT5)
- (3) “Thousands of *Thais* march for royal reforms.” (RT5)

Therefore, the term *Thais* on the Bangkok Post and Reuters sites shares various semantic properties. Indeed, *Thais*, from the perspective of the Bangkok Post’s writers, are Thai people who are supposed to have decent morals and faithfulness to the monarchy. At the same time, from Reuters’ point of view, the term *Thais* refers to a group of Thai people who have questioned the current state of constitutional monarchy and possess a desire for change.

After selecting a lexicon to represent the activists’ actions, the utilization of lexicon to represent the actions of activists varies; in fact, two groups of content words share parallel meanings when used to describe the actions of activists. Bangkok Post prefers to define activist demands (i.e., the resignation of PM Prayuth, the revision of the constitution, and the limitation of monarchical power) as illegal, using the term *violation* (4) and *violate* (8) of the existing law. According to the 4th edition of the Online Cambridge Dictionary, the term *violation* is “an action that breaks a rule and does not show respect for an important principle.” Considering excerpts (4) and (5) from the Bangkok Post site, the writers report that the activists’ demands were in *violation* of the constitutional law and their participation in the protest *violated* the pandemic-related regulations; thus, the actions of the activists in seeking to achieve their three demands contravened the applicable laws:

- (4) “The judges ruled that *these demands* were in *violation* of Section 49 of the constitution.” (BKP14)
- (5) “The protesters also *violated* a health safety announcement issued.” (BKP4)

Apart from using the verb *violate* (4), Reuters employs the noun *taboo* (8) to describe the actions and demands of the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists. According to the 4th edition of the Online Cambridge Dictionary, the term *taboo* refers to “an action that is avoided for religious or social reasons in a period.” When considering the use of the noun *taboo* in the following excerpts (6) and (7) from Reuters, the writers attempt to rationalize activists’ actions as they challenged restrictions placed on certain topics of discussion:

- (6) “The student movement that emerged last year smashed long-held *taboos* by openly criticizing King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who they say has amassed too much personal power since taking the throne after the death of his father in 2016.” (RT7)
- (7) “Months of youth-led protest against the military-backed government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha last year also broke traditional *taboos* by calling for reform of the powerful monarchy.” (RT14)

Hence, Bangkok Post defines the activists’ demands as illegal activities because they violate the law. On the other hand, Reuters describes the three demands as taboos since they are prohibited due to Thai social beliefs yet are not illicit because of public regulation.

Granularity

A granularity analysis reveals that the Bangkok Post and Reuters sites provide information related to the Thai pro-democracy activists differently in relation to the level and selection of information. Regarding the level of information, Bangkok Post provides general information related to the profiles of pro-democracy activists. For example, in excerpt (8), the writers sometimes employ the plural noun *students* to refer to the new generation of pro-democracy activists so that their audiences can understand that these activists are young people who are studying at schools or universities. The writers also introduce the key phrase *the students' role in the rally* but provide no further information about who these students are and why they are protesting against the military-backed regime:

- (8) “Thai media reported that the summons had been issued in connection with *the students' roles in the rally* on Oct 15 at the Ratchaprasong intersection in Bangkok.” (BKP12)

By contrast, as seen in the following excerpt (9), Reuters not only refers to the pro-democracy activists as *students* but also offers detailed information concerning significant traits of these new-generation activists in terms of their age range and their contribution to the pro-democracy movement. The writers also explain how these young activists use symbolic expressions, such as *the three-finger salute*, a gesture associated with elections, freedom, and democracy, and *white ribbons*, a sign of peace, in their harmless protests against government authority.

