



## A pragmatic analysis of the discursive strategies used in Mwalimu Andrew's *staffroom diary* texts

Adamba Lucy Lumosi<sup>1</sup>

Atichi Reginald Alati<sup>2\*</sup>

Lucy Mandilla<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2\*</sup> [aatichi@mmust.ac.ke](mailto:aatichi@mmust.ac.ke)

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

The Staffroom Diary by Mwalimu Andrew is a satirical and humorous text featured in the Sunday Nation that provides readers with insights into the experiences, observations, and contemplations of a fictional teacher persona. Its popularity as a lighthearted commentary has greatly aided in the exposure of serious and diverse issues through language. This paper analyzes the discursive strategies utilized in Mwalimu Andrew's Staffroom Diary texts. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis theory (CDA) by Fairclough. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and employed a descriptive textual analysis design to examine linguistic and discursive features in Mwalimu Andrew's Staffroom Diary texts. Systematic sampling was used to select the first column every month for a period of one year (2023). The findings indicated that Mwalimu Andrew utilizes discursive strategies, including referential nomination, argumentation, predication, perspectivation, and intensification, to clarify social roles and power dynamics among characters in the school context. The study established that writers use discursive strategies to shape readers' and audiences' perceptions of social roles. These strategies do more than entertain; they communicate and reinforce social realities, establish group identities, and celebrate leadership. This implies that speakers and writers should be cognizant of the fact that their language choices and repertoires of varieties in language use, while communicating diverse realities, can reinforce or challenge existing social hierarchies and cultural norms.

**Keywords:** Argumentation, Discursive Strategies, Perspectivation, Predication, Referential Nomination

### I. INTRODUCTION

*The Staffroom Diary* is a satirical and humorous text featured in the *Sunday Nation* newspaper, which provides readers with insights into the experiences, observations, and contemplations of Mwalimu Andrew, a fictional teacher persona. This column delves into the daily occurrences, challenges, and triumphs faced by teachers in Kenyan schools, offering readers a glimpse into the world of education from an intimate perspective. The text serves as a unique blend of humor and commentary, reflecting on the broader educational landscape while capturing the joys and frustrations of educators and shedding light on issues in the education system. This column resonates with a wide readership, including teachers, students, parents, and policymakers, as it provides a relatable platform to discuss pertinent issues (Khalayi, 2014). By analyzing the ways in which the author, Mwalimu Andrew, navigates his narratives, scholars can uncover how discursive strategies—nomination, argumentation, predication, and intensification—are employed to convey meaning, provoke thought, and stimulate conversations. It is against this background that this paper analyzed discursive strategies in *Staffroom Diary*.

Discursive strategies such as referential nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation, and intensification are pragmatic tools that reflect the speaker's strategic use of language to accomplish specific goals. These strategies function as acts of meaning-making that are only fully interpretable when considered in their pragmatic context. For instance, Wodak's (2015) framework shows how speakers and writers in the media use these strategies not just to describe reality, but also to shape perception, define social boundaries, and reinforce ideologies by including or excluding, glorifying or discrediting, and intensifying or mitigating certain ideas. Pragmatics is central to analyzing these moves, providing the theoretical lens to uncover how such strategies influence readers' or listeners' interpretations based on surrounding context, shared assumptions, and cultural norms.

The practical components of implicature, presupposition, and speech acts are crucial for comprehending the intricate dimensions of public media texts. Research such as Yus (2016) and Curcó (2020) has revisited the concept of implicature, highlighting its role in allowing communicators to convey meanings indirectly. This process requires audiences to draw upon their contextual knowledge to infer the intended messages. This phenomenon frequently appears in editorials, satirical columns, and political commentaries, in which authors presuppose a mutual intellectual landscape with their audience as they articulate nuanced or critical perspectives. Similarly, the evolution of speech act theory has



been directed towards media-specific applications, with researchers such as Fetzer (2018) and Cap (2021) highlighting the ideological functions performed by utterances in media discourses, including accusations, critiques, and calls to action. The nature of these communicative acts is profoundly influenced by context and frequently fulfills persuasive or political objectives. Through these perspectives, pragmatics clarifies how media language functions not merely to transmit information but also to execute actions such as influencing public opinion, reinforcing ideologies, or challenging prevailing narratives.

