

The Distribution of Power in Written Texts:

A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Different fields of linguistics tackle the concept of power. Discourse analysis is one of these fields that draws special attention to this concept. Critical Discourse Analysis in particular is the field that is used to reveal the discursive sources of power in analyzing written as well as spoken texts. Van Dijk's model of Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power (2008) is used in the analysis of data of this study which is represented by the Iraqi Prime Minister Noori Al Maliki's speech addressing the Iraqi nation. The hypotheses that are checked in this investigation read as follows:

The concept of political power is used by citizens who practice control over other community groups in verbal communication as reflected in written discourse. Moreover, there is a strong relationship between social power and discourse. In addition, power can be distributed logically in written discourse. The most important conclusions of the present study are the following: Power is distributed in logical chunks that can be entitled: instructions, future actions, persuasions, encouragement, propaganda, warning, inviting and controlling. Each of these items can be presented in a balanced way for the sake of persuasion and control.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Power, Access, Political Discourse, Discursive, Dominance, control, persuade*

1. Introduction

Recently, the concept of power has received a great attention from discourse analysts. Van Dijk is one of the prominent and outstanding figures in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. According to Van Dijk (2001:352), Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth (CDA)) is "a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts". It studies and analyze written and spoken texts to show how the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality

and bias are used in social, political and historical contexts. Van Dijk (1995:17) states that “CDA has become the general label for a special approach to the study of text and talk, emerging from critical linguistics, critical semiotics and in general from a socio-politically conscious and oppositional way of investigating language, discourse and communication.”

2. Critical Discourse Analysis: Definitions

CDA is a rapidly developing area of language study that considers discourse as a form of social practice and it concentrates on the centrality of context of language use to discourse. Its main interest is in reflecting the relation between language and power. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002:63) add that CDA is ‘critical’ in the sense that “it aims to reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power.” Huckin et al (2012:107) state that “(CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to textual study that aims to explicate abuses of power promoted by those texts, by analyzing linguistic/semiotic details in the light of the larger social and political contexts in which those texts circulate.” In other words, the main aim of CDA is to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, and legitimized by language use. It is generally agreed that CDA is not classified as a single method but is rather viewed as an approach. This reflects that it consists of different methods for studying the relationship between language use and social context. Wodak and Meyer (2008: 2) state that “CDA is therefore not interested in investigating a linguistic unit *per se* but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach.” They add that studies in CDA are derived from quite different “theoretical backgrounds, oriented towards different data and methodologies.” Paltridge (2008: 179) mentions that CDA reveals the relationship between language use and social and political contexts on one side and how they are used and reflected in particular texts on the other side. He (2008:179) adds that “the analysis might proceed to deconstruct and challenge the texts, tracing ideologies and assumptions underlying the use of discourse and relating these to different views of the world, experiences and beliefs.”

Fairclough (1995) defines CDA:

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (pp. 132-3)

3. Critical Discourse Analysis: Principles

Huckin et al (2012:111) believe that CDA is based on a number of distinctive principles, including these cited by Fairclough and Wodak:

- CDA addresses social problems.
- Power relations are discursive.
- Discourse constitutes society and culture.
- Discourse does ideological work.
- Discourse is historical.
- The link between text and society is mediated.
- Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.
- Discourse is a form of social action. (271–80)

The main concern of rhetoric and composition is the power of spoken and written discourse. Particularly, this power deals with the ways in which language can be used to persuade audiences of important public issues. Huckin et al (2012:109) state that there are different ways of presenting CDA purpose, situation, genre, diction, style, and other rhetorical variables as mentioned below:

1. CDA systematically grounds its analyses in both quantitative and qualitative attention to linguistic details.
2. CDA routinely engages texts that reflect inequality or other abuses of power.
3. As a consequence of point 2, CDA is always critical and explanatory.
4. CDA draws on a wide repertoire of textlinguistic tools.
5. CDA is eclectic, drawing on a wide variety of scholarly disciplines, concepts, and research methods.
6. CDA typically makes use of multiple texts and even large corpora of Texts
7. CDA takes into account textual silences, implicatures, ambiguities, and other covert but powerful aspects of discourse.
8. In the interest of reaching a broad lay audience, CDA tries to minimize the use of academic jargon.

