

A Discourse Analysis of Satirical Resistance to Foucault's Concept of Power

in *The Simpsons Movie*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was analyze how language is used in a film through Foucault's theoretical framework concerning power and resistance by 1) identifying the discourse present in *The Simpsons Movie*. 2) Moreover, this study examines how those discourses had an effect on individuals through institutions, which illustrate Foucault's concept of power. 3) Also, this study provides examples Foucault's concept of resistance by looking at how the binary oppositions found in the discourses become the subject of satire and how the techniques of satire are used to resist mainstream culture. Research tools consisted of a DVD and transcript of the film. Data were analyzed using discourse analysis viewed through Foucault's theoretical framework. The data were presented in a description according to the discourses identified while watching the film. Results of the study found that: 1) the discourses of masculinity, femininity, childhood, community, government, violence, the environment, religion, and sexuality appeared most frequently in the film. 2) In addition, the results of the study illustrate Foucault's concept of power by providing examples of dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification on individuals as well as how institutions use discourses to control society. 3) Finally, this study provide examples of Foucault's concept of resistance by looking at how the binary opposition found in the discourses become the subject of satire and how the techniques of satire are used to resist mainstream culture.

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ภาษาที่ใช้ในภาพยนตร์ผ่านกรอบทฤษฎีทางอำนาจและการต่อต้านของฟูโกต์ โดยการ ๑) ระบุถึงวาทกรรมต่างๆ ที่ปรากฏอยู่ในภาพยนตร์เรื่อง เดอะ ซิมป์สัน นอกจากนี้ ๒) งานวิจัยนี้ยังได้ศึกษาให้เห็นว่าวาทกรรมต่างๆ ที่ปรากฏในภาพยนตร์เรื่องนี้ส่งผลกระทบต่อปัจเจกบุคคลโดยผ่านทางสถาบันต่างๆ ทางสังคมได้อย่างไรตามกรอบทฤษฎีทางอำนาจและการต่อต้านของฟูโกต์ ๓) การศึกษานี้ยังแสดงให้เห็นด้วยว่าวิธีการและเทคนิคในการเสียดสีได้ถูกนำมาใช้เป็นรูปแบบของการแสดงการต่อต้านทางสังคมตามกรอบแนวคิดทฤษฎีของฟูโกต์ได้อย่างไร เครื่องมือในการวิจัยครั้งนี้ประกอบด้วยแผ่นวีดิทัศน์ระบบดิจิทัล (DVD) และบทภาพยนตร์ของภาพยนตร์เรื่อง เดอะ ซิมป์สัน ข้อมูลวิเคราะห์โดยการวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมผ่านกรอบทฤษฎีทางอำนาจและการต่อต้านของฟูโกต์ แล้วนำข้อมูลเนื้อหาที่วิเคราะห์แล้วนำเสนอผลการศึกษาในรูปแบบของความเรียงโดยจำแนกตามวาทกรรมที่พบ

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ในภาพยนตร์เรื่องนี้ ผลจากการวิจัยพบว่า วาทกรรมที่พบและปรากฏบ่อยในภาพยนตร์เรื่องนี้มีดังต่อไปนี้ ๑) วาทกรรมความเป็นชาย, ความเป็นหญิง, ความเป็นเด็ก, ชุมชน, อำนาจรัฐ, ความรุนแรง, สิ่งแวดล้อม, ศาสนา, และเพศ ๒) ผลการศึกษาได้แสดงให้เห็นถึงกรอบทฤษฎีทางอำนาจของฟูโกต์ถูกนำมาอธิบายจากตัวอย่างของปัจเจกบุคคลที่ถูกควบคุมผ่านทางวาทกรรมจากการใช้กระบวนการการแบ่งแยก, วิทยาศาสตร์มนุษย์ และอัตบุคคล และสถาบันต่างๆ ทางสังคมใช้วาทกรรมเพื่อใช้ควบคุมปัจเจกบุคคลเช่นเดียวกัน ท้ายสุด ๓) การศึกษานี้ได้แสดงให้เห็นถึงตัวอย่างตามกรอบทฤษฎีทางอำนาจในการต่อต้านขจัดขึ้นของฟูโกต์โดยจะเห็นได้จากลักษณะของคู่ตรงข้ามที่พบในวาทกรรมต่างๆ ซึ่งจะแสดงให้เห็นว่าอะไรคือประเด็นสำคัญในวาทกรรมที่ต้องการเสียดสี แล้วประเด็นต่างๆ เหล่านั้นถูกนำเสนอผ่านเทคนิคต่างๆ ของการเสียดสีเพื่อใช้แสดงการต่อต้านขจัดขึ้นต่อแนวคิดที่เป็นกระแสหลักทางสังคม

