Critical Discourse and Event Semantics Analyses of D. Trump's Statement on the Armenian Genocide

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Abstract

The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the US President D. Trump's statement on the Armenian Genocide. Our research is based on some principles of the discourse analytical theories covering the fields of semantics, pragmatics and political discourse. *Critical Discourse Analysis* is applied for analyzing political discourse and mostly studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. As for the event semantics analysis we employ the so-called *Event Structure Approach* focusing on causative constructions which refer to predicates formed by a combination of a causative event and an underlying predicate. Hence, two types of linguistic theories are applied for enclosing the hidden subtexts of the president's intentions along with maneuvering strategies.

Key words: *Critical Discourse analysis, Event-based Semantics, causation, verb meaning, predicate, agent.*

Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is obviously not a homogenous model, nor a school or a paradigm, but at most a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis (van Dijk 1993:131). Critical discourse analysis far and by accepts the social context studying the relations between textual structures and social context. The main objective of critical discourse analysis is to create a framework for decreasing the so-called opacity. In his well-known definition N. Fairclough describes CDA as "discourse analysis which aims to syste-

matically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practice, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony" (Fairclough 1993:135).

The word *critical* ''implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change" (Fairclough 1992:9). Fairclough points out three stages of CDA.

- ✓ Description is the stage which is concerned with the formal properties of the text.
- ✓ Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction – with seeing the text as a product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation…
- ✓ Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context – with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects. (Fairclough 1989:26)

These notions transform into an analytical method, including the "linguistic description of the language text, interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the text, and explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes" (Fairclough 1989:97).

According to R. Batstone "Critical discourse analysts seek to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular (and Potentially indoctrinating) perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly; because they are covert, they are elusive of direct challenge, facilitating what Kress calls the "retreat into mystification and impersonality" (Batstone 1995:198-199).

This paper presents critical discourse analysis of D. Trump's statement on the Armenian Genocide revealing causative constructions in his discourse by employing the underlying event-based semantics that owes its introduction into linguistics to D. Davidson. Much work on verbal semantics in the past twenty years or so has

been shaped by Davidson's idea to treat events as individuals, as values of variables in first-order logic (Davidson 1967:169). Texts in basic logics typically assign simple English sentences like *Mary kissed John* a representation like *kiss (m, j),* involving two constants and a binary relation. Davidson proposes that action sentences like this are not so simple, and involve, in addition, a quantification over events which is given in the formulation *∃e [kiss(m, j, e)] ("There is a kissing of John by Mary.")* where an existentially quantified event parameter is simply added to the relational structure of the predicate. However, the widely-adopted, neo-Davidson position is given in the formulation *∃e[kissing(e) & Agent (e, m) & Theme(e, j)],* where the verb is distilled into a core unary event predicate, whose participants are linked to the event by means of conjoined binary thematic relations (Higginbotham 1989, Parsons 1990). Utterly, the event is represented as *"There is a kissing, and it is by Mary, and it is of John".*

According to M. Shibatani, "most comprehensive analysis of the causative construction has been done in the framework of generative semantics" (Shibatani 1976:273). The causative construction provided the generative semanticists, particularly G. Lakoff (1970) and G. McCawley (1968) with the most rewarding field of investigation. N. Chomsky in his quest to displace the generative semantics analysis of causative constructions notes the problems that obtain in thinking of the lexical entry for **'kill'** as specifying somehow a phrase marker **'cause to die'**. He argues that, similarly, the lexical entry for **'murder'** might indicate that it can be inserted by a lexical transformation for the substructure **murder=cause to die** by unlawful means and with malice aforethought, where the grammatical object is furthermore human. (Chomsky 1971: 89)

Studies show that verb meaning can be represented by decomposing the predicate into more basic predicates. This is best illustrated by G. McCawley's analysis of the verb **kill;**

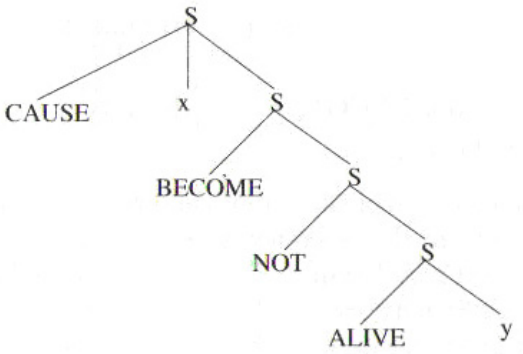


FIGURE 1 McCawley 1968, p. 73, Figure 3.