In the Kenyan context, as noted by scholars like Githiora (2018) and Wandere (2021), the role of pragmatics becomes even more salient due to the country's linguistic diversity and sociopolitical complexities. Media figures like Makau Mutua utilize pragmatic strategies—particularly satire, irony, and ambiguity—to critique power structures while simultaneously engaging and entertaining audiences. This strategic deployment of language, what Ellis (1999) and Hutcheon (1994) refer to as the stylistic and artistic use of discourse, relies heavily on pragmatic competence. Without an understanding of pragmatics, one might miss the multiple layers of meaning embedded in such texts, particularly when euphemisms, puns, or metaphors are employed to navigate sensitive or controversial topics.

Ultimately, pragmatics lies at the heart of this study; it enables a richer, more nuanced analysis of how public media communicates beyond words—through context, implication, cultural frames, and strategic language use. It allows the researcher to go beyond textual analysis and delve into the functional aspects of language in public discourse: how language is used to shape thought, influence behavior, and construct social reality. Pragmatics thus provides the conceptual foundation for understanding the deeper ideological functions of discursive strategies within public media texts.

#### Discursive Strategies

In public media, where language is carefully crafted to inform, persuade, or critique, pragmatics becomes indispensable in understanding not just what is said, but how, why, and to what effect it is said. Hussein (2020) underscores this by noting that pragmatics helps bridge the gap between literal word meanings and the deeper, context-dependent intentions behind those words—something especially crucial in media discourse, where implications, insinuations, and ideological leanings often remain unstated but heavily implied.

Pragmatics, according to Birner (2025), is a critical subfield of linguistics that concentrates on the ways in which context influences meaning. It encompasses the methods by which speakers employ language to accomplish communicative objectives, in addition to the literal interpretation of words. Wodak (2011) asserts that discursive strategies are the linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms used in pragmatics to structure discourse, influence interlocutors, and achieve specific communicative effects. Nominalization, predication, perspectivization, argumentation, and intensification are all strategies that influence discourse in a variety of sociocultural contexts. The examination of discursive strategies within the field of pragmatics has attracted substantial scholarly interest, with an emphasis on the ways in which language users employ a variety of techniques to achieve specific communicative objectives. These strategies have been the subject of recent research in a variety of contexts, such as academic writing, musical texts, and literary works.

Khafaga et al. (2023) analyzed the pragmatic dimensions of persuasion in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, identifying five principal strategies: directive speech actions, rhetorical inquiries, back-channel support, gap-bridging, and interruption. These methods were identified as enabling three forms of persuasion—pure, manipulative, and coercive—illustrating their efficacy in character interactions within the story. The study emphasized the expression of these techniques through the use of linguistic forms including imperatives, interrogatives, lexicalization, and slogans, highlighting the significance of pragmatic analysis in narrative texts.

Hansson's (2015) study examines discursive practices adopted by officeholders in the context of blame risk to achieve the goal of positive self-presentation. The findings of this paper particularly challenge prevailing linguistic approaches to the discourse of conflict. Hansson (2015) asserts that to understand the recurrent theme of blame avoidance within public communication, a more comprehensive lens is required. The study signals a call to action for the integration of innovative analytic tools within discourse studies, which can shed fresh light on the complex landscape of political and bureaucratic language use.

Similarly, non-literary studies, such as those by Afzal (2019) and Addae (2022), emphasize how editorial and political discourses use thematic framing, metaphor, and rhetorical structures to align readers with particular viewpoints. These communicative acts are inherently pragmatic—they rely on shared knowledge, implied meanings, and contextual cues to convey deeper significance, often with subtlety and indirectness. The researcher finds this particularly relevant when analyzing *Staffroom Diary*, where implicit critique is often embedded within seemingly mundane school narratives, thereby inviting readers to reflect critically on broader societal issues.

Furthermore, scholars illustrate how stylistic elements—whether in poetic form or news reportage—are deeply intertwined with pragmatic concerns such as audience understanding, authorial stance, and communicative effectiveness (Kumar, 2022, Agu, 2015, Mudogo, 2017). The researcher builds on this insight by proposing that *Staffroom Diary*'s



use of humor, metaphor, satire, and other rhetorical devices serves not only an aesthetic function but also a pragmatic one: challenging authority, provoking reflection, and fostering communal identity among readers.

