

DISCOURSE AND RACISM



“ Racism is a multifaceted social phenomenon, with different levels and overlapping forms. It involves attitudes, actions, processes and unequal power relations. It is based on the interpretation of the idea of “race”, hierarchical social relations and the forms of discrimination that flow from this. (Garner, 2017, p. 22)

TOPICS

The discourse of racism features a limited array of *topics* about minorities or immigrants that follow certain patterns. As Teun Van Dijk explains:

Whereas everyday conversations are often about other people, and anything may come up in such talks, *topics* about minorities or immigrants are often limited to a few topic types, namely, the increasingly negative topic classes of **difference**, **deviance** and **threat**. (109)

DISCLAIMERS

The following are *Disclaimers*, as noted by Van Dijk (2008) as part of racist discourses. They are ‘semantic moves with a positive part about Us, and a negative part about Them’ (109).

1. Apparent denial: ‘I have nothing against Arabs, but...’
2. Apparent concession: ‘Of course some Muslims are tolerant, but generally ...’
3. Apparent empathy: ‘Of course asylum seekers endure hardships, but ...’
4. Apparent ignorance: ‘Now, I don't know all the facts, but...’
5. Apparent excuse: ‘Sorry, but...’
6. Reversal (blaming the victim): ‘Not they, but we, are the real victims’
7. Transfer: ‘I don't mind, but my clients...’

TYPES OF DENIAL (OF RACISM)

One way that racism is perpetuated and asymmetrical power-relations remain unchallenged is through the denial of unfairness or racism.

1. act-denial (‘I did not do/say that at all’);
2. control-denial (‘I did not do/say that on purpose’, ‘It was an accident’);
3. intention-denial (‘I did not mean that’, ‘You got me wrong’);
4. goal-denial (‘I did not do/say that, in order to .. .’).



TASK

Look at the following quote:

“They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

Who said this? What was the context? Do you believe this is a racist statement?

- Search for other examples of potentially racist discourse from the media, textbooks and other sources.
- Analyse and discuss in what ways these texts may be seen as racist.

MATCHING DISCLAIMERS

1. Apparent denial:	(a) 'I don't mind, but my clients...'
2. Apparent concession:	(b) 'Not they, but we, are the real victims'
3. Apparent empathy:	(c) 'I have nothing against Arabs, but...'
4. Apparent ignorance:	(d) 'Now, I don't know all the facts, but...'
5. Apparent excuse:	(e) 'Of course asylum seekers endure hardships, but ...'
6. Reversal (blaming the victim):	(f) 'Of course some Muslims are tolerant, but generally ...'
7. Transfer:	(g) 'Sorry, but...'

MATCHING DENIAL OF RACISM

1. act-denial	(a) 'I did not do/say that, in order to ...'
2. control-denial	(b) 'I did not do/say that at all'
3. intention-denial	(c) 'I did not do/say that on purpose', 'It was an accident'
4. goal-denial	(d) 'I did not mean that', 'You got me wrong'

INTERACTION AND RESEARCH TASK

Do ONE of the following tasks. A or B. Either:

- A. Bibliography Research Task looking for well-known works dealing with race, language and identity. (NB, you are welcome to watch a one-hour lecture by John McWhorter)
- B. A Critical Discourse Analysis of a story applying van Dijk's analysis of racist language. Select a news story, film or book.

References and Further Sources

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