Key Words : Discourse, Satire, Resistance

คำสำคัญ : วาทกรรม แนวเสียดสีสังคม การต่อต้าน

Introduction

Humor is something that people all over the world share and can serve different functions. While humor is used for entertainment purposes, it can also be used as a tool to critique society, politics, culture, ideas, etc. As Alberti (2003) suggests, satire is a critical but humorous commentary on the social pressure to follow traditional values that define what it means to be part of mainstream culture in a society. By challenging what is acceptable, satire carries out what French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault calls resistance (Rabinow, 1984). For Foucault, resistance calls into question what is accepted as correct, and highlights what has been declared off limits by society, religion, education, government, etc. as inappropriate, unacceptable, wrong, abnormal, or false (Pickett 2006). In other words, satire is a form of resistance. Within Foucault's framework, resistance seeks to undermine power, which is the overall objective of satire (Pickett, 2006).

From Foucault's perspective, power can be defined as the way in which laws, government, society, family, and sexual identity pressure people to

conform (Pennycook, 2001). Discourses are used by society to label, separate, and pressure individuals to accept what has been determined to be acceptable and normal (Rabinow, 1984). By using discourses, institutions such as churches, schools, hospitals, prisons, government, and family have exerted power in every level of an individual's life, even down to the level of sexuality and gender identity to create absolute control through the fear of being singled out as "abnormal" (Rabinow, 1984). Discourse, then, plays a significant role in shaping human identity and society; however, as Wodak and Meyer (2008) point out, discourse can be defined in many different ways. At a basic level, Johnstone (2008) defines discourse as language in use. Fairclough (1995) uses the term discourse to describe the way language is used in society. Discourse can also be used to talk about the language related to a certain subject (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Moreover, Fairclough (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002) considers discourse to be the language used to express a certain worldview. This view of discourse is also held by Unger and Sunderland (2005), who describe discourse as an identifiable way

of using language that reflects a certain part of one's worldview.

Interestingly, Foucault presents a slightly broader view of discourse that suggests discourse is a certain way of using language that is strongly influenced by outside forces, which at the same time employ those discourses to establish boundaries concerning place, time, and even content that are considered appropriate for use (Barker & Galasinski, 2001). Barker (2008) summarizes Foucault's notion by stating that "discourse constructs, defines and produces the objects of knowledge in an intelligible way while excluding other forms of reasoning as unintelligible" (p. 20). In other words, discourse is something that is controlled by society and culture, but also acts as the tool through which society and culture exercise control. This definition is indeed different from most other approaches to discourse because it places an emphasis on how the language is being used and the influences that are at work when language is used instead of trying to find meaning. In this way, discourse can be an important part of understanding satire, because satire often rebels against the norms created by discourses as defined by Foucault (Simpson, 2003).

When viewed through Foucault's framework, a brief look at the history of satire demonstrates that satire has consistently functioned as a way to resist power. From the time of the Greeks and Romans to the writings of 16th, 17th, and 18th century England, and to the rise and development of television and film comedy in modern Great Britain and the United States, satire has been used as a way of addressing social, political, and cultural issues in an effort to challenge power and authority

(Armstrong, 2005). For the purposes of this study, a modern example of satire, *The Simpsons Movie*, was selected as a text in order to illustrate Foucault's concepts of power, discourse, human identity, and resistance by examining the satire used in the film.

Although *The Simpsons Movie* certainly has its share of laughs, it can and should be seen as much more than a funny cartoon. It is commonly accepted that an important reason for the popularity of *The Simpsons Movie*, and *The Simpsons* in general, is its controversy. *The Simpsons* has been successful because it frequently deals with many provocative issues in American society in a humorous way. According to what the creator of *The Simpsons*, Matt Groening, has shared in interviews, the show is supposed to make people think and question what they have always been told to think and do by the people or institutions in authority (Angell, 1993). For example, Groening states that *The Simpsons* presents a view of issues such as race, religion, immigration, sexual orientation, war, etc. from the perspective of the political left as a reaction against what he sees as the narrow minded views of the conservative right (Alberti, 2003). In other words, *The Simpsons* is intended to encourage people to resist conforming to the pressure to fit in that is found throughout society.