- (9) “One characteristic of the latest Thai protests has been the extent to which they are led by *students* and other *young people*. Most protest leaders are in their *20s*, but an even *younger generation* is following. From giving *the three-finger salute* of protest when the national anthem plays at school to tying *white ribbons* in their hair and on school bags as symbols of protest, *high school students* have rallied to the campaign.” (RT1)

Regarding the selection of information, Bangkok Post tends to include certain information related to the activists' potential violence. For instance, the writers report on the situation during the demonstration and included statements (10) saying that the activists had the potential to provoke chaos and mayhem because their protest guards were *armed* and carried *ping-pong bombs*. This claim is made in spite of the fact that it is based on *rumors* which were rejected by a core activist, who promised to keep the demonstration peaceful:

- (10) “The rally was preceded by *rumors* that its guards would be *armed* with 40 *ping-pong bombs*, a claim denied by Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul, a core leader who insisted the demonstration would be peaceful.” (BKP3)

In contrast to the Bangkok Post site, the following excerpt (11) shows that Reuters excludes making references to pro-democracy activists in terms of potential violence. The writers omit to mention rumors about the activists' possession of weapons (i.e., 40 ping-pong bombs) which have the potential to cause violence. In fact, the writers maintain a positive tone through the inclusion of a direct quotation by one of the activist organizers providing an assurance that the demonstration would be *peaceful* and *would not turn violent*:

- (11) “Organisers gave assurances the protest *would not turn violent*. “We want a *peaceful* protest,” protest leader Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul told reporters after speaking to the police.” (RT3)

Local Coherence

The application of local coherence as a discourse strategy plays a crucial role in relation to the writing of news articles about the new generation of pro-democracy activists in Thailand. An analysis of local coherence reveals that each selected news source includes propositions that cohere with one another to explain the current political tension, both with respect to the causes and consequences of the protest movement.

Concerning the consequences of the pro-democracy movement, Bangkok Post's writers prefer to offer statements explicating the unpleasant consequences of the demonstrations. As seen in the excerpt below (12), the writers attempt to explicitly infer that the activists are likely to get arrested as a consequence of their actions in participation in a banned protest event during the pandemic. Moreover, the writers imply that there will be a worsening in the spread of the coronavirus as a consequence of the activists joining the demonstration. The writers also include propositions stating that the location of the rally, Bangkok, is one in which the holding of public gatherings is strictly controlled due to the Covid-19 situation:

- (12) "Police are gathering evidence to take legal action against protest leaders and participants who turned up at city rallies on Thursday in violation of the emergency decree. The police said the protesters also violated a health safety announcement issued by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Bangkok has been designated a Covid-19 maximum and strict control zone, with a ban on gatherings of more than 50 people." (BKP4)

Regarding the cause of the pro-democracy movement, Reuters attempts to identify the root cause of this controversial movement. In the following excerpt (13), Reuters restates the activist's demands for the resignation of the current PM, the revision of the constitution, and the limitation of the monarchy's power. The writers then insist on providing additional content in order to justify why the activists are having a protest against the authorities again. The causes of this protest movement mentioned by the writers range from the underperformance of PM Prayuth in controlling the Covid-19 pandemic, the lack of an effective plan for maintaining the economy during the lockdown, and the lack of transparency in the vaccine sourcing process, with suggestions that the powerful King interfered in this process. Although the ban on protests is acknowledged, the writers attempt to validate the activists' actions in protesting due to the persecution and oppression by the dominant social institution that protestors claim to be enduring:

- (13) "Hundreds of Thai pro-democracy protesters took to the streets on Thursday, calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and constitutional changes that would curb the influence of the country's powerful monarchy. The rally, which defied a ban on public gatherings due to the pandemic, comes as Prayuth's government faces public criticism over its handling of coronavirus outbreaks, a slow economic recovery, and a vaccine policy that involves a company owned by King Maha Vajiralongkorn." (RT4)

Superstructures

An analysis of superstructures indicates that the two news sources differ in their preferences for topics and information provided in the most noticeable elements of their respective news items (i.e., headlines and leads). In fact, articles relating to six out of fifteen news events were titled differently. It is obvious that Bangkok Post tends to prioritize the authorities in these prominent elements while Reuters tends to preserve this foremost area for the activists.

