

Abstract

Just Shamans and Healers or Indigenous Medical Systems? A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Categories of Shamans and Healers as Constructed by Social Science Texts

"Just as even a single sentence has traditionally been taken to imply a whole language so a single discourse implies a whole society."

Language and Power, N. Fairclough

This paper presents a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the categories of shamans and healers as they are constructed and produced by some social science texts. The CDA has three aims. First, it seeks to problematize how the categories of shamans and healers have been traditionally used to construct and produce what has been said about the medical systems of indigenous communities around the world. This is considered in the backdrop of opacity by mainstream social sciences to construct them as medical systems. Not only medical systems, they are social institutions that are part of their comprehensive cultural systems. Therefore, they are indigenous knowledge platforms that help to respond to questions of health and illness, life and death, nature and culture, science and philosophy. The categories of shamans and healers have been used as a way to state that the indigenous medical systems are not scientific systems but isolated knowledge and practices performed by individual shamans or healers.

The second aim of this CDA is to examine the categories of shamans and healers in the context of the contemporary discussion on language, communication and discourse analysis and its various power relations as constructed in social science texts. The third aim is to demonstrate that there is a profound link among language, medicine and the social sciences and that it is impossible to continue in denial of this link. It is the assumption of the CDA that the constructed categories of shamanism and healers in the social sciences convey a specific bias of a logocentric and "scientificcentric" worldview that could not construct a category of indigenous medical systems. It is posited that, through this CDA of the categories of shamans and healers, the local and global discursive practices that most societies hold about health and illness and body and 'mind/soul/spirit' can be understood through the ample category of medical systems.

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