

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Discourse refers to language used coherently for communication (Cook, 2004, p. 6). It deals with both spoken and written language and emphasizes interaction between sender and receiver (Fairclough, 2003, p. 3).

Discourse concerns language, communication, meaning, and context; therefore, it applies to various disciplines, such as communication, cognitive and social psychology, or artificial intelligence (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2004, pp. 1-2).

In linguistics, religious speech or writing is considered as a discourse (Green & Searle-Chatterjee, 2008, p. 5). In Buddhism, Buddhist instruction is considered Dhamma. Therefore, the religious speeches or texts composed of Buddhist instruction are called Dhamma discourse.

A religious discourse may be considered as a combination of religious education and the art of language use. People use language as a medium of communication, including education. Ellis (1999, p. 2) suggests that “language serves communication” because an important role of language in communication is to minister the communicative goal. Lee (1983, p. 1) also suggests that “without language there will be no education” because an important role of language in education is to communicate with students.

Buddhist instruction was firstly formulated in ancient languages that people do not use in communication nowadays, particularly Pali and Sanskrit.

Later, monks or relevant parties in different countries used their own languages to translate the instruction into Chinese, English, Indian, Japanese, Tibetan, Thai, and a number of other languages.

Therefore, in religious communication and education, appropriate religious language is uniquely needed. Language is an essential part of the religious communication between religious leaders and followers or between believers. The language needs to truly convey meaning of religious truths and clearly provide a comprehensive and detailed religious message, as religion deals with the intangible non-physical world.

Dhamma discourse will be delivered effectively if proper utterances are used in suitable contexts to provide information or educate audiences, especially when Dhamma discourse is constructed in a single version intended for delivering to audiences in different countries around the world.

Mr. Sri Satya Narayan Goenka, or S. N. Goenka, is a teacher of Vipassana meditation. He was born in Burma and learnt a form of Vipassana meditation technique from his teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, who had received it from a long chain of teachers down to himself. Mr. Goenka began teaching the Vipassana meditation technique in India in 1969, upon the authorization from his teacher. He also expressed his gratitude for his success – which he attributed to the efficacy of Dhamma – by helping to establish Vipassana meditation centers in various parts of India and throughout different parts of the world, as a way to preserve the technique. The centers run retreats that are fully residential and free of cost (Vipassana Meditation, 2009).

Goenka and teachers trained by him have been teaching for more than 30 years. He has taught tens of thousands of people in more than 300 courses in different countries, in the East and the West, and each year more than 100,000 people attend the Vipassana meditation courses (Goenka, 1998, p. vii; Vipassana Meditation, 2009).

During each course, there is Dhamma discourse at the end of every day. The discourse helps guide attendees to understand the meditation technique and practice properly. The discourses were also produced in a single version in both an audio and video medium, recorded by Goenka himself. This single version of the discourses is delivered to all students in every course and in all centers around the world.

The Dhamma discourses are considered as an important tool in the teaching method. It conveys the purposes of the teaching, provides background of Dhamma to new students, clarifies procedure of the Vipassana meditation technique, and challenges the old students to continue to work hard and practice more.

Statement of the Problem

The Vipassana meditation centers established by Goenka and his supporters are located in different parts of the world, such as Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. The ten-day Vipassana meditation courses are organized in these centers for people from all nationalities, religions, or walk of life.

The Dhamma discourse by Goenka is provided to all attendees at the end of every day during the ten-day course. Since the discourse is recorded in a single version and distributed to all meditation centers, all persons who attend the courses receive the same messages from the discourses, no matter what background they have.

The recorded Dhamma discourses consist of a ten-day discourse series. The length of the discourses in total is ten hours or an hour a day. The discourses compile the teachings of the Buddha, meditation technique, application in daily life, and others. The discourse contents are considered huge, but they are managed in a logical, well-organized sequence.

Having a single version of the Dhamma discourses for all attendees, in all parts of the world, may be an unusual way to present religious teachings. Generally, speakers and writers modify their speech or writing to fit different groups of listeners or readers, especially when they are from different backgrounds. However, the Dhamma discourses presented by Goenka are developed in a single exclusive version, so a number of questions arise, e.g., linguistically, what type of communication the discourses use, how these discourses are constructed, and others. Therefore, research is needed to understand the communication purposes of the Dhamma discourses delivered by Goenka, as well as the procedure used to construct the discourses.

Purposes of the Study

The primary purpose of this thesis is to conduct a discourse and rhetorical analysis to understand the types and purposes of communication employed by the Dhamma discourses recorded by Goenka and delivered to attendees during the ten-day Vipassana meditation courses at his centers in different parts of the world.

The study will also examine how the logically articulated discourses are constructed and will describe the procedure to construct the discourses and the types of rhetorical devices used.

Research Questions

The study is initiated to serve the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the procedure for constructing the logically articulated Dhamma discourses of S. N. Goenka?

RQ 2: What is the procedure of the Dhamma discourses used in communicating with the attendees each day?

RQ 3: How does the procedure used to construct the Dhamma discourses communicate the intended message to the attendees in the Vipassana meditation courses?

Scope and Limitations

The study will focus on the analysis of the language use in the Dhamma discourses delivered by Goenka to the persons who attend the ten-day Vipassana meditation course, but will not attempt to determine the success of the Vipassana meditation course.

The study also will not evaluate how the attendees respond to the discourse information they receive, as Dhamma discourse may be a determinative influence on the practice of the attendees; however, there are also other factors that influence the success of course, such as experience in practicing meditation of the attendees, attitude of the attendees, etc. Moreover, the study will not evaluate the preparation for and training of the meditation courses.

The study will determine the theme of the discourse, the procedure of the discourse, and the types of the rhetorical devices used each day. The study also describes how the procedure to construct the Dhamma discourses communicates its message to the attendees of the Vipassana meditation courses.

Definition of Terms

Definitions of some importance terms used in this thesis are as follows:

Vipassana, in the Buddhist tradition, means insight into the nature of reality or to see things as they really are (Vipassana Meditation, 2009).

Meditation is a holistic discipline by which the practitioner attempts to get beyond the reflexive, thinking mind into a deeper state of relaxation or awareness (Vipassana Meditation, 2009).

Significance of the Study

The research is conducted to understand the communication purpose in the Dhamma discourses of Goenka, as they are delivered to attendees during the ten-day Vipassana meditation courses, and to discover how the logically articulated discourses are constructed. Therefore, the research will be beneficial to linguists, academics, students, and others who are interested in studying discourse, discourse analysis, discourse structure, and procedures for constructing a discourse. The study also examines various types of rhetorical devices; therefore, it would also benefit individuals or parties who are interest in studying rhetorical analysis and rhetorical devices. Researchers who need to conduct a research related to the same area may utilize the study results to support their studies. The study will also benefit the individuals or parties who need to formulate discourse for communication purpose.

In addition, it is expected that the study will benefit Dhamma practitioners, as it may augment their understanding of the language used in the Dhamma discourses of S. N. Goenka and thus enhance their Vipassana meditation practice.

Summary

The research is initiated to conduct an analysis which may determine and understand the communication purpose used in the Dhamma discourses of S. N. Goenka provided to the persons attending the ten-day Vipassana meditation courses. The study will analyze and present the procedure used to construct the logically articulated discourse and the rhetorical device used in the discourse. The analysis result will reveal how the procedure is formulated and what types of communication may be used in the discourse. The study will focus on the analysis of the language use only, but will not determine the success of the Vipassana meditation course and will not evaluate how the attendees respond to the religious information they receive.