It is in this unique role that satire can function as a means of fighting back against the pressures of society, laws, and institutions, and makes satire a noteworthy form of communication that can be explored further. The humorous nature of satirical works, such as *The Simpsons Movie*, enable people to easily participate in the small act of resistance that is created when criticism provokes laughter, reminding people that alternatives can be created and possibly providing a spark of inspiration for a better future. In

this sense as resistance, the satire of *The Simpsons Movie* carries on the longstanding desire for freedom that has marked the use of satire by giving a voice to the discourses that have been put down and silenced by society, politics, and culture. Although *The Simpsons Movie* is certainly good for laughs, the satirical discourses in the film also present a clear example of Foucault's concepts of power and resistance that can help non-Westerners understand these important ideas from Foucault have influenced Western academic research for more than thirty years. Thus, the objectives of this study were to identify the satirical discourses present in the film, and then demonstrate how those discourses illustrate Foucault's concepts of power and resistance.

Research Questions

1. What satirical discourses are present in *The Simpsons Movie*?
2. What examples of Foucault's concept of power are present in *The Simpsons Movie*?
3. How does satire function as resistance to the examples of power in *The Simpsons Movie*?

Materials and Research Tools

Materials

A DVD copy of *The Simpsons Movie* was used to conduct this study. The DVD of the film contains the English language version of the film and was purchased locally. The film is seventy-three minutes in length. The DVD version was selected by the researcher because of it has ability to be paused or opened at any scene. In addition, a transcript of the film was obtained from a fan website and was downloaded from the internet. The transcript has been checked for accuracy by comparing it to the actual movie, and has been found to be accurate.

Observation Logs

Observation logs were used as the primary tool to gather data while watching the film. A total of six different observation logs were used to accomplish the purposes of each research stage. Observation logs 1 and 2 were used to identify the discourses present in the film. Observation log 4 was used to look at how Foucault's concept of power affected individuals while Observation log 5 was used to make note of the role that institutions played in maintaining Foucault's concept of power as seen in the film. Finally, Observation log 6 was used to record the forms and techniques of satire used in the film in order to discuss how satire resist the mainstream.

Methods

Data Collection

This study was conducted in three stages in which observation logs were used to collect data that illustrated Foucault's theoretical concepts of discourse, power, and resistance while watching *The Simpsons Movie*. Stage 1 focused on the researcher watching *The Simpsons Movie* scene by scene using the DVD in order to make observations about the content of the film. Stage 2 returned to the film to look at how the discourses found in Stage 1 affected individuals by looking at the members of the Simpson family and the role that institutions played in using discourse to maintain order in society. Lastly, Stage 3 made note of the forms and techniques of satire used in the movie in order to discuss how satire can function as a form of resistance as defined by Foucault.

Data Analysis

Stage 1 involved preparing the text, and locating the satirical discourses present in *The Simpsons Movie*, which according to Foucault (cited in Bertens, 2001) are actually binary oppositions that function as the subjects of the satire in the film. The binary oppositions are important because these pairs are used to influence and control human behavior (Rabinow, 1984). Foucault and others, however, have observed that these pairs do not function in equal relationships (Bertens, 2001). Interestingly, it is often one side of the binary opposition that becomes the target of satire as it seeks to criticize the side of the binary opposition that is given preferred significance in society (Simpson, 2003). By identifying the discourses in this way, the researcher began to gain an understanding of the subject matter that is dealt with by the satire. In order to this goal, the film was separated into scenes. Once the text had been prepared, data collection began by following a series of steps to identify the discourses present in the film. These steps consisted of the researcher watching *The Simpsons Movie* using the DVD and a transcript made available on the internet to record observations using observation logs. From the overall patterns that appear in the film, the researcher was able to identify the binary oppositions present in the discourses of *The Simpsons Movie*.

Stage 2 examined how the discourses located in Stage 1 could be used to illustrate Foucault's concept of power. In this stage, the researcher investigated the way in which discourse was used to exercise power at both the individual and societal levels. To start with, the researcher looked for instances in which individuals were given and accepted labels as well as making note of how their

identities fit the notion of what kind of person they should be. This was done by studying the main characters of the Simpson family. Additionally, the researcher observed the institutions, such as schools, churches, law enforcement, government, and bureaucracy that produce discourses of knowledge in order to maintain power as depicted in the film. The study also made note of the institutions, their actions, and the knowledge they produced or promoted. This was done by noting how these institutions watched people, pressured people to fit in, corrected rebellion, taught self-discipline, isolated individuals, promoted what is "true," and used physical force if necessary. The findings in Stage 2 helped provide an understanding of Foucault's concept of power and how it uses discourses as a tool to maintain order as illustrated in *The Simpsons Movie*.

