# ANALYZING DISCOURSE
# FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

## Lect. Ruxandra BULUC[*], Ph.D.
"Carol I" National Defence University

*The aim of the present paper is, first of all, to synthesize critical discourse analysis terminology, and, secondly, to utilize it in analyzing a political speech by President George W. Bush concerning the situation in Iraq. The speech is from 2004 and the reason I chose it is that it presents quite clearly the American presidency's ideology behind the war in Iraq and also the most relevant discourse techniques meant to attract the support of the population for this mission.*

## Theoretical underpinnings

The term discourse has been defined in several ways the most general of which pertains to Gee (2005:10) who explains that discourse represents the way "linguistic and non-linguistic things are integrated." His definition is quite close to Dijk's (2001: 66) who speaks of discourse as "a communicative event including conversational interaction, written text as well as associated gestures, facework, typographical layout, images and any other semiotic or multimedia dimension of signification." Jäger (2001) and Fairclough (2001, 2003) focus on the social nature of discourse. The former defines it as "[t]he flow of knowledge – and/or all societal knowledge stored – throughout all time, which determines individual and collective doing and/or formative action that shapes society, thus exercising power" (Jäger 2001: 33). For Fairclough, discourse is directly linked to and determined by semiosis which "in the representation and self-representation of social practices constitutes discourses. Discourses are diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned – differently positioned social actors 'see' and represent social life in different ways, different discourses." (2001: 123) Or to put it more simply, also in Fairclough's words, discourse is "language in use as an

---

[*] e-mail: *ruxandra007@yahoo.com*

2013 ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂

element of social life closely connected with other elements." (2003: 3) Wodak pays closer attention to the linguistic components of discourse as she defines it as "a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as 'texts' that belong to specific semiotic types, that is genres." (Wodak: 2001: 66)

All these definitions of discourse have a few elements in common:

- discourse has a linguistic component that does not exist on its own but is influenced by other non-linguistic aspects such as gestures, images etc.
- discourse is produced/molded by different actors each with his/her own agenda that transpires in the discourse itself.
- discourse and society have an interdependent relationship, that is discourse shapes society and in its turn is shaped by society
- discourse is always ideologically laden

It has been noticed by all discourse analysts that no discourse exists in isolation; they all interact and all are based on elements from one or more other discourses. This brings to the fore other concepts that Critical Discourse Analysis employs in analyzing discourses: dialogicality, recontextualization, intertextuality and assumptions.

To take them one at a time, dialogicality (also referred to as *heteroglossia*) means the 'diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized.' (Bakhtin 1986: 262) Heteroglossia refers to different kinds of languages, such as: jargon, slang, formal and informal language. It also includes authorial speech, the speeches of narrators and characters, the different genres, and the way they interact in discourse. The multiplicity of voices and relationships between these voices – *dialogization* – constitute the basic stylistic features of the contemporary discourses. Languages are in general heteroglot. They embody the co-existence of different social and ideological mental frames and groups, both present and past.

Recontextualization, according to Fairclough, is "the appropriation of elements of one social practice within another, placing the former within the context of the latter, and transforming it in particular ways in the process." (Fairclough 2003: 32) Relations of power in governance are always involved in this process, as the appropriated discourse is meant to reflect, to emphasize, to justify and/or to strengthen a certain point of view expressed in the dominant discourse.

According to Fairclough (2003: 39), assumptions are linked to intertextuality. They represent types of implicitness such as presuppositions,

logical implications or entailments and implicatures. Everything that is directly stated in a text appears and functions against the background of what is 'unsaid' but can be inferred or deduced and which can be taken as a given. Intertextuality and assumptions may also be interpreted as claims coming from the author that "what is reported was actually said, that what is assumed has indeed been said or written elsewhere, that one's interlocutors have indeed heard it or read it elsewhere." (Fairclough 2003: 39) Dijk comes in support of Fairclough's explanation by adding the fact that the author assumes that the information presented implicitly is part of "the mental model of (the users of) a text but not of the text itself. That is, implicit meanings are related to underlying beliefs, but are not openly, directly, completely or precisely asserted for various contextual reasons, including the well-known ideological objective to de-emphasize our bad things and their good things." (Dijk 2001: 104) However, as Fairclough mentions, these claims may or may not be founded, as people may willingly or unwillingly (with desired or coincidental outcomes) make such assumptions. I would argue that this is the way most political speeches are built and this is the best technique that can be used to manipulate an audience into believing or sharing a set of values that the author wants them to adhere to.

