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THE WAR ON TERROR DISCOURSE: THE CASE OF THE SECOND GULF WAR

Abstract. This paper deals with the notion of discourse as manifested in political text and talk. The theoretical part elaborates the concept of political discourse with special focus on political speeches. Particular attention is also placed on Critical Discourse Analysis, which provides theoretical framework for the study. The subject of the analysis is the discourse of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair during the campaign for the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and during the initial stages of the military operation itself.

Keywords: discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, political discourse, The War on Terror.

1. Introduction

The events of 9/11 had tremendous political consequences for the world of international affairs. After terrorist attacks on the United States, there followed a series of overseas military operations mainly in the Middle East and also in Afghanistan. These operations were designed to fight the declared “War on Terror” and were executed by the United States and its allies. Great Britain was also a member of the US – led coalition – as a principal ally of the USA.

After 9/11 attacks, there also came into existence a new type of rhetoric, which was aimed at justification of these military actions. If leaders wanted to justify their actions and decisions in the public, they had to communicate their arguments in a clear, coherent and persuasive manner.

In this paper, I will present an analysis of selected fragments of discourse taken from the speeches by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The fragments from his speeches present examples of how discourse may be used and structured for purposes of persuasion. The article also presents theoretical framework for Critical Discourse Analysis.

2. Political Discourse

Chilton [1, p. 4] claims that “language and politics are intimately linked at a fundamental level.”

Horvath [2, p. 45] also considers language as being essential in political affairs and comments on the role of language in politics: “in this process, language plays a crucial role, for every political

action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language.”

Indeed, language plays a vital role in the construction of ideological positions. No matter how politics is defined, it also involves a linguistic, discursive and communicative dimension. Politicians are aware of the potential of language use and therefore they attach great importance to communicative events.

One of the main aims of the analysis of political discourse is to specify the ways in which particular choice of language is manipulated for specific political goals. Examples of political discourse can be analyzed almost on all levels of linguistics from lexis to pragmatics. Political discourse may contain covert as well as overt linguistic tools that serve for shaping of public opinion. On the syntactic level, for example, reversal of the word order can be used for stressing certain information.

Chilton and Schaffner [3, p. 211] assume that the “task of political discourse is to relate the fine grain of linguistic behaviour to what we understand by “politics” or “political behaviour.” Within political discourse, Van Dijk [4, p. 176] distinguishes between the following genres: “parliamentary debates, laws, propaganda, slogans, peace negotiations, international treaties.” In addition to the above mentioned genres, political speeches also present an essential component of political discourse. Within political discourse, speeches given by politicians are a particularly important genre.

As a genre of political discourse, political speech, according to Dedaic [5, p. 700] represents

“relatively autonomous discourse produced orally by a politician in front of an audience, the purpose of which is primarily

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persuasion rather than information or entertainment. [...] The orator is speaking face to face with his or her audience and deals with a controversial issue. Generally, the purpose of any political speech is to convince the audience that his or her standpoints are correct and plausible."

Dedaic [5, p. 700] continues to claim that political speeches can be classified either by the occasion (commemorative, inaugural, etc.), by the speaker (political candidate, national leader) and by audience (TV, local national, international).

Especially in the Western countries, speeches of the prime minister or the president (these include, e.g. inaugural addresses, war rhetoric, farewell addresses, state of the nation addresses, etc.) are prominent social and political events and preferred objects of linguistic analyses – it is because these speeches produce linguistic as well as sociopolitical ties with audiences.

As far as persuasion in political discourse is concerned, it is generally viewed as the primary aim of majority speeches to the public. In Dedaic's view [5, p. 702] "persuasion is an attempt to change human behavior or to strengthen convictions or attitudes through communication. (...) The orator employs argument and rhetorical devices, such as evidence, lines of reasoning, and appeals that support the orator's aims." In the case of the conflict in Iraq, the argument related to weapons of mass destruction was frequently employed, repeatedly stressed by Western leaders and it played an essential role in decisions about military involvement.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis

The theoretical framework for this study is situated within Critical Discourse Analysis. The roots of CDA go back to the 1970's. The main stimulus for the emergence of "Critical Linguistics" was provided by publication of the book entitled *Language and Control* [6]. As the title implies, the book was primarily concerned with the relationship between language and power. Fowler [7, p. 3] claims that the authors provided an analysis whose aim was to "get at the ideology coded implicitly behind the overt propositions, to examine it particularly in the context of social formations."

Critical Discourse Analysis emerged from the writings generally associated with Critical Linguistics and also with Systemic Functional Linguistics. Critical linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis are seen as useful tools for analyzing political speeches, gender inequalities, etc.

Hopkinson [8, p. 32] suggests that this theoretical framework for the study of discourse is also used when studying "manipulative media discourse, and the strategies it uses to achieve its aims."

According to Schaffner and Wenden [9, p. xviii], the main goal of Critical Discourse Analysis is to "analyse language and the functioning of language in its social context." The adjective "critical" is not used in a negative sense. Young and Fitzgerald [10, p. 8] claim that this term is used "to describe a way of looking at lan-

guage reflectively, that is, asking why a speaker/writer has chosen certain words and structures, and not others." CDA sees context of language use as an essential component for any analysis. Furthermore, CDA encompasses and makes use of rhetoric, sociolinguistics and also pragmatics.

Van Dijk [4, p. 85] views CDA as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context."

Over the last two decades, this approach has become very influential in the study of various discourses. CDA primarily focuses on the relationship between language and power, as well as on "the way discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of power and dominance in society." [4, p. 86]

According to Caldas – Coulthard [11, p. xi], discourse is considered an important aspect of "power and control and Critical Discourse Analysts [...] feel that it is indeed part of their professional role to investigate, reveal and clarify how power and discriminatory value are inscribed in and mediated through the linguistic system."