Moreover, studies like Sengul (2019) and Hansson (2015) underscore the need to understand macro-discursive functions such as blame avoidance and ideological positioning—critical areas where pragmatics offers insights into not just what is communicated but how and why certain linguistic forms are selected. These insights are especially important in the case of *Staffroom Diary*, where the columnist uses a fictionalized school setting to address real societal grievances, echoing the subversive tradition of *Whispers* (Ogola, 2004). The researcher argues that these macro-level discursive strategies are instrumental in veiling critique while still holding institutional powers accountable.

Pragmatic analysis, therefore, is not merely an ancillary perspective—it is central to understanding the discursive choices within *Staffroom Diary*. As Cruz (2015) notes, it enables the researcher to decode the latent meanings, speaker intentions, and contextual cues embedded in the text, thus uncovering how language is manipulated not only to entertain but also to interrogate Kenya's sociocultural landscape. The researcher concludes that pragmatic-discursive analysis is vital in unpacking the layered meanings and communicative intentions that characterize Mwalimu Andrew's satirical commentary.

### 1.1 Research Objective

The objective of this study is to analyze the discursive strategies employed in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* columns to uncover how language is used to construct, negotiate, and reflect social roles, power relations, and cultural realities within the school context.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

We applied CDA theory, which views language as more than a neutral tool of communication but as a powerful medium for shaping, maintaining, or challenging societal ideologies and power relations (Thomas & Wareing, 2004). Rooted in interdisciplinary traditions, including the Frankfurt School and influenced by thinkers like Michel Foucault, CDA emphasizes the role of discourse in constructing social realities. Fairclough's contributions, particularly his work *Language and Power*, are central to this approach, highlighting how linguistic choices reflect and influence social, political, and cultural contexts. In analyzing Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary*, CDA offers a lens to examine how language and discursive strategies such as satire and irony portray educational issues in Kenya.

Key tenets of CDA applied in this paper include, Power relations and ideology, contextualization of meaning and language as a social practice. Language in *Staffroom Diary* reflects and critiques power dynamics within Kenya's education system. In addition, meaning in the text is shaped by social, political, and cultural contexts, making discursive strategy interpretation dependent on audience understanding where language is used to perpetuate or challenge societal norms and values.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and employed a descriptive textual analysis design to examine linguistic and discursive features in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* texts. The primary data for the study were the *Staffroom Diary* texts authored by Mwalimu Andrew, who is also the persona in the text. The research sampled qualitative data, which consisted of linguistic units of analysis, including words, phrases, and sentences extracted from the *Staffroom Diary* texts. A subset of 16 articles was selected from the monthly average of 48 using stratified purposive sampling to ensure thematic and temporal diversity. The texts were coded as SD-X (*Staffroom Diary*: 1).

Being qualitative in nature, the data were subjected to textual analysis. A textual analysis guide was explicitly designed to gather diverse pragmatic properties in the *Staffroom Diary* texts. Forty-five linguistic units were purposively sampled and coded. The coding matrix also facilitated the organization and classification of different linguistic features revealed in the texts, ensuring that patterns of language manipulation were well established and methodically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The extracted linguistic features were subjected to focus group discussions (FGDs) for elicitation of further data that tested the interpretation of the discursive strategies.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Referential Nomination

The data revealed many cases where the author uses referential nomination in Mwalimu Andrew's columns. This is a process through which people or objects are referred to in discourse, and the ways by which they are defined by readers. Shashkova (2019) suggests that this strategy entails the specification of subject identity and subject role in



the social world to impact social perception and behavior. It can consist of defining a person as a “teacher,” “student,” or “administrator,” which means that certain things are expected of them and certain privileges or power are granted.