As mentioned previously, all discourses are ideologically laden. Ideologies are defined in different ways, but all these definitions emphasize the relation between them and power. Almost all definitions of ideology are based on Foucault's view of the relation between discourse and power. In *The Order of Things* (1994), Foucault argues that the conditions of discourse have changed over time, in major and relatively sudden shifts from one period's episteme to another. The basic principle that Foucault applies to his work is a respect for differences. It informs his approach to history, society, politics, psychiatry and economics. It is out of this respect that his methodology arises, and it aims at uncovering the specificity and discontinuity of each discourse. His methodology is based on his view of power as the key element in all social areas, and on his general debunking and refusal of a global and totalizing mode of thought.

Fairclough argues that "ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation." (Fairclough 2003: 9) Along the same lines, Thompson 1984 argues that ideologies are in fact "meaning in the service of power."  Fairclough (2003: 9) makes another important point concerning ideologies, namely that, although they are first and foremost representations, they can be 'enacted' in several ways and 'inculcated' in the identities themselves of the social agents. Moreover,

ideologies are more stable and more resilient than any individual text or collection of texts.

When it comes to the theory of argumentation one of the most important names who tackled the problem is Stephen Toulmin (2003). He identifies the three major parts of an argument as well as three additional, optional parts. The major parts are the following:

• the *claim* which is the main point, the thesis, the idea that guides the argumentation. It is usually stated directly at the beginning of a text or at the end, if a certain effect is expected. However, the claim may also be implicit in the reasoning and organization of the text.

• the *support* which is represented by the reasons offered in support of the claim. It can be presented as evidence, proof, arguments, data or grounds such as facts, statistics, experts' opinions, examples, explanations etc.

• the *warrants* which are the presuppositions and the assumptions which underlie the text. They could be generally held beliefs, customs, cultural values etc. They form the common ground between the author and the intended audience, as they invite the latter to participate unconsciously by supplying part of the argument. Warrants also form the link between the claim and the support.

The additional parts are the following (it needs to be mentioned that not all or any must be used in all arguments):

• the *qualifiers* which are the expressions which tone down an argument

• the *rebuttal* which refers to the fact that when making an argument opposing views must also be taken into consideration and treated fairly. All questions and objections that the audience may have must be answered or the argument will lose strength.

• the *backing* which represents the evidence needed to support the warrant and make it more believable.

**George W. Bush's turns of phrase**

The fragment below is taken from the press conference in which George W. Bush vowed to "Stay the Course" in Iraq after June 30, 2004. He indicated his willingness to commit more U.S. troops and resources and reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Iraq after the planned June 30 transfer of sovereignty to Iraqi leaders. The excerpt presents Bush's conclusions after his speech on the situation in Iraq and on the measures that had to be taken by the American government.

1. "The violence we are seeing in Iraq is familiar. The terrorist who takes hostages, or plants a roadside bomb near Baghdad is serving the same ideology of murder that kills innocent people on trains in Madrid, and

murders children on buses in Jerusalem, and blows up a nightclub in Bali, and cuts the throat of a young reporter for being a Jew.

2. We've seen the same ideology of murder in the killing of 241 Marines in Beirut, the first attack on the World Trade Center, in the destruction of two embassies in Africa, in the attack on the USS Cole, and in the merciless horror inflicted upon thousands of innocent men and women and children on September 11th, 2001.

3. None of these acts is the work of a religion; all are the work of a fanatical, political ideology. The servants of this ideology seek tyranny in the Middle East and beyond. They seek to oppress and persecute women. They seek the death of Jews and Christians, and every Muslim who desires peace over theocratic terror. They seek to intimidate America into panic and retreat, and to set free nations against each other. And they seek weapons of mass destruction, to blackmail and murder on a massive scale.

4. Over the last several decades, we've seen that any concession or retreat on our part will only embolden this enemy and invite more bloodshed. And the enemy has seen, over the last 31 months, that we will no longer live in denial or seek to appease them. For the first time, the civilized world has provided a concerted response to the ideology of terror – a series of powerful, effective blows.

5. The terrorists have lost their shelter of the Taliban and the training camps in Afghanistan. They've lost safe havens in Pakistan. They lost an ally in Baghdad. And Libya has turned its back on terror. They've lost many leaders in an unrelenting international manhunt. And perhaps, most frightening to these men and their movement, the terrorists are seeing the advance of freedom and reform in the greater Middle East.

