A Systemic Functional Analysis of Dictators’ Speech: Toward a Move-based Model

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Abstract

Political genre analysis has for a long time been the focus of attention for many scholars as they supply a rich source of discovery about the nature of language manipulation due to their organized and well-established structure. While politicians may be interested in how to gain support from the public, linguists and critical discourse analysts might be interested in the way such support is enacted by language. Political language rhetoric has been studied from different perspectives and disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, psychology, communication science, and discourse science. Much of the impetus behind such studies has been on divulging the language misuse and the way such misuse has been legalized. An invisible linguistic misconduct can be attributed to the so-called dictators’ speech. Dictators owe their states to words they use to legalize their misdeeds. In order to reveal their disguised intention and disclose their style and structure, this study is an attempt to decipher generic pattern of speeches delivered by some notorious dictators throughout history, Stalin, Gadhafi, and Hitler for instance. Using a Systemic Functional Grammar approach, 20 speeches were rhetorically analyzed which were resulted in a move-based model of the genre. The results reported in this study are accompanied by concrete examples along with a mixed method analysis. The findings can be of use both for applied linguists interested in discourse Analysis and language practionairs interested in the use of critical discourse approaches to the analysis of reading and writing skills.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Grammar; Discourse Analysis; political genre

1. Introduction

In order to win favorite responses, everyone is cautious in choosing appropriate sentence structure and vocabulary. In spite of their unique positions, politicians are no exceptions. Speech-makers have well command of

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language manipulation skills to persuade the public to accept and support related policies. Dictators are those who mostly benefit from this encoding skill effectively to legalize their government. The very word "dictator" comes from the Latin verb "dictate," meaning "to speak." To be a dictator is to be the one who speaks, and the one for whom speaking mostly matters. The dictators speak through the voice of authority and by means of language. People listen to them even when they are wrong, since language plays the role of a vehicle to end justifications. From Critical Discourse Analysis point of view, on the other hand, dictator can be defined as: (1) A person who presume himself to be the superpower; so accept no intellectuality, (2) A person who is scared to let people be free and wanted to take control of their lives, and (3) A person who is doing anything but ruling for the sake of ruling. Therefore, this paper attempts to analyze some of the speeches made by a number of notorious presidents.

According to Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1985), language is a network system that allows its user to make choices for the realization of their intended meaning. In every part of the world, language is (mis)used to serve the dominant ideology present in that particular society. For instance, politicians can give a well-organized public speech to deceive common people. However, a thorough rhetorical move analysis of their written form, can decipher the pattern through which people get hooked to take the preferred mind set. On the other hand, CDA aims at denaturalizing hidden abusive power relations and ideological processes embedded in the text. In addition to uncovering discursive means of mental control, it also plays a crucial role in awakening people who contribute to legitimization of dominance through their ignorance. Accordingly, the findings of the present study will be highly beneficial in revealing future persuasive strategies misused by stakeholders to legalize a government as well as clarifying their true intentions. Moreover, the results of this study can be of use both for applied linguists interested in discourse Analysis and language practitioners interested in the applying critical discourse approaches to the analysis of reading and writing skills. Furthermore, this study might be interesting for material developers of courses intended for politicians in the field of ESP/ EAP. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to provide the required sensitivity to subtle signs of deceptive intent (Chilton, 2005) by discovering the move structure laid in dictators' speeches that are believed to be aimed at justifying their policies. Swales (1990) investigated the moves in research articles. He maintained that when writing articles, researchers follow 4 moves in writing the introduction section of articles; establishing the field, summarizing the previous research, preparing for present study and introducing present research. Later on, he completed the model, and proposed a Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model for research article introductions: establishing the territory, locating a research niche and occupying the niche. Some researchers followed this move-analytic method and tried to find moves applied in different parts in academic genres (cf. Ansary and Babaii, 2004; Prabripoo, 2009) and other non-academic ones (Khany, 2011).

Language is merely a tool that can be manipulated by persons, derived either by good or ill intentions, to persuade other people. In the hands of people like dictators; however, it becomes a very dangerous tool. They can use it to tyrannize them, to ignite conflicts between them, or to gather and galvanise them to fight the dictator's wars, without them knowing it. That is the reason why deciphering their speech to reveal the underlying structure becomes of paramount importance. By way of illustration, Wang (2010) attempted to explore the relationship between language, ideology and power in the US president, Barack Obama’s speech. He analysed Obama's presidential speeches applying Systemic Functional Grammar and Critical Discourse Analysis from modality and transitivity point of view. His research revealed that in addition to material process, relational process, and mental process, modal verbs, and first person pronouns are utilized more in his speeches when talking about his plans to bring about confidence to his target audience. On the other hand, as Americans have religious tendencies internally, Obama's speech has been formed structurally and lexically in a way that it is like the speech of a clergyman. Applying the same theories in order to find out about the steps laid in dictators speeches seems to be appealing as the purpose of this study.