Therefore, CDA fits nicely within the increasingly expansive domain of rhetoric/composition/writing studies. Researchers can move beyond the traditional analytic modes of interpretation and criticism as they start examining the impact that contexts, power dynamics, and social interaction have on written texts and processes. Van Dijk (2015: 466) states that:

As an analytical practice, CDA is not one direction of research among many others in the study of discourse. Rather, it is a critical perspective that

may be found in all areas of discourse studies, such as discourse grammar, Conversation Analysis, discourse pragmatics, rhetoric, stylistics, narrative analysis, argumentation analysis, multimodal discourse analysis and social semiotics, sociolinguistics, and ethnography of communication or the psychology of discourse-processing, among others. In other words, CDA is discourse study with an attitude.

4. The Analysis of Power

Power is one of the central concepts for CDA. The analysis of power in several disciplines is carried out within the boundaries of sociology and political science. A full-fledged, interdisciplinary theory is necessary to capture its most important implications and applications.

Wodak and Meyer (2008:10) remark that in texts, discursive differences are governed by differences in power. So they are encoded in and determined by discourse and by genre. Therefore, texts are often sites of struggle they reflect differing discourses and ideologies struggling for dominance. They add that “the defining features of CDA are its concern with power as a central condition in social life, and its efforts to develop a theory of language that incorporates this as a major premise.” (See Clegg, 1998; Lukes, 1986). The notion of struggles for power and control together with the intertextuality and recontextualization of competing discourses in various public spaces and genres are determined as well. Van Dijk (2008:19-21) summarizes different properties of power as follows:

(1) Social power is a property of the relationship between groups, classes, or other social formations, or between persons as social members. Although we may speak of personal forms of power, this individual power is less relevant for our systematic account of the role of power in discourse as social interaction.

(2) At an elementary but fundamental level of analysis, social power relationships are characteristically manifested in interaction. Thus we say that group A (or its members) has power over group B (or its members) when the real or potential actions of A exercise social control over B. Since the notion of action itself involves the notion of (cognitive) control by agents, the social control over B by the actions of A induces a limitation of the self-control of B. In other words, the exercise of power by A results in the limitation of B's social freedom of action.

(3) Except in the case of bodily force, power of A over B's actual or possible actions presupposes that A must have control over the cognitive conditions of actions of B, such as desires, wishes, plans, and beliefs. For whatever reasons, B may accept or agree to do as A wishes, or to follow the law, rules, or consensus to act in agreement with (the interests of) A. In other words, social power is usually indirect and operates through the "minds" of people, for instance by managing the necessary information or

opinions they need to plan and execute their actions. Most forms of social power in our society imply this kind of "mental control," typically exercised through persuasion or other forms of discursive communication, or resulting from fear of sanctions by A in case of noncompliance by B with A's wishes. It is at this point that our analysis of the role of discourse in the exercise, maintenance, or legitimation of power becomes relevant. Note, however, that this "mental mediation" of power also leaves room for variable degrees of freedom and resistance of those who are subjected to the exercise of power.

(4) A's power needs a basis, that is, resources that socially enable the exercise of power, or the application of sanctions in case of noncompliance.

These resources usually consist of socially valued, but unequally distributed attributes or possessions, such as wealth, position, rank, status, authority, knowledge, expertise, or privileges, or even mere membership in a dominant or majority group. Power is a form of social control if its basis consists of socially relevant resources. Generally, power is intentionally or unwittingly exercised by A in order to maintain or enlarge this power basis of A, or to prevent B from acquiring it. In other words, the exercise of power by A is usually in A's interest.

(5) Crucial in the exercise or the maintenance of power is the fact that for A to exert mental control over B, B must know about A's wishes, wants, preferences, or intentions. Apart from direct communication, for instance in speech acts such as commands, requests, or threats, this knowledge may be inferred from cultural beliefs, norms, or values; through a shared (or contested) consensus within an ideological framework; or from the observation and interpretation of A's social actions.