6. A desperate enemy is also a dangerous enemy, and our work may become more difficult before it is finished. No one can predict all the hazards that lie ahead, or the costs they will bring. Yet, in this conflict, there is no safe alternative to resolute action. The consequences of failure in Iraq would be unthinkable. Every friend of America and Iraq would be betrayed to prison and murder as a new tyranny would arise. Every enemy of America and the world would celebrate, proclaiming our weakness and decadence, and using that victory to recruit a new generation of killers.

7. We will succeed in Iraq. We're carrying out a decision that has already been made and will not change: Iraq will be a free, independent country, and America and the Middle East will be safer because of it. Our coalition has the means and the will to prevail. We serve the cause of liberty, and that is, always and everywhere, a cause worth serving." (Excerpt from the Press Conference of President George W. Bush, April 13, 2004)

I will proceed to a step-by-step analysis of the selected text. I have numbered the paragraphs so that it will be easier to refer to the text. First, I will look at the sentence level to see how syntax and morphology contribute to the building and development of the speech. Then, I will move to the level of the arguments to see how these combine to legitimize the speech. Then, I will analyze the persuasive and ideological components of the speech. Throughout the analysis, I will try to point out how dialogicality and recontextualization interact within this discourse.

The text is constructed on a dichotomy that is present in the lexical and syntactical choices. The first articulation of this opposition is rendered by the contrastive use of the pronouns "we" and "they". "We" refers to the civilized world, the good guys and "they" to the enemy, the terrorists, the bad guys. The conflict is simplified to the maximum. There are no gray areas; just black and white. The underlying message is "if you're not with us, then you're against us." This dichotomy extends to the level of the sentence as well. In the first two paragraphs we are dealing with very long sentences, meant to impress the audience. They enumerate the most important terrorist acts that shocked the world. Their length is meant to impress and to make the list seem never-ending. The enumeration makes the sentence appear long but it does not make it complicated. This way, it can be both impressive in size and easily comprehended.

In paragraph number three, an abrupt change in style takes place. The sentences become short and to the point with no more enumerations, as all sentences are main juxtaposed clauses. These are the charges brought by Bush against terrorists, and, in order to have the maximum impact on the listeners, they are short and to the point. The repetition of the verb "seek" places the focus on the sentence that comes after it not on the verb as such, thus concentrating the message even more. This problem was also analyzed by Dijk who explains that "ideologically biased discourses polarize the representation of us (ingroups) and them (outgroups)." (Dijk 2001: 103) He further explains that there exists in all ideologically-laden discourses a general strategy of emphasizing the positive aspects of one's self-representations and of the negative aspects of the others' representations. (Dijk 2001: 103)

So far in George W. Bush's speech, the arguments have been constructed along the scheme of contrasts: A versus B. It is the civilized world who has to fight against the terrorists whose only aim is to hurt people and to disrupt lives. In paragraph number three, a shift in the argumentative scheme can be noticed. An implication is used: if we do not take action, then they attack us. The apposition "a series of powerful, effective blows" is meant to show that if action is taken then a result can be reached. And this result is

elaborated on in the next paragraph. Again, this paragraph is made up of short main clauses. The use of the Present Perfect is meant to emphasize the fact that the actions that have been taken have led to the present situation and they justify all future measures.

In the sixth paragraph, another change appears. Modals, which have been conspicuously absent so far, begin to make their presence felt because potentialities are discussed. Given facts are no longer presented. Now the speech focuses on what could happen if things do not continue along the same path and terrorism is not dealt with the way as it has been so far. "May" and "can" are used to show possibility and probability. One sentence not containing a modal comes to interrupt the series. And this is exactly the essence of the paragraph. "There is no safe alternative to resolute action." Again this is prescriptive. The problem is described in the paragraphs above. Then the solution that has been implemented so far and the results it has led to is detailed. In the present paragraph, an alternative is proposed, but in gloomy terms. The modal "would" is presented as a marker of the conditional to show that, if the course of action is changed, the following thing would occur: tyranny, persecution, and never-ending terrorism.

In the last paragraph, yet another change in morphology can be noticed. The modal "will" appears, both as a marker of future tense but also of volition. There is a very interesting play upon words. In the same paragraph, we come both across the modal "will" and the noun "will." It is the will of the civilized world to bring terrorists to their knees. And if there is a will there will also be a way. This is the message conveyed by the paragraph since no real solution is put forth to justify this faith in their own force.