Stage 3 examined how satire functions as resistance to power by looking at the forms and techniques of satire that were used to deal with the discourses in *The Simpsons Movie*. The researcher watched the film again to observe which of Hodgart's (1969) forms and techniques of satire were used to deal with the binary oppositions present in the movie. The forms of satire included formal and imaginary voyage and utopia while the techniques will include reduction (caricature, stereotypes, parody, and destruction of the symbol), invective, and irony (Hodgart, 1969). The forms and techniques of satire illustrate Foucault's concept of resistance as a way of violating the norms established by society in the way they pay attention to the forbidden or unacceptable (Pickett, 2006). In the same way, satire often gives attention to the part of the binary opposition that has been declared off limits by society by poking fun at the half of the pair that has been labeled as acceptable

(Picket, 2006). By looking at how satire accomplishes its goal of criticizing, the researcher could also understand how resistance to power can take place.

Results and discussion

The results of the study answered three main questions: 1) What discourses are present in *The Simpsons Movie*? 2) What examples of Foucault's concept of power are present? 3) How does satire function as resistance to those examples of power? The results of the study are presented below according to the discourses observed in the film. After watching the film, the following discourses were noted as appearing most often: masculinity, femininity, childhood, community, government power, violence, the environment, religion, and sexuality. When examined closely using Foucault's framework, it was seen how these discourses are used by the society in the film to label, separate, and pressure people to submit to the ideals that the institutions of society constantly promote. Furthermore, it was also seen how the filmmakers used satire to create a discourse of resistance to challenge the dominant discourses of the fictional community in the movie, which is a reflection of reality in America.

Masculinity

The discourse of masculinity was depicted most often in the film, portraying the ideal of what the society within the movie says it means to be a man, husband, and father. This discourse describes a man as someone who fixes things around the house, goes to church with his wife and children, cares about the safety of his family, takes care of his children's needs, pays attention to his children, teaches his

children to be good people, respects nature, needs a wife and family to have an identity, and is considerate of others. All of these characteristics are presented as representative of the "normal" man. The contrast between the "normal" and "abnormal" man reflects what Foucault referred as a binary opposition that is used by society to establish the boundaries of what, when, and where can be said by whom (Barker & Galasinski, 2001). As Pennycook (2001) points out, when discourse is used in this way, masculinity becomes something pressures the characters in the film to conform to what society says they should be and do. In this case, "normal" males are seen as being "masculine," while "abnormal" males are viewed by Springfield society as "feminine." Thus, within the film, there is a binary opposition concerning males that consists of masculine versus feminine, masculine receiving a positive connotation while feminine receives a negative connotation. Males are encouraged and rewarded for being masculine but looked down on and pressured to change if perceived as too feminine.

The character of Homer Simpson provides a clear example of how the discourse of masculinity is used by society in the film. Illustrating what Foucault called *dividing practices*, Homer is labeled a man, husband, father, and citizen (Rabinow, 1984). These labels enable society to separate Homer from others through *scientific classification* and create boundaries and expectations concerning what he can and cannot do as well as what is acceptable and unacceptable for the roles given to him (Rabinow, 1984). For example, Homer is a father who struggles to live up to the ideal that society has placed on him. He often disappoints his children, acts selfishly toward his family, is careless and irresponsible, and is constantly compared

to his neighbor, Ned Flanders, who is an example of the ideal man. According to Foucault's concept of power, these labels and their ability to isolate Homer are evidence of the process of *subjectification*, which pressure Homer to accept the role that society has placed upon him (Barker & Galasinski, 2001). Moreover, the institutions of religion, government, family, and sexuality all work to pressure Homer to submit to his place in society by reinforcing the idea of what it means to be a man, husband, and father.