(6) Total social control in contemporary western societies is further limited by the field and the scope of power agents. That is, power agents may be powerful in only one social domain—politics, the economy, or education or in specific social situations as in the classroom or in court. Similarly, the scope of their actions may be limited to a few people or extend to a whole class or group of people or to specific actions. And finally, the powerful may be assigned special responsibilities in their exercise of power. Beside this form of power distribution, which also involves various forms of power sharing, there is the important dimension of resistance: Dominated groups and their members are seldom completely powerless. Under specific socioeconomic, historical, or cultural conditions, such groups may engage in various forms of resistance, that is, in the enactment of counter power, which in turn may make the powerful less powerful, or even vulnerable, typically so in revolutions. Therefore, the enactment of power is not simply a form of an action, but a form of social interaction.

(7) The exercise and maintenance of social power presupposes an ideological framework. This framework, which consists of socially shared, interest-related fundamental cognitions of a group and its members, is mainly acquired, confirmed, or changed through communication and discourse.

(8) It should be repeated that power must be analyzed in relation to various forms of counter power or resistance by dominated groups (or by action groups that represent such groups), which also is a condition for the analysis of social and historical challenge and change.

5. Political Discourse

Due to the persuasive power, political discourse received much attention as a special object of study. Van Dijk (2015:478) adds that political discourse analysis is central to the studies of CDA since it “is interested in the critical study of power abuse.”(See also Wodak, 1989; Wodak and Van Dijk 2000; Fairclough, 2006). Political discourse may be relevant in many aspects of life. Van Dijk (1993:252) states that “Unlike other discourse analysts, critical discourse analysts (should) take an explicit sociopolitical stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large.” Van Dijk (2008:85) believes that “few forms of oral discourse are as well known, routinely quoted, or distributed as widely through the mass media as that of top politicians, such as the president or prime minister.” Thus, most studies point out or study “political language”, which reflects the powerful and specific use of lexical style.

6. Discourse and Access

Access to discourse is considered to be central in the study of discursive reproduction of power (See Van Dijk, 2015:470; Van Dijk, 1993:255-256). Van Dijk (2008:85-88) mentions the following dimensions of *access*:

Planning

Taking the initiative is the beginning of access to discourse. It includes “the preparation or the *planning* of a communicative event”, decisions about the setting (time, place) and an 'agenda' for talk will be implied, as well as the participants being “invited or ordered to appear.”

Setting

Many elements of the setting of communicative events are included under this dimension that may be controlled by different participants. This includes “who is allowed or obliged to participate, and in what role, may be decided by the chairperson or by other powerful participants who control the interaction.”

Controlling communicative events

The power to control various dimensions of speech and talk is the central part of Access. This includes which mode of communication may/must be used (spoken, written), which language may/must be used and by whom (dominant or standard language, a dialect, etc.), which genres of discourse are allowed, which types of speech acts, or who may begin or interrupt turns at talk or discursive sequences.

Scope and audience control

In public forms of discourse, discourse access crucially implies audience access. The scope of access which indicates the size of the audience of one's discourse is an important criterion of power. However, control is much more effective than the scope if the speaker can access the minds of the audience successfully. In cases "when speakers are able to influence the mental models, knowledge, attitudes and eventually even the ideologies of recipients, they may indirectly control their future actions."

In other words, if discourse access is a measure of power, CDA becomes an important diagnostic tool for the assessment of social and political dominance (Van Dijk, 2008:90)

7. The Analysis of Power and Discourse

Within the framework of social power and the control of discourse, Van Dijk's analysis starts with a typology of the ways power is enacted by discourse as a form of social interaction:

(1) Direct control of action is achieved through discourses that have directive pragmatic function (elocutionary force), such as commands, threats, laws, regulations, instructions, and more indirectly by recommendations and advice. Speakers often have an institutional role, and their discourses are often backed by institutional power. Compliance in this case is often obtained by legal or other institutional sanctions.

(2) Persuasive discourse types, such as advertisements and propaganda, also aim at influencing future actions of recipients. Their power is based on economic, financial, or, in general, corporate or institutional resources, and exercised through access to the mass media and opt to widespread public attention. Compliance in this case is manufactured by rhetorical means, for example, by repetition and argumentation, but of course backed up by the usual mechanisms of market control.