CDA is also specifically interested with how one group controls or influences another group through the form of content of text and talk.

Fairclough points out that CDA is "based on the assumption that "language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life." [12, p. 2]

In general, it might be said that CDA views language as a form of social practice and attempts to make people aware of the influences of language and social structure of which they are usually unaware.

4. Analysis of Tony Blair's Discourse on Iraq

4.1. General features of Tony Blair's rhetoric

In this part of the paper, different recognitions and shifts of perception of "evil" in Tony Blair's view will be presented.

In general, the main feature that can be attributed to Tony Blair's rhetoric is that of "struggle between good and evil." In this bipolar division, Blair is frequently typified as an agent of "good" involved in the struggle against "evil." [13, p. 150]

In the following, changes in Blair's perception of the notion of evil throughout different periods of time will be discussed, drawing mainly on the work by Charteris – Black [13, p. 150].

Before 9/11, it was mainly social injustice and its roots that Blair considered "evil." This is manifested in his speech from September 2000:

(1) "Crime, anti-social behaviour, racial intolerance, drug abuse, destroy families and communities. They destroy the very respect for others on

which society is founded. They blight the life chances of thousands of young people and the quality of life of millions more. Fail to confront this evil and we will never build a Britain where everyone can succeed.” (Tony Blair, September 26, 2000) [14, par. 49 – 50]

The following year, Blair changed the subject of the embodiment of evil – at that time, the focus was placed on terrorism. He stated:

- (2) “This mass terrorism is the new evil in our world today. It is perpetrated by fanatics who are utterly indifferent to the sanctity of human life and we, the democracies of this world, are going to have to come together to fight it together and eradicate this evil completely from our world.” (Tony Blair, September 11, 2001) [15, par. 2]

In 2003, during the campaign for the military operation in Iraq, it was Saddam Hussein who was perceived as “evil.” Tony Blair’s proclamation is as follows:

- (3) “Looking back over 12 years, we have been victims of our own desire to placate the implacable, to persuade towards reason the utterly unreasonable, to hope that there was some genuine intent to do good in a regime whose mind is in fact evil.” (Tony Blair, March 18, 2003) [16, par. 9]

4.2. Tony Blair’s Discourse during the campaign for the Iraq War in 2003

The focus of this part of the paper will be placed on Tony Blair’s rhetoric during the campaign for the invasion of Iraq and during the initial stages of invasion in March 2003.

For the purpose of the analysis, short fragments of his speeches from this period were selected. The aim of this selection is to demonstrate some basic tools of Critical Discourse Analysis, namely presupposition and the usage of pronouns.

Ponton [17, pp. 11–16] considers presupposition and usage of pronouns as basic tools for Critical Discourse Analysis. Presupposition is defined by Yule [18, p. 25] as “something the initiator of communication assumes to be the case prior to making utterances.”

In the following excerpt, Tony Blair, without any justification, claims that Saddam Hussein’s possession of weapons of mass destruction is implicit:

- (4) “Our aim is to disarm Saddam of his weapons of mass destruction.” [19, par. 14]

Such statements, although unjustified, may be perceived as veritable in the public. However, Ponton suggests that “in the case of Iraq, an invasion was necessary to demonstrate that Blair’s presupposition was false.” [17, p. 14] Nonetheless, it might be stated

that the presupposition employed by Tony Blair achieved its primary function associated with legitimization of military action.

As far as the usage of pronouns in discourse is concerned, Fairclough [20, p. 106] distinguishes between the so called inclusive and exclusive *we*. He provides the following examples taken from a *Daily Mail* editorial: “We cannot let our troops lose their edge below decks while Argentine diplomats play blind man’s bluff round the corridors of the United Nations.” Fairclough [ibid.] further argues that by employing “inclusive” *we*, “the newspaper is speaking on behalf of itself, its readers, and indeed all British citizens.” On the other hand, “exclusive” *we* “refers to the writer (or speaker) plus one or more others, but does not include the addressee (s).”

Similar use of *we* can be found in Tony Blair’s discourse on Iraq:

- (5) (...) “Once again he refused. The choice the international community then faced was to disarm Saddam by force and oust his regime or to back down and to leave Saddam hugely strengthened to attack or intimidate his neighbours and to pass on these weapons to terrorist groups. I believe that history will judge that we made the right choice.” (Tony Blair, March 30, 2003) quoted in [17, p. 13]

In this fragment, Tony Blair directly implies that “the international community” was facing a choice. Towards the end of his proclamation, he states that “we made the right choice.” However, as aptly noted by Ponton [17, p. 13], “the choice to disarm Saddam and oust his regime was not taken by the international community at all, but by Britain and the United States.” These two countries did not take into account opinions of other important world powers. Ponton [ibid.] goes on to argue about the logic behind Blair’s usage of pronoun by claiming that “Blair has used rhetorical ‘sleight of hand’ to smooth over conflicting opinions within the international coalition; and, by constructing a rhetorical front of international unity behind his favoured policy, make the military option more persuasive to his current listeners.”

5. Conclusion

This paper has presented a brief overview of the interplay between language and politics. Starting with the concept of political discourse as such, continuing with description of the main features of political speeches, and introducing the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper has also presented an attempt how to explore discursive properties of political speeches.

Bloor and Bloor [21, p. 7] argue that “the linguistic analysis of texts has many practical applications above and beyond knowledge about language for its own sake. It can help us to find out why some texts are more effective than other texts at communication or persuasion.” The fragments from the speeches of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s speeches have illustrated how leaders may communicate their political aims and ideas.

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