Trivial as the *Staffroom Diary* may be, its value lies in the fact that referential nomination in Mwalimu Andrew pinpoints not only the selected characters in the educational arena but social roles in general, along with all the implications attached, such as power relations. By naming individuals, he builds up stories that reveal power relations and cultural discourses, encouraging readers to decode the text. Some of the instances evident in his columns include:

### Example 1

#### *Acting HM*

In this extract, the phrase “Acting HM” draws attention to bureaucratic absurdities and highlights his own role while subtly criticizing the hierarchies within the institution. This choice of language influences readers’ perceptions and encourages them to reflect on the social dynamics at play.

### Example 2

#### *Branton, Kuya, and Mrs. Atika*

The use of specific names, as in example 2, provides clear identification of individuals within the school context. By referring to teachers and students by their names instead of generic terms, the writer personalizes the narrative and makes the characters more relatable to readers. Besides highlighting personal relationships, this approach also underscores the distinct roles and responsibilities of each individual within the school hierarchy. For instance, naming a teacher or student creates a sense of familiarity and connection, allowing readers to understand their unique contributions to the school environment. Furthermore, this strategy suggests a clear division between authority figures and subordinates, emphasizing the power dynamics present in the educational setting.

According to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as articulated by Fairclough (1995), the use of evaluative and ideologically laden language, such as “enemies of development,” demonstrates how discourse is strategically utilized to reproduce, contest, or validate power structures. CDA posits that language is a social activity infused with ideological functions and capable of perpetuating hierarchies.

Within the framework of *Staffroom Diary*, this phrase characterizes specific stakeholders (e.g., parents, school authorities, or education officers) as obstructive or retrogressive. This categorization not only undermines their perspectives but also positions the speaker—Mwalimu Andrew—as the embodiment of progress and rationality. This discursive technique corresponds with Fairclough’s (2013) concept of ideological positioning, wherein language is employed to align readers with specific viewpoints while alienating or disparaging others.

### Example 3

#### *Fiolina as “Fiolina” or “her”*

The author refers to Fiolina as “her,” while describing Yunia as “my elder sister” and referring to Fiolina’s family members as “her brother,” “sister,” and “father.” This choice of naming creates a personal connection with Fiolina, making her feel more relatable and significant in the narrative. In contrast, the use of general terms for her family members depersonalizes them, suggesting a degree of separation. This strategy implies that Fiolina occupies a more intimate and central role, while her family is portrayed as external and potentially adversarial.

The author’s reference selections in the *Staffroom Diary*—particularly concerning Fiolina and her family—expose intentional discourse techniques. The repeated use of the name “Fiolina” and the pronoun “her” fosters closeness and significance, establishing her as a pivotal and emotionally impactful presence in the narrator’s life. This personalized reference emphasizes her presence, consistent with work indicating that naming methods can create intimacy or separation in conversation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Itieba et al., 2023).

### Example 4

#### *...the person TSC was trusting to be a deputy HM, mere messenger*

One of the major characters, Kuya, is referred to as “the person TSC was trusting to be a deputy HM” and contrasted with terms like “mere messenger” in reference to himself. The strategy here serves to construct Kuya as unworthy or immature for the role, framing him as unsuitable for authority. The nomination reinforces a hierarchy, suggesting that while Kuya is being considered for promotion, his perceived shortcomings disqualify him in Andrew’s eyes. The reference to “TSC” and “deputy HM” invokes institutional authority and hierarchy, underscoring the power Andrew wields as gatekeeper of Kuya’s promotion.

This finding agrees with Koski et al. (2015), who indicate that nomination reinforces hierarchy by assigning specific labels and categories to individuals or groups, which affects how they are perceived and valued within a social context. Conversely, terms that diminish the status of others, like “non-pedagogical people,” highlight a lack of knowledge or connection to the core activities of the educational setting. This linguistic distinction not only reflects



existing social structures but also perpetuates them, influencing interactions and reinforcing power dynamics within the discourse.

### Example 5

*Kuya, the senior-most teacher after you*

Elsewhere, a formal tone is noted where the Sub-county TSC Director repeatedly refers to Kuya formally as “Kuya” and “the senior-most teacher after you.” This reference positions Kuya as a deserving authority figure, challenging the narrator’s (Mwalimu Andrew’s) reluctance to recognize Kuya’s role. The nomination emphasizes institutional hierarchy and the director’s endorsement of Kuya’s position, reflecting the expected respect for formal titles and roles.