In the example below (14) from the Bangkok Post website, which reports on violent clashes, the writers represent the authorities in the most noticeable space of the news discourse, giving priority to them by mentioning *parliament* in the headline. The writers inform their readers that a chaotic incident took place outside the parliament building when activists pressured

members to discuss constitutional reform. The writers then mention a confrontation between royalists and pro-democracy activists. However, the writers do not explain how brutal the confrontation was, simply stating that many people were injured in the incident:

- (14) “Chaos outside parliament.”
 “Pressure is mounting on parliament to accept the controversial charter amendment bill sponsored by civil group Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw) after clashes between pro-monarchy supporters and anti-government protesters erupted on Tuesday, leaving several people injured.” (BKP6)

While that same incident was reported on the Reuters website. It is noticeable that the writers prioritize the activists in the most important elements of the news discourse. In the excerpt below (15) from the Reuters website, the headline specifies the number of injured people and refers to the incident as *the most violent protest* since the emergence of the new movement. The writers clarify that some participants suffered gunshot wounds after joining the rally outside the parliament. Unlike the Bangkok Post, Reuters reveals that the pro-democracy activists encountered pro-monarchy supporters and riot police. The writers focus on what has happened to the activists without mentioning the responsibility of the authorities or parliament.

- (15) “At least 55 hurt in Thailand’s most violent protests since the new movement emerged.”
 “At least 55 people were hurt, some with gunshot wounds, when demonstrators marching on the Thai parliament clashed with police and royalist counter-protesters, in the worst violence since a new youth-led protest movement emerged in July.” (RT6)

Syntactic Structures

An analysis of syntactic structures examined 326 sentences and clauses related to the pro-democracy activists. The findings reveal that Bangkok Post and Reuters prefer activation, followed by passivation and nominalization as syntactic structures in selected discourses. However, the proclivity for using a specific structure to highlight positive attributes or mitigate negative propositions related to pro-democracy activists is insignificant. The numbers of tokens are calculated in percentages and represented in the following table.

Table 3

Syntactic Structures

Types of Syntactic Structures	Bangkok Post	Reuters
active voice	155 (79.49%)	111 (84.73%)
passive voice	35 (17.95%)	17 (12.98%)
nominalization	5 (2.56%)	3 (2.3%)
Total	195 (100%)	131 (100%)

According to Table 3, most sentences and clauses are written in an active structure in which the doers of the actions are assigned explicitly; indeed, the use of an active voice is favorable when the news writers narrate the violent clash during the demonstration. In fact, active sentences clearly manifest that both police and activists are the doers of violent actions; in turn, they are also receivers of such actions. As an example of an article concerning confrontation between police and activists, the excerpt below (16) from the Bangkok Post site includes active sentences

portraying how police and activists interacted. The first sentence shows that *police* are doers of the predicate (i.e., *used a water cannon truck to fire salvos and force*) while the receivers of the action are *protesters*. The last sentence then refers to the response by activists, where the *protesters* are doers of the predicate (i.e., *threw smoke bombs and bags of paint*). At the same time, the *police* are the receivers of the action:

- (16) “Police used a water cannon truck to fire salvos and force them back. Protesters then threw smoke bombs and bags of paint toward rows of riot police on the other side.” (BKP6)

The same incident was reported on the Reuters website. The news writers employ a similar sentence structure (i.e., activation) to describe the harmful interaction between police and activists. The excerpt below (17) from Reuters indicates that the *police* are doers of the predicate (i.e., *fired water cannons and teargas*) while the *protesters* are receivers of the action. The writers then provide an active relative clause (i.e., *who cut through razor-wire barricades and remove concrete barriers outside parliament*) to modify the plural noun *protesters*, the latter being doers predicates. The last sentence shows that *protesters* are doers of the action (i.e., *advanced on*) while the *police* become the receiver of the action:

- (17) “Police fired water cannons and teargas at protesters who cut through razor-wire barricades and removed concrete barriers outside parliament. Protesters advanced on police with makeshift shields, including inflatable pool ducks.” (RT6).