Interestingly, the filmmakers choose the discourse of masculinity and use satire to challenge the idea of what it means to be a man, husband, and father. According to Pickett (2006), Foucault's notion of resistance can be defined as the breaking of rules established by society in an effort to rebel against the labels placed on the individual. Foucault argues that labels which are placed on individuals by society are simply language, not nature (Pickett 2006). By challenging what is acceptable, resistance is highlighting the other side of the binary pair that has been declared off limits by society, religion, education, government, etc. as inappropriate, unacceptable, wrong, abnormal, or false (Pickett 2006). By using techniques such as reduction, which includes parody, stereotypes, and destruction of the symbol, as well as irony, the film presents an alternative vision of man, husband, and father in a humorous manner. Homer Simpson, for example, seems to enjoy crossing boundaries that society has established for men. Homer is depicted as unable to fix things, clumsy, childlike, doubting religious beliefs, depending on his wife for decisions, and avoiding taking responsibility as a parent. He is the opposite of what society has said he should be, yet he remains the hero of his wife, children, and

community. By using satire, the discourse of masculinity is changed by the filmmakers, resisting the definition of "normal" man, and instead highlighting the opposite.

Femininity

The discourse of femininity also appears frequently. Women are depicted as staying at home to cook, clean, and care for children, depending on their husbands for affirmation, submitting to their husbands, speaking with logic and reason, observing religion, producing things at home, forgiving, and keeping order and discipline in the home. It is these characteristics that appear in the film as descriptive of a "normal" woman. As observed in the film, a binary opposition exists between what is considered to be the appropriate kind of female who is feminine and the opposite who shows characteristics that Springfield society usually assigns males as masculine traits. Feminine traits are encouraged while masculine traits in a female are discouraged by society.

The character of Marge Simpson provides a clear example of how this discourse of femininity is used to label, separate, and create conformity, again illustrating Foucault's concepts of *dividing practices*, *scientific classification*, and *subjectification*. By labeling Marge a woman, wife, and mother, the fictional society in the film creates the ideal of the "normal" woman mentioned above to which Marge is pressured to submit. The institutions of marriage, family, religion, community, and government promote this concept of a "normal" woman, teaching Marge that a woman's place is in the home, taking care of husband and children.

Although, in general, Marge can be seen submitting to this role placed on her by society, the

filmmakers use the discourse of femininity to challenge the idea of what it means to be a woman, wife, and mother. For Foucault (cited in Pickett, 2006), resistance is one way of acknowledging that other possibilities exist in terms of defining oneself. Within Marge's role as a woman, the filmmakers find subtle ways of resisting the ideal of a feminine woman by allowing Marge to take on traditionally male roles such as family leadership. Again, by using techniques such as reduction and irony, the filmmakers are able to transform Marge's character into a strong woman capable of making her own decisions and leading the family outside the home.

Childhood

Childhood is another significant discourse that is taken up in *The Simpsons Movie*. The so-called normal child is portrayed as curious, playful, submissive, innocent, smart, and looking to parents for approval. In *The Simpsons Movie*, the discourse of childhood consists of a binary opposition of good versus bad children. Good children are rewarded and complimented, while bad children are pressured to change their behavior. Moreover, it was observed that the children in the film, namely Bart, Lisa, and Maggie Simpson, are taught from birth by parents, family, neighbors, teachers, doctors, government officials, and religious figures about what a "good" child is and does. The filmmakers, however, use the satirical techniques of reduction and irony to create child characters who often act in an adult manner. The "normal" child ideal is made to look extreme, unrealistic, and humorous. For example, Lisa becomes an environmental activist while Bart breaks laws and becomes an alcoholic. Bart, Lisa, and Maggie are often seen rebelling, seeking

independence, and telling their parents what to do. Thus, through satire, the things that society says children should not be or do are displayed and celebrated, illustrating the value that Foucault places on breaking the rules as the best way to be set free (Pickett, 2006).

Community

In *The Simpsons Movie*, there is a discourse of community that describes the ideal of what a community should be. For the characters in the film, community helps enforce discipline and order, teaches people to be good citizens, makes decisions through democratic means, and has the ability to punish violations of its standards of conduct. The reaction of the community against selfish actions of characters in the film reveals a binary opposition between community and individual. Community is given a positive connotation while individualism is seen as dangerous and a threat to the community's existence. Community itself also acts as an institution while also providing a structure for other institutions, such as religion and family, to teach the values mentioned above and ensure order. The filmmakers use satire to criticize this ideal by depicting it in extreme forms. For example, when faced with disaster, the community turns into a mob out for revenge against Homer. By representing the community in an extreme manner through satire, the filmmakers are able to offer a humorous critique on the nature and role of community. Community is depicted in an extreme manner in order to give value to the role of the individual, demonstrating through satire that while community is an essential part of any society, an individual's identity can be lost in the crowd. Satire promotes the individual as someone of

equal or even greater value than community that must also be respected. By acknowledging what is considered to be forbidden to talk about or to be, resistance can undermine power (Pickett 2006). In other words, breaking the norms can challenge power and its influence on one's life.

