Key Words in the Discourse of Discrimination: A Semantic Analysis

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an inquiry into discrimination, from a semantic perspective. In the discourse of discrimination, there is a set of key words. These terms are identified as the *processes* of discrimination, the progressive stages and manifestations of socio-cultural conflict. There are several dimensions to discrimination: a *rhetorical* dimension, consisting of the speech acts of discrimination; a *social* dimension, including the behaviours associated with discrimination; and a *cognitive* dimension, which includes the underlying attitudes and ideologies.

This thesis presents and justifies semantic explications for a field of words pertaining to the language of abuse, hatred and the processes of discrimination. The discussion is categorised into four sections, commencing with an examination of the speech act verbs: *insult, abuse, denigrate*, *vilify* and *offend*. Then follows an analysis of words that describe the social acts of discrimination, including *dehumanise*, *demonise*, *marginalise*, *stigmatise* and *discriminate*. Next is an analysis of words that describe the cognitive elements of discrimination, including *stereotype*, *intolerance*, *prejudice*, *xenophobia*, *racism* and *sexism*. The analysis considers aspects of semantic phenomena, including: synonymy, polysemy, metaphor and ambiguity. The final section is a treatise on overt and covert discrimination, and discusses perspectives and directions in this area of research.

The method of semantic representation adopted in this thesis is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach advocated by Anna Wierzbicka and colleagues. This method employs reductive paraphrase to explicate lexical semantic structure. The data is sourced from naturally occurring examples and corpora, including Collins Word Bank and the British National Corpus. Where applicable, this work engages in a comparative discussion of lexicographical and lexicological methodology. The explications I have constructed are supported by pragmatic and syntactic evidence, extracted from speech media, corpora and other textual sources. The findings of this research have practical applications for many diverse fields, including law, public policy, education and conflict resolution, this work also endeavours to enhance the contribution of lexical semantics to lexicography.

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