Besides using active structures, some articles write about incidents in a passive structure when the doers of those actions are unknown. Reporting an incident involving damage to public property, the following example (18) from Bangkok Post reported on a disturbance where the police booths were destroyed during the pro-democracy demonstration. However, the statement is passivated because the doers of the action *burned* cannot be verified.

- (18) “A police box was seen going up in flames in Din Daeng. Another tourist police box was later burned near the Victory Monument.” (BKP9)

Similarly, Reuters also selects to use the passive voice when reporting this incident. In the following excerpt (19), the doers of the action *set on fire* are deleted due to the inability to verify the identities of people who are responsible for the damage:

- (19) “Two police booths were also set on fire as sporadic violence continued into the night.” (RT9)

Lastly, the use of nominalization is witnessed in both Bangkok Post and Reuters websites, with cases of sentences being nominalized when references are being made to actions already mentioned before. In the following example (20) from Bangkok Post, the headline involves a simple active sentence saying that the *police* are doers of the action *face*. At the same time, the *protesters* are receivers of the action. The news authors then include a lead using the noun *confrontation* to refer to the action *face* instead of using another simple sentence in the active voice (i.e., *police confront pro-democracy protesters*):

- (20) “Police *face* protesters again.”
“A *confrontation* between police and pro-democracy protesters turned ugly late Saturday with a number of injuries and arrests.” (BKP7)

Reuters shares similarities with Bangkok Post in the syntactic structures of its headlines and leads. For example, in the following excerpt (21) from Reuters, the writers include an active sentence in the headline, saying that *Thai police* are the doers of the action *clash* at the same time that the *protesters* are the receivers of the action. The writers then employ the plural noun *clashes* to refer to the incident:

- (21) “Thai police *clash* with protesters as thousands hold the anti-government rally.”
 “*The clashes* broke out after thousands of protesters drove in a convoy of cars and motorcycles through the capital.” (RT9)

Ideological Implications

Ideological implications are identified as either positive self-presentation or negative-other presentation according to van Dijk’s Ideological Square. In fact, the scrutiny of ideological implications is considered based on the findings of discourse strategy analysis. The results reveal that Reuters prefers positive self-presentation while Bangkok Post favors negative other-presentation when constructing the representation of the new generation of pro-democracy activists in Thailand.

Positive Self-Presentation

After considering the finding of discourse strategy analysis, it can be concluded that Reuters prefers to construct a positive representation of the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists because it utilizes discourse features to emphasize positive attributions and deemphasize negative propositions concerning the activists. According to The Trust Principles (2019), Reuters expects its journalists to perform professionally in a politically and culturally diverse environment in order to ensure its standing as the most trustworthy international news source. Its writers thus have to be careful to report accurately and avoid favoring specific interests. Noticeably, Reuters not only provides in-depth reporting on the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists but also validates the activists’ actions as being aligned with the international definition of democracy, in which individuals in democratic communities have the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly (Annan, 2020). Instead of judging the political and cultural values of Thailand, Reuters attempts to represent the actions of the activists: to publicly criticize the government’s performance, to express opinions toward the royal institution, and to participate in political demonstrations, to be in agreement with the universal declaration on democracy in which international audiences are feasible to understand that Thai activists are eligible to protest under the democratic system.

Negative Other-Presentation

The results of discourse strategy analysis show that Bangkok Post prefers to construct a negative representation of the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists since it applies discourse strategies to emphasize negative attributions and deemphasize positive propositions related to the pro-democracy activists. As stated in Vision & Mission (2019), Bangkok Post aims to be a trusted media provider in the country; consequently, it represents itself as a decent member of the community, operating its business in an ethical manner in alignment with its governing principles. Therefore, its attempt to act in accordance with its mission may control how its news authors understand and report on the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists. The activists’ demands and actions are invalid from the Bangkok Post’s perspective because they do not behave in accordance with the media outlet’s governing and organizational policies in their opposition to authority and their questioning of the highest institution. In other words, decent members of the Thai community are supposed to respect existing laws, governmental authority, and the royal institution (Trajakvanich & Rojjanaprayon, 2020). Thus, Bangkok Post is implicitly saying that the pro-democracy activists have the right under the democratic system to participate in political demonstrations; however, their actions should not show disrespect to the authorities and the king of Thailand.