(3) Beyond these prescriptive discourse forms, future actions may also be influenced by descriptions of future or possible events, actions, or situations; for instance, in predictions, plans, scenarios, programs, and warnings, sometimes combined with different forms of advice. The power groups involved here are usually professionals ("experts"), and their power basis is often the control of knowledge and technology (Pettigrew, 1972). The rhetorical means often consist of argumentation and

the description of undesired alternative courses of action. More implicitly, scholarly reports about social or economic developments may thus influence future action.

(4) Various types of sometimes widespread and, hence, possibly influential narrative, such as novels or movies, may describe the (un)desirability of future actions, and may have recourse to a rhetoric of dramatic or emotional appeals, or various forms of topical or stylistic originality. The power groups involved here form what we called the symbolic elites. A specific case of this class of discourses is news reports in the media, which not only describe current events and their possible consequences, but which essentially portray the actions, and represent the opinions of the political, economic, military, and social power elites. It is mainly in this way that the consensual basis of power is manufactured, and how the general public gets to know who has power and what the powerful wants. This is a crucial condition for the development of the supporting ideological framework of power, but also for various forms of resistance ("know thine enemies").

8. Outline of the Prime Minister's Speech

The speech of the Prime Minister Noori Al-Maliki can be internally divided into the following parts:

1. thanking almighty Allah (1)
2. addressing the Iraqi people (2)
3. referring to past similar experiences (3)
4. addressing the world (4, 11)
5. future expectation (5)
6. addressing the Iraqis and encouraging them (6)
7. promising the nation (7, 12)
8. instructing the citizens (8)
9. warning the citizens (9)
10. assuring the people of safe elections (10)
11. praying to God (13)
12. saluting the people (14)

9. Data Analysis

The analysis and interpretation represents the distribution of power of the Iraqi Prime Minister Noori Al Maliki's speech. It attempts to link the political discourse with the social processes reflected in the written text.

1. *"In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful"*

Mr. prime minister opens his speech by addressing Almighty Allah and thanking Him.

2. *"Only seven days left to the elections and Iraqis will go with courage and bravery to express their national legitimacy on which depends their future and the future of their generations and the dignity of Iraq and all Iraqis."*

He addresses the Iraqis saying that they are brave enough to decide their own future by taking part in the democratic elections. At the same time, he tries to remind them of the remaining time of the election.

3. *"This is not the first time that the Iraqis set out men and women to defy terrorism, we have organized several elections under very difficult conditions and with security and political challenges."*

Similar past elections have proudly proved that the Iraqis are courageous and fear not terrorism. He also tries to tell them that the government is securing the election process.

4. *"Terrorism did not prevent Iraqis from performing their national duty towards their country and their future."*

Al-Maliki addresses the world saying that the Iraqis have proved to be victorious against terrorism.

5. *"Terrorism and the enemies of the political process will try to undermine democracy and freedom in Iraq by all means and ways and to impede the elections and to deter citizens from going to ballot boxes."*

His own future expectation shows that both of democracy and freedom will be targeted by terrorism and other enemies of the political process.

6. *"They will also commit forgery and fabricate lies in order to confuse the citizens when standing in front of the ballot box and make them unable to deal with this unclear atmosphere."*

Mr. prime minister expresses his future expectations of the actions of the anti-powers concerning the elections.

7. *"We call upon all Iraqis to go heavily to the ballot boxes, and we want them to make a good choice, we want to leave behind the past with all its problems and pains, and we will move forwards to the next phase towards the prospects of construction and with a sense of responsibility and proper organization of the political process and a good choice for those who will assume responsibility in the next phase."*

He addresses the Iraqis by both warning them from the actions of terrorism and anti-political powers and encouraging them to go and participate in the elections.

8. *"I warn all citizens and invite them to stand to the side of the security services and the staffs of the Independent High Electoral Commission during the elections so as to control the electoral process in order to be fair and free of fraud, because there are some people that are betting on forgery to win the elections and they want to tamper with the results in various ways, but now all doors closed in their faces."*

The Prime Minister, Noori Al-Maliki, expresses his dominance over people by warning them and inviting them to submit their assistance to other organizations as security and High Electoral Commission. The power of government organizations is also expressed by the prime minister's speech. These organizations are considered to be the source of control and discipline and the ones that can prevent forgery. In saying "but now all doors closed in their faces", he emphasizes the power of the government organizations and his power and control over the situation.