In view of this, field studies have developed the idea that the meaning of a verb can be analyzed by the structured representation of the event that the verb designates. Hence, the so-called complex events are identified as having an internal structure. Various studies converged on the idea that complex events are structured into an inner and an outer event, where the outer event is associated with causation and agency, and the inner event is associated with telicity and change of state (Pustejovsky and Tenny 2001:10). With the so-called CAUSE predicate the outer event is represented and the change of state is represented by the predicate BECOME. Towards making sense of the internal structure of verb meanings R. Jackendoff proposes the theory of decomposition calling it *Conceptual Representation*s which parallel the syntactic representations of sentences of natural language. These employ a set of canonical elements including CAUSE, GO TO and ON and cannonical elements including Thing, Path and Event. Under his system R. Jackendoff represents the sentence *Harry buttered the bread* as:

[Event CAUSE ([Thing]i,[Event Thing
[Path TO ([Place ON (Thing]j)])])])]} (Jackendoff 1990:54)

According to event-semantic theories through syntactic-semantic representation the hidden meanings of the utterance can be revealed. The deep

semantic-syntactic analyses through context and event semantics permit to restructure the deep meaning and significance of the sentence. The linguistic text transforms to a formal logical-semantic structure (i.e. deep structure) through which the surface structure of the text is represented. We understand the text in its deep structure taking into consideration the implicit and contextual meanings.

It is worthy to mention that here we have something to do with context models, suggested by van Dijk. Language users not only form and update models of events and situations they communicate about, but also of the communicative event in which they participate. A communicative event or situation, that is context, includes the following categories: Setting (Time, Place), Circumstances, Participants and Action (and their modifiers), including those that represent opinions. These define the mental (and hence subjective) counterpart of the canonical structure of a communicative situation or context as presented in a vast literature in ethnography, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, social psychology (van Dijk 1995:255). Context models feature evaluative propositions or opinions: speech participants usually have opinions about each other, about the actual text and talk of the other as well as about other features of the context (time, place, circumstances). Within this framework, we identify two types of event structures: communicative event and complex event (outer and inner events) representing the deep structure of the talk or writing. The theory of event semantics provides a large analytical tool for analyzing word meaning. A new synthesis has emerged in recent years which attempts to model verb meanings as complex predicative structures with rich event structures. The research has developed the idea that the meaning of a verb can be analyzed into a structured representation of the event that the verb designates. This literature has further contributed to the realization that the grammar recognizes the existence of complex events having an internal structure.

Outline of the Remembrance Day Speech

On Armenian Remembrance Day on April 24, 2017, the US present president D. Trump paid tribute to more than one million Armenians killed

during the Ottoman Empire. Howbeit, the president following his predecessors stopped short of calling the great calamity as a Genocide.

As a matter of fact President Donald Trump's speech can be divided into the following 4 parts;

1. **Remembering and Honoring the memory**
2. **Acknowledging the fact** that one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in the final years of the Ottoman Empire.Trump indirectly mentions the fact of 1.5mln. Armenians being the victims of Genocide, though.
3. **Pointing out the past and the Armenians' contribution to the USA**

By pointing out the past the president indirectly and unconsciously accepts the history and the deeds by the hands of Young Turks. By that, it becomes clear that he is familiar with the history by mentioning the name of Ottoman Empire, which doesn't exist anymore. As for Armenians' contribution he posits their indelible contribution to their country. This means, that the president tries to pacify the plight, hence maneuvering the recognition of the core event.

4. **Welcoming the efforts of Turks and Armenians**

Trump outlines new foreign policy avoiding to mention official facts or proning to one or another. The overall theme of the president's speech can be summerised as grievously inadequate. The word Genocide is maneuvered and scrubbed. The president uses the expression Meds Yeghern instead. The speech shows that suffering and loss of innocent lives are abstracted from any cause, i.e. any perpetrator.

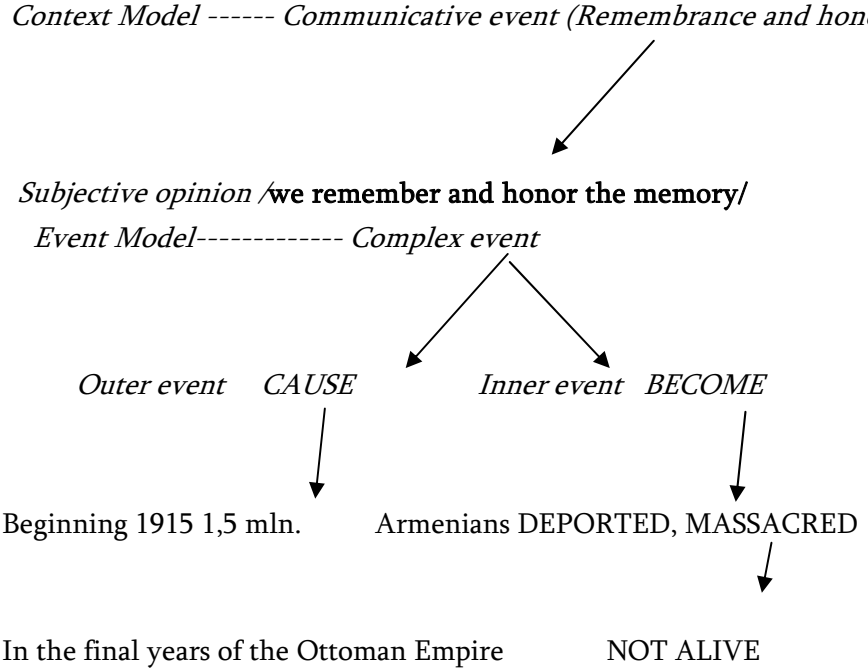
The question to be analyzed from the event-semantics point of view is the following: Who caused the suffering? Who committed the murder?