Conclusion

The current study examines the use of discourse strategies to construct representations of the new generation of Thai pro-democracy activists and decode hidden ideologies in news articles related to this controversial movement. The findings revealed that Bangkok Post ideologically selected the discourse features to negatively represent the youth activists and their actions in violating the existing laws. In turn, Reuters ideologically employed the discourse strategies to sketch a positive image of the young activists as they strived to strengthen democracy and remove unnecessary power from the highest social institution.

Apparently, language is used as a powerful instrument in the news to enact and express the ideology of the particular news organization; therefore, news audiences need to be more critical when reading about complicated and sensitive issues. News audiences, indeed, should obtain news from various sources and make their arguments on the basis of the information they have received before making judgments or forming opinions on particular topics, especially those related to political conflict, in order to prevent themselves from being deceived by sophisticated language use and hidden ideology in the news.

Finally, the application of CDA and van Dijk's Ideological Square as a theoretical framework is effective in studying the relationship between language and ideology; however, it is necessary to remind themselves that the findings of this investigation cannot be generalized because they may have been different if the representative samples had been collected from different news sources or according to different data selection criteria. Further studies will be needed in order to shed further light on the use of discourse strategies in the media and their connection to the ideological orientations of news organizations.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Donald Stuart Cameron for proofreading and to the ethics committees at Srinakharinwirot University for the research approval (Certificate Number SWUEC/E/G-354/2565).

About the Authors

Walairut Sawasdee: A graduate student pursuing a Master's Degree in Arts (English) at the Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand. Her current research is about political ideology in online media discourse. Her areas of interest are World Englishes, Applied Linguistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis.

Nuntana Wongthai: An associate professor at the Center of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests focus on Cognitive Linguistics, Language and Communication, Semantics, and Pragmatics.

References

- Annan, K. (2020). *Democracy: Manual for human rights education with young people*. Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy#:~:text=The%20word%20democracy%20comes%20from,the%20will%20of%20the%20people>.
- Aungsuwan, W. (2017). *A corpus-informed appraisal analysis of Thai media representation and attitudes towards red-shirt protesters in political conflicts in Thailand*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2980632>
- Digital news report* (2021). Reuters Institute. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>

- Fairclough, N., Mulderrig, J., & Wodak, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Eds.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (pp. 357-378). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068>
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. Routledge.
- Hall, S. (2013). The work of representation. In S. Hall, J. Evans, & S. Nixon (Eds.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- Hewison, K. (2020). Look right: The conservative elites opposing Thailand's protesters. *Melbourne Asia Review*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.37839/mar2652-550x4.10>
- Melendez. (2020, October 25). #WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest. Article 19. <https://www.article19.org/resources/whathappeninginthailand-government-crackdown-on-the-right-to-protest/>
- Phoborisut, P. (2020). The 2020 student uprising in Thailand: A dynamic network of dissent. *ISEAS Perspective*, 129. <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-94-feminism-and-the-pro-democracy-cause-in-thailand-by-wichuta-teeratanabodee/>
- Teeratanabodee, W. (2021). Feminism and the pro-democracy cause in Thailand. *ISEAS Perspective*, 94. <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-94-feminism-and-the-pro-democracy-cause-in-thailand-by-wichuta-teeratanabodee/>
- The trust principles*. (2019). Thomson Reuters. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en/about-us/trust-principles.html#:~:text=The%20Thomson%20Reuters%20Trust%20Principles,fundamental%20to%20our%20entire%20business.>
- Thomas, E., Beattie, T., & Zhang, A. (2020). #WhatsHappeningInThailand: The power dynamics of Thailand's digital activism. *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27718>
- Traijakvanich, N., & Rojjanaprayon, R. (2020). Ideologies in Thai politics. *Journal of Suvarnabbumi Institute of Technology (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 6(2), 415–428. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/svittj/article/view/241211>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2000). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446217856>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687908>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2008). News, discourse, and ideology. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203877685>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2011). *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2013). Ideology and discourse. In M. Freeden & M. Stears (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies* (pp.175-196). Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199585977.013.007>
- Viboonchart, N., & Gampper, C. (2014). The underlying ideologies in news articles: The study through the use of direct quotations and lexical choices in an English newspaper in Thailand and an American newspaper. *Asian Social Science*, 10(15). <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n15p187>
- Vision & mission*. (2019). Bangkok Post. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://www.bangkokpost.co.th/business/newspaper/bangkokpost>
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory, and methodology. In R. Wodak, & M. Meyer (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp.1-33). SAGE.