9. *"I call on all citizens to be aware of all attempts of fraud , forgery and influence on the polls by those who are preparing for it."*

Again, the prime minister is addressing people by warning them to be aware of the source of power abuse to the government's organizations and their representatives.

10. *"We took all the measures necessary to provide security for all election centers."*

In practicing his power, the prime minister assures the citizens the provision of security to persuade them to go and practice their roles in voting. In saying "We" he indicates that he is as authoritative as other organizations in providing security to the citizens.

11. *"Yesterday, the cabinet also took a decision to use all government vehicles to transport people from the villages to the election centers and facilitate the process for them so that they can participants in the National Electoral this carnival which we hope will be an honest and very impressive to the world."*

The Prime Minister invites the government's institutions to play a positive role in the elections. He tries to persuade the nation that the government is taking decision for the interest of the nation themselves while the contrary is true; providing facilities reinforces the Prime Minister's interest.

12. *"Iraq, which is fighting terrorism rampant in the region did not back down and will keep on the development work for the political process through the gate of the democratic process and the elections"*

He promises the nation that Iraq will advance and develop despite all terrorism actions. Again, the Prime Minister tries to convince people that the government is stronger than terrorism in an attempt to push people to participate in elections.

13. *"I ask God to take the hands of the Iraqis to goodness and lead them to the election centers to stop the enemies of Iraq and the enemies of the political process by their participation and their purple fingers."*

He prays to God to safeguard the Iraqi people in his own battle against all forms of terrorism and to enable them to see their way through the elections.

14. "Peace Be Upon You and God 'S Mercy and Blessings."

Finally he salutes the people and wishes them God's blessings.

10. Conclusions

The present study analyzes the distribution of power in a written text as represented by the Prime Minister Noori Al Maliki's speech of 23/4/2014. Van Dijk's model of *Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power* (2008) is used in this analysis. It was noticed, in this speech, that power is distributed in logical chunks that can be entitled: instructions, future actions, persuasions, encouragement, propaganda, warning, inviting and controlling. Each of these items is represented by one or more of the analyzed speeches in a more or less balanced way. The study also reveals the strong relationship between social power and discourse. Furthermore, there exists a relationship between text and talk in exercising power. Political speeches can directly be analyzed using discourse strategies. Power is enacted and used by powerful actors to persuade the powerless ones. In the light of the aforementioned analysis of the written speech we can say that the hypotheses upon which the present study is based are verified.

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توزيع السلطة في النصوص المكتوبة: تحليل الخطاب النقدي

المستخلص

يعتبر تحليل الخطاب أحد المجالات اللغوية التي تلفت الانتباه بشكل خاص الى مفهوم السلطة. تحليل الخطاب النقدي على وجه الخصوص هو المجال الذي يُستخدم للكشف عن المصادر الخطابية للسلطة في تحليل النصوص المكتوبة وكذلك المنطوقة. استخدم نموذج فان دايك (Van Dijk) لبنية الخطاب وبنية السلطة (٢٠٠٨)

في تحليل المادة البحثية في هذه الدراسة التي يمثلها خطاب رئيس الوزراء العراقي السابق نوري المالكي والذي يخاطب فيه الشعب العراقي. اما الفرضيات التي تم التحقق منها في الدراسة الحالية هي:

يستخدم مفهوم السلطة السياسية من قبل الاشخاص الذين يمارسون السيطرة على مجموعات المجتمع الأخرى في التواصل اللفظي وكما هو مبين في الخطاب المكتوب. علاوة على ذلك ، هناك علاقة قوية بين السلطة الاجتماعية والخطاب. كما يمكن كذلك توزيع السلطة بشكل منطقي في الخطابات المكتوبة. أهم الاستنتاجات التي توصلت إليها الدراسة الحالية هي: إن توزيع السلطة في منطقيا في أجزاء الخطاب يمكن أن يكون بعنوان: تعليمات او إجراءات مستقبلية او إقناع او تشجيع او دعاية او تحذير او دعوة او مراقبة. يمكن تقديم كل عنصر من هذه العناصر بطريقة متوازنة من أجل الإقناع والسيطرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تحليل الخطاب النقدي ، السلطة ، الوصول ، الخطاب السياسي ، الخطابي ، الهيمنة ، السيطرة ، الإقناع