### Example 6

*Apostle Elkana, The Revered Principal Spiritual Superintendent of THOAG (The Holiest of All Ghosts) Tabernacle Assembly*

The elaborate title sets Apostle Elkana apart as a figure of authority in religion, emphasizing the cultural importance of spiritual figures in the community. In the column *Did turning down Apostle Elkana’s prayers jinx us?* he is referred to as “Apostle Elkana, The Revered Principal Spiritual Superintendent of THOAG (The Holiest of All Ghosts) Tabernacle Assembly.” The phrasing adds a touch of satire, subtly questioning the grandiosity and perceived necessity of such roles in everyday school life.

The situation of Apostle Elkana exemplifies the function of titles and nomenclature as discursive techniques. This title’s excessive formality and verbosity demonstrate how language may establish authority, bolster religious validity, and simultaneously provoke critical reflection through mockery. The article illustrates how such rhetoric invokes cultural veneration while simultaneously ironizing the function of spiritual figures within institutional and educational contexts.

CDA theory asserts that language is inherently biased; it both reflects and influences power relations (Fairclough, 1995). The article’s title and description, albeit amusing, possess ideological significance—interrogating the potential commodification or exaggeration of spirituality in educational contexts. This corresponds with van Dijk’s (2011) concept of the “ideological square,” wherein the emphasis and de-emphasis in discourse serve to portray Apostle Elkana as powerful, central, or virtuous. The rhetorical selections in this narrative—via lexical hyperbole, honorific accumulation, and sarcastic reference—reveal underlying conflicts regarding religious authority, communal standards, and cultural dominance, like those presented in *Staffroom Diary*.

## 4.2 Argumentation

Argumentation, as a discursive strategy, involves constructing logical reasoning to persuade or inform an audience about a particular viewpoint (Alnasser, 2023). Zotmann and O’Regan (2016) emphasize that in conversations, argumentation helps establish credibility and engage listeners by providing evidence or reasoning to support claims. Within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), argumentation is recognized as a key element that reveals underlying power relations and ideological positions embedded in discourse. It shapes how individuals present perspectives and influence the beliefs of others.

In *Staffroom Diary*, Mwalimu Andrew frequently employs argumentation to frame his authority and legitimize his decisions on educational and domestic matters. For example:

### Example 7

*As a leader, you should be happy when your people grow, not sad. That is true Madam, but it should be the right people growing, not just anyone...*

Here, Andrew critiques Kuya’s appointment by implying that not all promotions are justified. The phrase “the right people” suggests that Kuya lacks the qualifications for advancement, thereby questioning the rationale of promotions based on seniority alone. This implicitly advocates for meritocracy, while simultaneously revealing Andrew’s bias toward a more equitable yet hierarchical system.

He extends this argument by justifying his decision to delay Kuya’s promotion letter:

### Example 8

*My plan was to give the letter to Kuya at an appropriate time. Appropriate time in this case meant a time when he showed professional maturity to receive the letter...*

Andrew frames the delay as a principled, logical decision rather than an administrative oversight, positioning himself as a responsible authority prioritizing professional growth. This discursive move legitimizes his actions, reinforcing his authority while marginalizing Kuya. This legitimization is often achieved through appeals to social norms



and logical reasoning, while Van Leeuwen, (2008), highlights that specific discourse structures allow claims to be framed as socially acceptable and persuasive.

Similarly, Andrew uses argumentation to rationalize the removal of Alex from a leadership role. By attributing negative traits such as lateness, absenteeism, and backbiting, he portrays Alex as irresponsible and disloyal:

### Example 9

*...I can assure you that another HM would have fired him within a week...*

This reasoning validates Andrew's decision and portrays him as a prudent leader whose authority should remain unquestioned. Beyond the school, he employs the same strategy to justify his paternalistic control over household finances, invoking "economic difficulties" and claiming exclusive insight into the "pinch." This appeals to rational economic responsibility and reinforces his authority as the family head.

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2015), predication qualifies social actors, phenomena, or objects by attributing characteristics to them. Through predication, discourse can reinforce or challenge stereotypes, shaping reader perceptions of individuals and their roles. Wodak and Meyer (2009) argues that predication often justifies power relations by associating certain groups with dominance or disadvantage, thereby stabilizing or destabilizing social hierarchies.