Our approach is based on the idea that the grammar of natural language structures the events represented by verbs into complex events, with a causative outer event and a change-of state inner event. Within this framework, we identify two types of event structures: communicative event and complex event (outer and inner events) representing the deep structure of the talk or writing. The theory of event semantics provides a large analytical tool for analyzing word

meaning. A new synthesis has emerged in recent years, which attempts to model verb meanings as complex predicative structures with rich event structures.

Analysis 1

Today, we remember and honor the memory of those who suffered during the Meds Yeghern, one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century. Beginning in 1915, one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in the final years of the Ottoman Empire (Statement by President Donald J. Trump on Armenian Remembrance Day 2017)



CAUSE-BECOME relation becomes significant at this point. The so-called causer argument makes an object (1.5 ml. Armenians) undergo a change of state. One interesting point should be taken into consideration, that in the deep semantic context the causer of the event, i.e. agent is not marked, however, the front position of the sentence comes to be represented by adverbial modifiers of time (beginning 1915/ in the final years of the Ottoman Empire), which prompts that the president is well-aware of the history. Yet, in Trump's statement, it is not

clearly mentioned who realized the events but the history gives the reader/listener a hint, that in 1915 1.5 million Armenians were massacred by Young Turks. The following structure can be outlined:

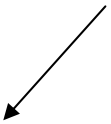
MASSACRE ---------- kill----------BECOME NOT ALIVE

As can be noticed, the Armenian people are the grammatical passive (Armenians were massacred and marched to their death) subject of the sentence (event) but the agent and cause of the real event (massacre) are not presented, i.e. who did the action (event), who caused 1.5mln. Armenians to be massacred and deported are not mentioned though. Like in Obama's statement one can detect the event **Meds Yeghern** in Trump's statement as well, where the EVENT-RESULT is mentioned, but EVENT-CAUSE is missing.

Analysis 2

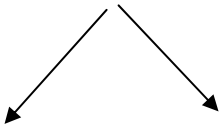
I join the Armenian community in America and around the world in mourning the loss of innocent lives and the suffering endured by so many (Statement by President Donald J. Trump on Armenian Remembrance Day 2017).

Context Model ---------- *Communicative event*



Subjective attitude: Sharing the pain of the Armenian community in America

Event Model ---------- Complex event



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Outer X CAUSE Inner /innocent lives BECOME lost/suffered)

The example clarifies that the causer AGENT is not presented (X), i.e, the president uses a maneuvering strategy expressing his thoughts with grammatical

passive structures. From here the reflection, that politicians often need to apply to composite audience characterized by heterogeneous values and beliefs, is onward observable. In order to do so they turn to techniques of ambiguity that make their positions seem broadly applicable.

Conclusion

By the way of conclusion I draw together the threads that we have woven throughout the examples. The American evading politics in Genocide recognition is expressed by the linguistic strategies used in the presidents' talk. US authorities do accept the history but at the same time try to maneuver the fact playing a conciliatory role. Trump's politics is also avoiding as he devalues talk dismissing it as "rhetoric". In his statement the US 45th president refuses to talk about the 1915 events in their full sense. He just **introduces** the communicative event *(Today, we remember and honor the memory of those who suffered during the Meds Yeghern, one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century.)* or **describes** the event being discussed *(one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in the final years of the Ottoman Empire.).* They **evaluate t**he event *(As we reflect on this dark chapter of human history, we also recognize the resilience of the Armenian people.) by* ***mentioning*** *the Armenians and Armenian Community's contribution to their nation (Many built new lives in the United States and made indelible contributions to our country, while cherishing memories of the historic homeland in which their ancestors established one of the great civilizations of antiquity…..). Hence, for the best we posit that the relationships among* languages and ideology are best explored by combining Critical discourse and Event-based Semantic analyses, providing a new idea and method to analyze public addresses.

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Դ. Թրամփը՝ Հայոց ցեղասպանության մասին. իմաստաբանական և խոսույթային քննություն

Սույն հոդվածի նպատակն է վերլուծել ԱՄՆ 45-րդ նախագահ Դ. Թրամփի ելույթը Հայոց ցեղասպանության վերաբերյալ՝ բացահայտելով այն լեզվական և խոսույթային ռազմավարությունները, որոնցով նախագահը փորձում է խուսափել «ցեղասպանություն» եզրույթից: Հոդվածում քննվում են այսպես կոչված Քննադատական խոսույթի վերլուծությանը և իրադարձությունների իմաստաբանությանը հարող տեսություններ, որոնք լավագույնս արտացոլում են խոսույթի ենթատեքստում թաքնված իմաստների բացահայտման մեխանիզմները: