TOPIC IDENTIFICATION BEHIND POLITICAL DISCOURSE: WHAT WAS SAID AND WHAT WAS MEANT?

KHADIDJA HADJ DJELLOUL, M'HAMED BENZAYED

Abstract:

When two speakers utter the same speech, using the same words; the meaning they convey to their audience can be completely different. In fact, speakers use words or terms to express ideas, but they do not always dictate their meaning or identify the topic of their speech. This generally occurs when political leaders use powerful words so as to be convincing and persuasive through their discourse. Thus, the aim of the study is to unveil the topics behind the speech of the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during the Arab Spring Uprising in 2011 and the British candidate speech for the Prime Minister campaign held by Andrea Leadsom on July 4, 2016. Despite the clear diversion of key terms in each speech; there was a clear difference, between what was said and what was meant for, in both.

Keywords:

Discourse; Political Discourse; Meaning; Speech; Topic Identification.

Authors:

KHADIDJA HADJ DJELLOUL, Faculty of Public Law, Dr. Moulay Taher University of Saida , Algeria, Email: Khadidja.hadjdjelloul@univ-saida.dz
M'HAMED BENZAYED, Faculty of Public Law, Dr. Moulay Taher University of Saida , Algeria, Email: benzayedabdelkader58@yahoo.com

Citation:

Introduction

Discourse analysis has recently gained prominence in many fields of knowledge where researchers have interests and their studies aim at discovering related features. As such, political discourse has peculiar characteristics that make it different from other forms of discourse. Among these features, words or terms play a pivotal role in politicians' efforts to legitimize their quest and maximize the effectiveness of their communication with receiving end. hey systematically influence the audience to adopt a positive attitude, alter their perceptions and beliefs, and guide them towards a specific political action. Implicit target topics are identified behind politicians' discourses. Accordingly, the present work intends to shed some light on the issue by selecting two sample speeches. It revolves around the role of words within the speech of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during the Arab Spring Uprising in 2011 and the candidacy speech by Andrea Leadsom held on July 4, 2016. Contemporary incidents motivated the selected speeches, helping to uncover the study's purpose. Before delving in, it is necessary, first, to account for the concepts of discourse, political discourse, and external contexts. After that, it is important to consider term analyses that lead to the identification of different topics

1. Discourse by Definition

It is hard to define the term discourse since there are a plethora of academic works that actually offer analyses of selected texts Harmon (2017) purposefully used the term "descriptions" instead of "definitions" because attempts to explain the concept and pass for a clear definition seem to capture some of its aspects but lack sufficient precision.

Discourse remains an ambiguous field; however it is an entity that requires understanding and realisation of its content and connotation. Researchers in this field are required to have a grasp of the linguistic, anthropological, psychological, social, communicative, analytical, and critical aspects of a speech in order to arrive at a full and thorough understanding. However they encounter a dilemma where they have to specify and select concepts, despite the fact that the terminology is widely used in common social and cultural spheres.

Purvis & Hunt (1993) determined discourse as a platform of interaction,. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) stressed the implications and social consequences of discourse, especially the relation between it and power. Chilton (2004) connected discourse with institutions and pointed out the essential correspondence between them. To define discourse, one should

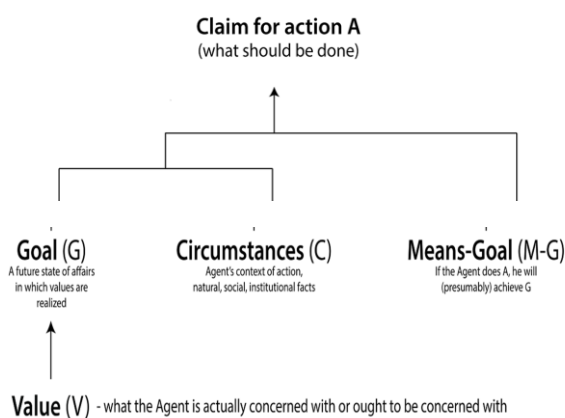make a distinction[1] with texts; however, a hang back occurs when coming to that point.

1.1.   The Political Discourse

Traditionally, political discourse is strictly connected to power. Schäffner argued that "politicians do not deliver speeches as individuals, but rather as representatives of political parties governments, or nations" (1996, p. 203). Van Dijk (1997) clarifies that political discourse involves more than just politicians. Other various recipients of political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the masses, and other groups are included.

Political speech as a part of political discourse does not need much explanation for it has always been scholars' and journalists' favorite subject of interest and investigation (Wodak, 2005). A political speech is meant for a broad audience. It typically addresses questions of common interest. In other words, a political speech is built upon an exigence as a situation that is "marked by a sense of urgency" (Bitzer 1968, p. 7) and needs action in order to be solved. This perception of the essence of political speech seems to fit in with the concept by Fairclough & Fairclough since it is in agreement with what they call "circumstances"

Figure 1.

Structural Constituents of Political Discourse

Source: Fairclough & Fairclough (2012, p. 45).

---

[1] The distinction between discourse and text is attempted by Lemke (1995).

The speeches by the Egyptian president and the British prime minister candidate, which will be presented below, align with specific circumstances and, therefore, unquestionably form the core of political discourse. This can be found in the established typology by Reisigl & Wodak (2001).

2. External Contexts

2.1. The Arab Spring Uprising

The end of 2010 witnessed unprecedented tensions as masses of anti-government protests began in Tunisia. Shortly after, a series of revolts in countries in the Middle East and North Africa occurred. From Libya to Syria, there have been countless losses notably in Egypt. On January 25, 2011, marches, demonstrations and civil resistance began in Cairo, and lasted for 18 days until Hosni Mubarak finally succumbed to an over turn after being in power for 30 years.

2.2.   British Prime Minister Campaign 2016

In the Brexit referendum held on 23rd June 2016, the majority of British people chose to leave the European Union and David Cameron, who supported the "Remain" campaign, announced his resignation as the Conservative Party Leader and Prime Minister, which meant the necessity of appointing his successor. Andrea Leadsom, an internationally unknown politician, was one of the candidates who ran for office. The text analyzed below is Leadsom's launch speech held on July 4, 2016.

3. Discourse Analysis and Discussion

3.1. The Analysis of Mubarak's Speech[2]

Lahlali (2011) examined the themes and structures of the last speech by President Hosni Mubarak before he was forced out of office. One of the significant aspects of his speech was the repetition of themes rather than phrases or single words. This aspect was observed by Al-Majali, who concluded that repetition in the presidential speeches was intended to threaten civilian protestors. Al-Majali examined Mubarak's speeches using Halliday and Hassan's framework of cohesion. Results revealed that Mubarak used linguistic features different from the ones he usually did. He used

---

[2] The speech was delivered on three successive dates: 28th of January, the 1st of February and the 10th of it.

repetition, hyponyms and synonyms to serve purposes such as political ideologies and to threaten the protesters in the current study.

Anagondahalli (2013) examined the image repair strategies used by Hosni Mubarak during the Arab Spring. The researcher aimed to investigate how Mubarak responded to and represented himself. According to him, Mubarak used: *denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness* and *corrective action*. The *mortification* strategy was never used by Mubarak, who tried to deflect the anger toward "unnamed others" instead of himself (p. 242).

Furthermore, Adimi used three words to describe Mubarak's speech: *paternalism, selfishness* and *falsity.* He posited that the latter depicted himself as a father figure in an attempt to sympathise with the protesters. Mubarak used the first-person pronoun (I) many times, signifying his geocentricism. He also blamed others for conspiracy theories that supported his delusions. As previously illustrated, we inferred all of this by analyzing Mubarak's speech and identifying significant topics.

3.2. The Analysis of Leadsom's Speech

Two big values are strongly accentuated in Leadsom's speech[3]: *freedom* ("We are choosing freedom away from the stifling EU institutions") and *democracy* ("Our democracy is the oldest in the world"). It is pointed out that *freedom* enables *democracy*. Hence, the consequence of a referendum is illustrated as a big success that gave back freedom to British people. In fact, the conceptualization offered is that of a war just won against an oppressor. The use of the fall of the Berlin wall puts an additional emphasis.

Leadsom states *"a division within the nation"*, with an observation that "the referendum did not cause divisions but it rather reveal them", which dismisses the idea that the referendum is the origin of the problem. She hurried with an appeal for unity and the assurance that there were no worries: "What I would like to say to them is please: Don't be afraid; We haven't lost our senses; We haven't stopped caring about each other; We haven't stopped loving our families and children; We haven't stopped loving our country either".

She realizes that many citizens are not happy about their economic situation, ("The importance of wealth and job creation is core to all my beliefs…", "Workers' rights under my leadership will be protected and enhanced."). She further implicitly points out the guilty of the situation: *"The EU elites failed to*

---

[3] The full text is enclosed in Appendix I (retrieved from: Harmon (2017, p.85)).

handle crucial problems". She clearly attributed the British people's wish to exit the EU to the responsibility of the EU elites. Leadsom's set of circumstances justifies the need to respond with solutions.

"Bringing the nation together" and *"building a greater Britain"* (outside EU) were the relevant goals to be pursued by the new government as the speaker mentions. Since the decision about Brexit is considered final, *bringing the nation together* can only mean convincing the unconvinced about the 'leave' Building a greater Britain appeals to her because she believes that Great Britain is already great and can only become even better.

It is clear that the call for action in every election campaign speech is always the same: *Vote for me*. It is a transparent invitation to elect her. "Why me?" she claimed, why her? She claims to have the right attitude (reflected in her promises and commitments), skills and qualifications. So it is recommendable to select her for leadership (call for action).

Conclusion

Generally speaking, political discourses reflect the crisis that is experienced, if not exacerbating it further. They are primarily exploited by political leaders to persuade the public to adopt their policies and to convince them of their righteousness in facing threatening crises. In the political domain, terms often undergo a shift, deviating from their original meanings and acquiring new connotations that vary in their proximity or divergence from the primary identified topics. Sometimes the terms employed do not reach the level of expectation held by the receiving audience. When extracted from their original contexts, these terms might confine us to narrow connotations. Nevertheless, if we return a word to its original context, we can unravel embedded meanings and subsequent topics, that the speaker and subsequently the recipient intend to convey.

Certain thematic fields within Mubarak's speech have exhibited recurring topics, notably: authoritative messages devoid of sympathy. Mubarak employed the father figure image as a strategy to steer clear of the dictatorial image. Mubarak's speech could have been more sympathetic and realistic if the geocentricism he used had not been apparent in his use of the (I) pronoun. Instead, he could have been more understanding, more aware and more appreciative of the protesters' demands. This was reflected linguistically in his speech's increasing shift in affective tone. The findings were supported by Anagondahalli (2013), who claimed that Mubarak's speech had a sort of "corrective actions," which were very general but precise. It was the list of someone who listened attentively to the demands of the protestors

which he failed to maintain. Finally, Mubarak used positive strategies to portray himself as knowledgeable and to demonstrate his goodwill and virtue toward the public. His true political goal was to stay in power or to pass it on to his successor.

All the above points in Leadsom's discourse can lead to the deduction that what was meant for was that British people appreciated democracy and freedom and since Brexit did not occur, these values could not be converted. The referendum result with its ramifications means a big chance for the British people to regain democracy and freedom. Due to the difficult economic, political and social circumstances, achieving targets posed a big challenge for the new prime minister. However, given Leadsom's qualifications, it was advisable to entrust her with leadership.

Despite attempts to understand the meanings of the used terms, it is impossible to fully identify the intended topic. Consequently, the process of analysis remains limited endeavors in any given work or discourse. However, emphasizing the importance of context does not, in any case, nullify the meaning, which still retains its significance in exploring the textual connotation.

