

ETHNIC CONFLICT, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDITORIALS OF THE SRI LANKAN ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS – A MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Discourse constitutes power in constructing ideational, textual and interpersonal constructs which are ideological. It can transmit and even legitimize power in society. In the post-conflict development scenario, the editorials of Sri Lankan national newspapers should develop constructive discourse on politics and development to make a positive impact on legislative changes. The media professionals are vested with the ethical-responsibility of contributing to the constructive socio-political development through their media. The editorials in the Sri Lankan English newspapers are stamped as 'ethno-nationalist' (ICES, 1996; CPA, 2004). Media Monitor (2006) reports that 'eighty seven per cent of Sri Lankan journalists believe that the Sri Lankan media is failing to provide accurate, balanced and fair information'. The study focuses on whether the media has been a part of the problem or a part of the solution (Media Monitor, 2004) and what would have been the reasons for different 'truths' to be reported to the Sinhala, Tamil and international communities? Since newspaper and editorial discourses are the constructors of journalists and editors of the elites, community biased ideologies are "hidden or subtle in expressions and often revealed in mild forms" (van Dijk, 1995). This study uses Social constructionist approach, mainly discourse analysis, which focuses on the shared meanings and on how they are produced on the themes of ethnic conflict, peace and development. It uses qualitative research methodology. The objective is to investigate the themes, structures and strategies of the Sri Lankan English newspaper editorial discourse to arrive at the ideological and attitudinal positions focusing on the themes. In critical discourse analysis, Canagarajah (1999) notes that "critical linguists interpret how speech genres and texts may serve the ideological interests of the powerful". The significance of this study and contribution lies in its focus on the Sri Lankan English newspaper editorials ideologies found in the media. The findings reveal that the editorial discourse constructions are ethnic - as party-biased.

Key Words : Discourse analysis, Social Construction, Ethnic conflict, Devolution, Development

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