When one compares the last two paragraphs, one cannot fail to notice the interaction between the modal "would" and the modal "will." The former shows what may happen if the strategy is changed now; the latter reinforces the fact that the presidency will not allow this to happen and will carry on the plan.

Now, I will look at how these elements contribute to building the discourse at the level of argumentation. The speech is quite well organized as far as Toulmin's theory of argumentation is concerned. Firstly, there are the claim and the support, the empirical data represented by the enumeration of the terrorist attacks. Then, the warrant appears in paragraph two. This general premise is presented in the form of a personal generalization of the terrorists' goal. The first step is the introduction of the backing. This is done smoothly, through the use of the first person plural pronoun "[o]ver the last several decades, we've seen that any concession or retreat on our part will only embolden this enemy and invite more bloodshed." Thus an appeal is made to common belief of what is wrong or right, to moral values, and to everyone's

ability to infer what may happen next in order to justify the claim that is made. Paragraph number five can also count as a backing, but not in the traditional sense. It is meant to back up the claim by means of positive, encouraging examples. This paragraph presents the results the measures taken so far have had on the terrorists. The rebuttal is also present in a diluted form. In paragraph number six, an alternative is presented, an alternative to "resolute action." Straight from the beginning, it is qualified as an unthinkable situation and described in doom-like terms. Finally, paragraph number seven presents the claim, which is that given all the facts presented above, the present course of action is the only really efficient one and it should be kept no matter the risks or unforeseen consequences.

The whole argument is created and unfolded as a persuasive argument and in this respect some more characteristics can be mentioned. The strategic function is more emphasized than the communicative one. The goal of this speech is to gain people's support, to make them follow their leader and trust his decisions. The communicative function is reduced to the minimum. The time for informing has passed and now it is time to take action. This seems to be the message of the speech. Another feature of the text comes to emphasize its strategic function. The discourse is in no way dialogical. It does not even take into consideration the fact that there may appear objections to the line of action it proposes. An apparent attempt to create a dialogue may be noticed in paragraph six, but it is just a smoke screen. The real issue is to prove that the presented argument is the only possible and logical one. All the existential and universal quantifiers in that paragraph only work together to create the impression of an absurd scenario that no rational and moral human being could accept. When a text is not dialogical, it automatically fails to take into account views that may contradict it and it becomes strategic and even manipulating.

But how has this smoothing over of all possible counter arguments taken place? By recontextualizing the terrorist attacks, by taking them out of their original setting, by breaking the cause-effect chain that might have been able to account for them at least to some small extent, all that was left of the original discourse were the negative, revolting aspects. The attacks were re-set and re-interpreted in the context of the present speech. The new function they gain is to reinforce the suggested course of action. They become means to manipulate public opinion. Their initial meaning was to draw the public attention to something. They were a really violent and shocking way to do it but this was their goal. In the context of the present discourse, they lost that function altogether and have become reasons for war.

From the point of view of Critical Discourse Analysis, the present speech can be considered a discourse in itself. It is a way of presenting an

ideology. This ideology is in consonance with the definition provided by Vincent: it is a "body of concepts, values, and symbols" (2010: 5) which claim to be both descriptive and prescriptive for human beings. In this case, the situation described is the one brought forth by terrorist attacks and the prescribed action is war until the enemy is fully defeated. There is no room for an alternative. This is one solution and the members of the civilized world must adhere to it unconditionally. The speech attempts to legitimize a particular interventionist policy that the American government promoted at that time.

By using Critical Discourse Analysis to look at political texts one might discover how exactly manipulation is achieved, how the feeling that the words are charmed appears. And by understanding these mechanisms of argumentation, we might find that we are less vulnerable to manipulation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bakhtin M. M., *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* Austin: University of Texas, 1986.

Dijk van. T., "Multidisciplinary CDA: a plea for diversity" in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications. London, 2001.

Fairclough N., "Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research", in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications. London, 2001.

Fairclough N., *Analysing Discourse*, Routledge, London, 2003.

Gee J.P, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis. Theory and Method*, Routledge. London, second edition, 2005.

Jäger S., "Discourse and knowledge: theoretical and methodological aspects of critical discourse and dispositive analysis", in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications. London, 2001.

Thompson J., *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Cambridge. Polity Press, 1984.

Toulmin S.E., *The Uses of Argument*, Cambridge University Press, third edition, 2003.

Vincent A., *Modern Political Ideologies*, Wiley-Blackwell third edition, 2010.

Wodak R., Meyer M., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications, London, 2001.