For instance:

### Example 10

*young but simple Anglican Church pastor revered Apostle Elkana with expensive anointing oil*

Here, Andrew contrasts humility and prosperity, subtly questioning prevailing values in religious leadership. Such contrasts disrupt assumptions about sincerity in religious hierarchies.

### Example 11

*...And I will not borrow carelessly during this bear run... She asked me what a bear run was. I had forgotten that I was dealing with someone at a lower intellectual level...*

Here, Fiolina is framed as intellectually inferior in matters of finance, reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes that position men as knowledgeable providers. Similarly, descriptions of her family's poverty—"they have been taking kude daily and breakfast is a foreign word" Predication also manifests in subtle shifts of address. Fiolina's father calls Andrew both *my son* and *kijana*, with the former denoting greater respect and reconciliation. As Van Dijk (2011) observes, predication often reflects or contests social hierarchies; in this case, it reinforces Andrew's elevated standing.

### Example 12

*"I did not understand the hurry for releasing the results."*

Here, Andrew positions himself as a measured leader who prioritizes quality rather than quick outcomes. He further clarifies that exam results are not part of his Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), subtly distancing himself from direct accountability for KCPE outcomes. This stance allows him to redirect responsibility elsewhere while reinforcing his own image as competent and deliberate. By framing events through his chosen perspective, Andrew shapes readers' understanding of what constitutes effective leadership within the school hierarchy.

#### Intensification

Intensification is a discursive strategy that amplifies aspects of language to heighten emotional impact or underline significance (Sultan & Rapi, 2020). In CDA, intensification highlights how speakers emphasize specific issues to influence perceptions and reactions. It often relies on adjectives, adverbs, or emphatic statements, creating a sense of urgency, severity, or importance. Donohue and Hamilton (2022) observe that such strategies are especially common in persuasive contexts.

In *Staffroom Diary*, Andrew uses intensification to underscore his dedication, authority, and optimism, often employing emotionally charged or emphatic phrases

### Example 13

*"I promise you that this 2023 is the year when we will do it again; much better."*

By describing progress as a "huge milestone," Andrew elevates the significance of achievements, presenting himself as confident and forward-looking. This rhetorical choice not only reinforces his commitment but also inspires support from readers by framing developments as signs of ongoing transformation.

### Example 14

*"I can't believe anyone would want me out and look out for a truly transformed Mwisho wa Lami Primary."*



This expression amplifies Andrew's resolve, portraying him as indispensable to the school's progress. Through such intensified statements, he constructs a narrative of himself as a transformative leader whose efforts cannot be ignored.

Within CDA, intensification is significant because it exposes underlying ideologies and power dynamics. Andrew's language choices convey his personal commitment while rallying readers to adopt his vision. Intensification therefore functions as a tool of persuasion and mobilization, reinforcing his authority while shaping perceptions of leadership and change within the community.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to examine the discursive strategies employed by Mwalimu Andrew in the *Staffroom Diary*. Findings reveal that he strategically deploys referential nomination, argumentation, predication, perspectivation, and intensification to mould readers' perceptions of characters, roles, and authority in educational contexts. Through naming and argumentation, he questions the competence of others while legitimizing his own actions. Predication allows him to frame colleagues and family members in ways that reinforce hierarchical and gendered dynamics. Perspectivation enables him to cast himself as rational, measured, and fair, while intensification amplifies his commitment and leadership vision. Overall, these strategies extend beyond entertainment. They construct and reinforce social realities, affirming authority, legitimizing hierarchy, and shaping group identities, while subtly discouraging dissent. Andrew thus emerges not only as a narrator but also as an active agent in producing and sustaining ideological positions within educational and domestic spheres.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that writers, educators, and media practitioners become more conscious of the power of language in shaping social perceptions and reinforcing ideologies. Language users should employ discursive strategies responsibly to promote inclusivity, equity, and critical reflection rather than perpetuate stereotypes or hierarchies. Further research could explore how similar linguistic practices manifest in other satirical or educational texts to broaden understanding of discourse as a tool for both social critique and transformation.

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