Appendix

List of News Articles

Published Date	Bangkok Post		Reuters	
	Codes	URL	Codes	URL
October 15, 2020	BKP1	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2002191/were-staying-until-pm-quits	RT1	https://www.reuters.com/article/thailand-protests-scene-idUSKBN27108W
February 10, 2021	BKP2	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2065987/anti-govt-groups-vow-to-intensify-protests-as-leaders-charged	RT2	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protests-idUSKBN2AA1NF
February 20, 2021	BKP3	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2071611/activists-hold-no-confidence-rally	RT3	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protests-idUSKBN2AK06E
June 24, 2021	BKP4	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2138039/rallygoers-likely-to-face-legal-action	RT4	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-protesters-return-streets-demanding-constitutional-changes-2021-06-24/
November 14, 2021	BKP5	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2215223/protesters-submit-statement-opposing-absolute-monarchy-to-german-embassy	RT5	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/no-absolute-monarchy-thousands-thais-march-royal-reforms-2021-11-14/
November 18, 2020	BKP6	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2021203/chaos-outside-parliament	RT6	https://www.reuters.com/article/thailand-protests-idUSKBN27X0GY
February 14, 2021	BKP7	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2067647/police-and-protesters-face-off-again	RT7	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protests-idUSKBN2AD0GC
July 18, 2021	BKP8	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2150783/police-fire-water-cannon-rubber-bullets-tear-gas-at-protesters	RT8	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-youth-activists-go-ahead-with-protest-despite-gatherings-ban-2021-07-18/
August 10, 2021	BKP9	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2163199/protesters-	RT9	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-protest-leaders-detained-

		clash-with-police-in-dindaeng		ahead-planned-car-mob-rally-2021-08-10/
August 15, 2021	BKP10	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2165619/protesters-around-thailand-honk-horns-to-banish-prayut	RT10	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-protesters-plan-car-mob-rally-demanding-pm-resign-2021-08-15/
October 30, 2020	BKP11	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2011307/three-of-four-freed-protest-leaders-rearrested	RT11	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protests-leaders-idUSKBN27F2JW
November 20, 2020	BKP12	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2023039/two-high-schoolers-face-protest-charges	RT12	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protests-idUSKBN2800SR
March 3, 2021	BKP13	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2077707/ammy-confesses-to-burning-portrait	RT13	https://www.reuters.com/article/thailand-protests-idINKCN2AV0G7
November 10, 2021	BKP14	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2213147/constitutional-court-rules-activists-aimed-to-overthrow-monarchy	RT14	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-court-rules-students-royal-reform-call-sought-overthrow-monarchy-2021-11-10/
March 5, 2022	BKP15	https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2274131/court-convicts-webmaster	RT15	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-man-jailed-insulting-monarchy-with-sticker-kings-portrait-2022-03-04/
Total Word Counts		7,608 words		5,743 words