Government Power

The discourse of an all-powerful government plays a central role throughout the movie. In the film, the government is presented as constantly watching, enforcing discipline, dealing with rebellion, possessing the ability to instantly respond with force, and telling people what to believe as "true." Included as part of a discourse of government, the American presidency is portrayed as a powerful, decision-making office, supported by the large bureaucracy of government agencies. As can be seen in the film, the discourse of an all-powerful government consists of a binary pair that contrasts order and chaos. Order is portrayed as correct, safe, and good while chaos is represented as wrong, dangerous, and bad. Within Foucault's framework, power can refer to the way in which government pressures people to conform (Pennycook, 2001). As summarized by Bertens (2001), what is known as truth or knowledge is determined by discourses which were also chosen by other people over time to reflect the desire to maintain order in society. Foucault (cited in Barker & Galasinski, 2001) argues that government has a particular interest in power and its effects on discourse, because it is power that can create an orderly society. As mentioned above, Foucault (Rabinow, 1984) argued that power seeks to isolate the individual through the use of labels. This, however, is just one side of power. Power also seeks

to spread to every level of the individual's life, even down to the level of sexuality and gender identity to create absolute control (Rabinow, 1984). Rabinow (1984) suggests that this concept is best represented in Foucault's description of the panopticon prison. In his book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the design for a prison known as the panopticon as a perfect illustration of how power influences every aspect of life (cited in Rabinow, 1984). The panopticon was a prison in which all of the cells faced a centrally located tower (Rabinow, 1984). Each cell was visible to the tower at all times; however, inmates could never know if they were being watched (Rabinow, 1984). In the panopticon prison, power seeks to label people, and those considered "abnormal" are singled out and pressured to get back in line through both self-discipline and outside measures, if necessary (Rabinow, 1984). Being different is turned into something dangerous. Constant observation and visibility prevent disorder (Rabinow, 1984). The crowd loses power by being turned into a collection of individuals, and the threat of being seen leads to self-discipline (Rabinow, 1984).

Foucault (cited in Rabinow, 1984) explains that over time, power was used in smarter and more efficient ways to maintain its hold on people. At first, power relied on the strong force of the state or government, but this did not always result in the desired result of order (Rabinow, 1984). Power then became more spread out, penetrating deeper until it was everywhere and waiting to catch rule breakers (Rabinow, 1984). In this way, society became like the panopticon prison. The constant threat of getting caught prevents disobedience (Rabinow, 1984). Disobedience is met with being singled out and

pressured to get back in line (Rabinow, 1984). By becoming much more behind the scenes and indirect, power became more effective and able to reproduce itself without the need for physical force (Rabinow, 1984). It becomes possible to observe and label the inhabitants of society by using the language of binary pairs (Rabinow, 1984). As illustrated in the panopticon, power opens opportunities for experimentation to maintain itself (Rabinow, 1984). Power is maintained through institutions such as churches, hospitals, schools, prisons, governments, etc. that perform the role of constantly observing individuals (Rabinow, 1984). For Foucault (cited in Bertens, 2001), the concept of power influences everything. This can be clearly seen in *The Simpsons Movie* as the characters are put through the process of *dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification* while interacting with the institution of government.

Although the government in the film is certainly powerful, the filmmakers frequently use the satirical technique of destruction of the symbol to reveal an ineffective, indecisive, and inept government that is full of human weaknesses. For example, the president in the film is Arnold Schwarzenegger, who does not enjoy his position and wants others to tell him what to do. By representing the president a Hollywood star and a foreigner, the labels that give the position its power are removed, and he can be seen in a different way. Instead of appearing strong and powerful, the result is that the discourse of an all-powerful government is challenged by an alternative view of government as flawed, opening the door to questions about the nature, size, and role of government in the lives of its citizens. The result is that the discourse of an all-

powerful government is challenged by an alternative view of government as flawed, opening the door to questions about the nature, size, and role of government in the lives of its citizens.