References

Adimi, Ahmed. (2011). Analysing Hosni Mubarak's Speech: Paternity, Selfishness and Deception. *Dr. Ahmed Adimi Blog.* http://adimiahmed.overblog.com/article-68720736.html.5 January 2020.

Alkahtani, M. B. (2020). Failing to Prevail: A Discourse Analysis of Attitude in Mubarakâ€™ s Speeches During the Arab Spring. *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, *14*(1), 123-137.

Al-Majali, Wala. "Discourse Analysis of the Political Speeches of the Ousted Arab Presidents During the Arab Spring Revolution Using Halliday and Hasan's Framework of Cohesion." *Journal of Education and Practice* 6.14 (2015): 96-108.

Anagondahalli, Deepa. (2013). Prior Reputation and the Transition from Image Repair to Image Makeover: The Case of Hosni Mubarak. *Public Relations Review,* 39, pp.241-44.

Bitzer, L.F. (1968). The Rhetorical Situation. Philosophy and Rhetoric 1, 1-14.

Chilton, P. (2004). Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and Practice. London: Routledge.

Fairclough, I., & Fairlclough, N. (2012). Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students. London: Routledge.

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T.A. van Dijk (Ed.), Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction 2 (pp. 258-284). London: Sage.

Halliday, M.A.K. and R. Hasan. *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman, 1976.

Harmon, L. (2017). Political discourse as practical reasoning: A case study of a British Prime Minister candidate speech. *Linguistics Beyond and Within (LingBaW)*, *3*(3), 74-86.

Lahlali, El Mustapha. (2011). The Arab Spring and the Discourse of Desperation: Shifting from an Authoritarian Discourse to a Democratic One. *Arab Media & Society* 14, available at: http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20110531110744_L ahlali.pdf.

Purvis, T., & Hunt, A. (1993). Discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology… The British Journal of Sociology 4, 473-499.

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2001). Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetoric of Racism and Antisemitism. London: Routledge.

Schäffner, Christina. 1996. "Editorial: Political speeches and discourse analysis." *Current Issues in Language and Society* 3(3): 201-204.

Van Dijk, T.A. (1997). What is Political Discourse Analysis? Retrieved from: http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Politics,%20Ideology%20 and%20Discourse.pdf. 6.05. 2023.

Van Dijk, T.A. (2006). Politics, Ideology, and Discourse. Retrieved from: http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Politics,%20Ideology%20 and%20Discourse.pdf. 6.05. 2023.

Wodak, R. (2005). Language and Politics.Retrieved from: http://host.uniroma3.it/linguisti/lcsingles/Roma3/Newsblog/Entries /2014/4/6_New_class_time_files/Wodak-Language%20and%20 Politics.pdf.6.05.2023.

Appendices

Appendix I: The Speech of Andrea Leadsom

The decision we took on the 23rd June was a great moment in history. Not just a historic opportunity for our country but for Europe as a whole. Perhaps the biggest moment since the Berlin Wall came down. We are not leaving any of our historic ties with our European friends, We are choosing freedom away from the stifling EU institutions. Through NATO we remain bound through the 1949 treaty to come to the defense of Europe's democracies if they are attacked. The nations and peoples of Europe remain our close friends, staunch allies and key trading partners. I believe, however, that our vote to leave the EU will be a positive wake up call for those European elites who have been far too complacent about:
– Youth unemployment that is wrecking lives in S Europe
– The declining share of world trade that threatens Europe's progress, and
– The failure of the Brussels machine to respond to globalization.