Violence

Another interesting discourse found in the film is that violence is “normal,” making non-violence “abnormal” and therefore something to be avoided. Violence is depicted as something humorous, sometimes necessary, always entertaining, and common to everyday life. From the opening scene with Itchy and Scratchy on the moon, violence is made into something normal and funny. Violent acts frequently occur throughout the film, including Homer choking his son, Mr. Burns releasing his dogs to chase people, Nelson bullying Millhouse, police shooting at children, an angry mob intent on hanging the Simpson family, and military using weapons of war against its citizens. The characters in the movie are given roles that permit them to use violence. Homer is allowed to use violence against his son, and Bart is allowed to be violent toward his father. The filmmakers, however, portray violence in an extreme manner, again using the techniques of reduction and irony. Violence then becomes something so unrealistic that it becomes humorous. By highlighting the true nature of violence and making it look silly, the filmmakers actually promote the idea of non-violence. As Pickett (2006) suggests, Foucault places a high value on breaking the rules as the best way to be set free, and in this instance, the filmmakers choose to break with rules to challenge the idea that violence is normal and acceptable.

Environment

While the plot of the movie centers around the Simpson family's adventure during a man-made crisis, surprisingly, a discourse of the environment did not appear as often as other discourses; moreover, the discourse of the environment is depicted as an issue of little interest to the majority of people in Springfield. Institutions seem to promote the carefree attitude held by most of the townspeople toward environmental issues. In fact, a binary opposition concerning the environmental discourse occurs in the film and places environmental activism against the carefree attitude of those who think it is unimportant.

Individuals and institutions in the film are caught in the middle of this conflict between concern for the environment and the lack of concern; however, the institutions of Springfield tend to support the side of the debate that says environmentalism is an over reaction. Lisa Simpson is labeled an environmental activist, which is given a negative connotation as illustrated by the townspeople's reaction to her call for action. Because she has been scientifically classified as having an "abnormal" view about the environment, she is placed in a minority. Lisa, however, accepts her role as an environmental activist and does not give up when other people fail to show interest. The institutions of Springfield seem to promote the carefree attitude held by most of the townspeople toward environmental issues. As an institution, the community itself pressures Lisa to slow down and take it easy. Members of the community do not want to listen, and when they do listen, they easily lose focus, such as their reaction at the auditorium when Lisa gives her presentation.

It is this lack of interest, and in fact hostility, that the filmmakers choose to target with their satire. Satire is used to criticize the majority opinion by using reduction and irony in a way that makes those who oppose taking care of the environment appear as uninformed, narrow minded, and selfish. The satire highlights the weakness of the argument by depicting it as unbelievable. For example, parody and irony are used in the scene containing Lisa's presentation, "An Irritating Truth," making reference to the film, "An Inconvenient Truth," that also talked about the environment. It is the community's reaction to both Lisa's door to door campaign and her presentation, however, that the filmmakers choose to target with satire. By using the technique of reduction, the filmmakers make the lack of concern for the environment seems exaggerated. In other words, there is so little concern that it is unrealistic and thus, humorous. In this case, satire is actually used to provoke people to think about the validity of their arguments against taking care of the environment. The filmmakers make the argument against environmentalism seem selfish and unintelligent, giving voice to the side of the binary opposition that has been neglected by the society in the film.

Religion

The discourse of religion plays a minor but interesting role in the film, showing religion as beneficial for family and community while having appropriate and inappropriate forms of worship as well as acceptable and unacceptable beliefs about God. As observed in these examples from the film, a binary opposition exists between orthodox and unorthodox religious beliefs. Orthodox beliefs are

acceptable but unorthodox beliefs are unacceptable. Clearly illustrating part of Foucault's concept of power, order regarding religious belief is maintained by other institutions, such as family, church, and community (Rabinow, 1984). Homer, for example, is reminded by his wife that there are some things that should not be said about religious beliefs when he questions why they have to go to church to worship God. When he also expresses his doubt about the existence of God and mispronounces the name of Jesus, instead referring to him as "Jebus," other people in town look at him threateningly. Again, by using the techniques of reduction and irony, the filmmakers are able to give expression to thoughts and ideas that are usually considered off limits in Springfield and the American society it reflects. The humorous nature of exaggerating the attitudes toward religion enable the filmmakers to question the idea of correct beliefs, engaging in what Foucault would refer to as resistance to the idea of correct beliefs by highlighting non-traditional beliefs.