Because of our decision on June 23, we are no longer bound to that EU model. We will have our freedom back. Today I want to talk first about our future place in Europe, second about building a greater Britain and then, third, about why I am the best choice to lead our country forward. I want to start with the result of the referendum and the clear choice of the British people. The result is final. It must be respected and I will respect it. The United Kingdom will leave the European Union. Freedom of movement will end and the British parliament will decide how many people enter our country each year to live, work and contribute to our national life. Billions of pounds more will be invested in the NHS from the savings we make from cancelling our EU membership fee. The laws and regulations that govern the British people will be made in Britain – and not Brussels. And at elections the British people will be able to appoint or sack politicians, secure in the knowledge that EU bureaucracy cannot undermine their wishes. I intend to keep the negotiations as short as possible. Neither we nor our European friends need prolonged uncertainty and not everything needs to be negotiated before Article 50 is triggered and the exit process is concluded. My team will set out trade, border and security agreements – our renegotiation will be in the hands of a dedicated Cabinet colleague. I emphasize 'dedicated'. The team that I will assemble to lead Britain out of the EU will consult opposition politicians, business people, farmers, trades unions and trade negotiators. I will closely consult with colleagues from the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolved parliaments, as well as here in Westminster, to make the most of the huge opportunity that lies ahead. I will do everything in my power to keep the United Kingdom United.

And this brings me on to my second of three themes for today. The next prime minister must bring the nation together. The EU referendum didn't cause divisions but it certainly did reveal them. Many people are shocked at the result but they really shouldn't be. What I would like to say to them is please: Don't be afraid; We haven't lost our senses; We haven't stopped caring about each other; We haven't stopped loving our families and children;

We haven't stopped loving our country either; We've just rediscovered our Freedom!

It's very obvious that many fellow citizens are unhappy with the way the economy works for them. So it won't be enough to protect the working people of this country by just reducing the flow of low-skilled labour – although that is necessary. When there is room for tax cuts they must be focused on the low-paid. The importance of wealth and job creation is core to all my beliefs but the richest people of Britain should know that they will not be my priority. Britain will make her way in the world by investing in the skills of her people – not by expecting them to adopt unacceptable conditions. And those people who have become rich by winning boardroom pay rises that bear no relation to company performance should be aware that I find this unacceptable. Too few people in my old field of financial services were ever brought to book for their part in the 2008 crash.

I'll continue to build on the good work that George Osborne has done in reducing the deficit. We have to get our house in order. The Chancellor's sound northern powerhouse project needs to be supercharged, and I won't forget that Sunderland was one of the first to make very clear, last Friday morning, the desire for change. I will appoint a key minister for housing and try my hardest to keep him or her in the job for the rest of the parliament. I want a minister who thinks of nothing other than how to use a bigger housing budget to deliver on the aspirations of the working people of this country. As well as spending more on roads, railways and broadband I'll make rapid decisions on airport expansion. Business needs certainty. I will prioritise new trade deals with the fastest growing parts of the world, a simpler tax system, and an immigration policy focused on bringing the most talented people to our country. Workers' rights under my leadership will be protected and enhanced, as my friend Gisela Stuart MP and I made clear during the referendum debates. The national living wage, the apprenticeship levy and Michael Gove's important pupil premium will all be safe under my watch. And commit today to immediately guaranteeing the rights of our EU friends who have already come here to live and work. We must give them certainty – they will not be bargaining chips in our negotiations.

Finally, why me? It was a big decision to put myself forward to lead our country. One that was driven by my absolute conviction that our future, and that of our children and grandchildren, will be so much better outside the EU. But my real passion in politics is my desire for social justice – for a transformation of our society. For nearly two decades I've been chairing and founding new charities to support the earliest years of life. There is no doubt that the period from conception to the age of two is critical…it is during this period that the lifelong emotional capacity of a human being is largely set up established. Being able to learn, being able to make friendships, to hold down a job, to have a sense of self-worth. These sound very basic, but for too many in our country these things are elusive. And there's a financial angle to this. The choice our country faces is simple: We spend more on early intervention or we spend much more later on picking up the pieces of lives that struggled

at school, struggled in work, and all too often found themselves without hope. I am certain we can change that, and my absolute commitment to it and the emotional health of our nation.