Sexuality

Among the discourses present in *The Simpsons Movie*, the discourse of sexuality illustrates Foucault's concepts of power and resistance with the greatest clarity. This discourse describes sexuality as something that must be kept private, is unacceptable to be revealed in public, must not be talked about or looked at should be expressed between husbands and wives, and if these norms are violated, it is perceived as sin, something that must be hidden, and a threat to society.

"Normal" sexuality is seen in the example of husbands and wives who love each other in exclusive relationships. In *The Simpsons Movie*, a

binary opposition exists between "normal" and "abnormal" sexuality. The strongest expression of this binary pair is seen in the contrast between heterosexual versus homosexual. Heterosexuality is depicted as love, honor, and romance when Homer and Marge make love in the cabin while society in Springfield considers homosexuality a sin to be confessed as seen in Homer's wish for Ned Flanders to admit being gay, or an activity that must remain hidden from sight as witnessed in the two police officers who make out in a dark corner in order to avoid being labeled outcasts. In this case, society uses the discourse of sexuality to regulate people's behavior and pressure them to conform to a specific ideal, namely heterosexuality and modesty.

Family, community, religion, and government all work together to enforce the rules and maintain order. Sexuality that finds expression outside these norms is quickly condemned and pressure is applied on the violator to get back in line. When Bart skates naked through town, his sexuality is on display for everyone to see. In response, Bart is arrested, and other people make fun of him, embarrassing him in public. By having a main character break the sexual norms of Springfield, the filmmakers succeed in illustrating the silliness of becoming stressed about something that is part of human nature and therefore should not be condemned. Highlighting an attitude of freedom and open celebration of human sexuality, the filmmakers give attention to the part of the binary pair that has been labeled as inappropriate or unacceptable by bravely putting it directly in front of the audience. The satirical technique of reduction, including parody, is used to draw attention to sexuality by making it look innocent and even humorous. Bart's

naked skate through town challenges the idea of what is acceptable in not only Springfield, but also in real life.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the results of the study clearly revealed that *The Simpsons Movie* contains many examples Foucault's concepts of power and resistance in its satirical discourses. The satirical discourses found in *The Simpsons Movie*, namely masculinity, femininity, childhood, community, government power, violence, the environment, religion, and sexuality, illustrate Foucault's concept of power and demonstrate how satire can function as a form of resistance to power as well. Although this study did not employ the more commonly used methods of looking at language in a film, such as literary criticism, linguistics, media studies or post-structuralism, this study does show how using a film as a text can result in benefits that can come from a creative exploration of a new area of academic study. One of the most important benefits of this study is that it lays the groundwork for further research on English language films entering the Thai market. Very little research has been conducted by Thai researchers in the area of animated films from America, and American research has not examined *The Simpsons Movie* (Williamson, 2008). This exploration of how a theoretical framework such as Foucault's concepts of power and resistance can be applied to an animated, satirical film demonstrates a way of understanding both the text and the theoretical concepts at the same time. Thus, this study helps move the non-native English speaker beyond traditional ways of looking at media texts, such as films, found in literary studies and applied linguistics.

Another significant reason why an analysis of the satirical discourses used in *The Simpsons Movie* is important is that it increases knowledge of the non-native English speaker in the area of understanding influential theories of Western thought, such as Foucault's concepts of power and resistance. Foucault's theories concerning discourse, language, power, and individuals are not well known in Thailand, but these ideas have had a significant impact on Western philosophy and linguistics (Barker, 2008). By looking at how Foucault's concepts of power and resistance are illustrated in *The Simpsons Movie*, this study provides an example of a way for the non-American student to gain a working knowledge of major theories that shape both academic discussion and worldview in Western countries.

Forming an understanding of how satire is used to convey a message, this study also contributes to a deeper level of understanding of language and culture needed for effective communication. By exploring examples of Foucault's concept of power in *The Simpsons Movie*, the satirical discourses are revealed as more than just a cartoon and its humor. The satire in the film also clearly illustrates Foucault's concept of resistance to power by poking fun at different aspects of everyday life in America, demonstrating that a cartoon can have something to say as well as entertain. Working within the framework of Foucault's ideas, this study shows and encourages non-native English speakers to understand how satire can function as resistance to authority by broadening an awareness of the role that humor can play in giving people a voice to resist power, to express criticism, and to begin to work for a better society.

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