2. Method

Following Halliday and Hasan (1989), the SFG theory of language was used in this study as a method of analyzing the rhetorical structure of political speeches, with the aim of revealing the Generic Structure Potential of political speeches. Based on the Systemic Functional Grammar theory which holds the view that there exists a discernible pattern in behavior, speeches were analyzed to reveal a solid pattern of moves laid within them. In other
words, when the purpose and the target audience are the same, one prototype model can be extracted. Dictators' speeches have the same purpose of injecting dominant ideology, to order, justify and legalize their policy. They are articulated with the same aim of deceiving ordinary people as their target audience. To verify the necessity of their commands and simultaneously establish a good image among common people, dictators make use of certain linguistic skills embedded in their speeches. This study examined the public speeches of some dictators throughout history to discover the solid pattern that is laid semantically within their structure. Public speeches were preferred over interview and other utterances delivered by them, on the logic that these deceptive tools are believed to be ordinary enough to decipher. Interviews, on the contrary, offer them more evasion tools and seem to contain more technicalities. In addition, in order to further the generalizability of the discovered patterns, selected speeches were restricted in neither time nor topic. Therefore, the analyzed corpus included the speeches delivered by Hitler, Stalin, Mussilini, Lenin, Ben Ali, Mugabe, Gadhai, and Mubarak, Sadam Hosein etc.

In order to guarantee intra-reliability, the speeches were analyzed twice within 3-month interval. Furthermore, by having two raters analyzing the speeches, the inter-rater reliability was taken care of.

Since dictators manipulate language to justify their commands; the soul of authority is present within the whole body of their speeches, for instance, by means of mottos or carefully selected structure and vocabulary. By way of illustration, Hitler, one of the belligerent and patriotic notorious characters throughout history, chooses his lexis accordingly (e.g. my comrades, my countrymen) to inject his ideology in a hidden fold. Speechmakers design speech texts meticulously in a way that moves and sub moves change very gently and smoothly so that there remains a slight degree of overlap between two adjacent moves. In the next section, the result of the study is briefly presented.

3. Results

The following table illustrates the rhetorical moves extracted from the corpus of the study. Following the table, each move is elaborated on with some concrete examples. In so doing along with SFG features, other techniques such as CDA are also drawn upon.

| Move | Sub-move |
|------|----------|
| 1) Highlight commonality | M1S1) Religious values  
M1S2) Subjective narration of history  
M1S3) Patriotic values |
| 2) Justify current policy | M2S1) Depicting evil picture of foreign/internal enemies (mainly presumed)  
M2S3) Present current policy as the best  
M2S3) Solutions for current problems |
| 3) State orders | M3S1) Euphemizing  
M3S2) Wish for further success |

Note: M: move, S: sub-move

3.1. Highlight commonality (history, religion, culture, and patriotism)

This move is used by the dictator to categorize himself under the category of common people so that they would easily accept his superiority and believe him to be truly one of them. Sub moves are also interchangeable and repeatable which might range from one whole paragraph to one single word:

E.g. Omar Al-Bashir says *"our homeland"* to establish patriotic commonality however, Gaddafi, who utilizes
religion and culture to legalize his government, specifies a special place for some holy verses in his speech:

"Peace Be Upon Muhammad" → religion
"Americans have no tribe, no background" → culture

As he is truly aware of the fact that his people have high potential to absorb religious prejudice, and value people according to their tribes, Gaddafi tries to downgrade his enemies in people's view by cultural means. While Hitler needs to pull people to the war fronts so he tries to motivate a sense of loyalty within the soul of society.

By subjective narration of history on the other hand, they attempt to establish homogeneity and eradicate the social distance to raise affection and patriotic sense. Karimov, on the other hand, tried to manipulate history to his own favour by the following phrase:

"In the intervening period we have experienced and profoundly discovered the hard-faced truth in our own case, that no nation, no country in the world were given easy way to achieve independence, the very possibility to breathe freely, to build their own destiny and future with own hands."

Recognizing people as belonging to a certain group, or as certain members of society, and the way this admission will influence and thus change the way they deal with each other are the foundation of categorization theory. Van Leeuwen (1996) maintains that social actors are influenced by the policies of those big stakeholders who decide to include (insider) or exclude (outsider) minorities with their power. Later, Van Dijk called this phenomenon polarization, or in-group (US) and out-groups (THEM) categorization.

3.2. Justify current policy

In order to disguise illegality of their position, dictators are in crucial need of verifying their policy through whatever way possible, namely depicting evil picture of foreign/internal enemies (mainly presumed) and/or guiding opponents toward desired path or otherwise threaten them (optional) and picturing the present current policy as the best and/or the solution for current problems (optional). Gaddafi, for example, has stated the following paragraph as a means to devalue his opponents and solidify his position.

"Open the channel of Libya in Down Street, Open Libya channel if your nerves hold of what you will see open Libya channel if you hold, you and Berlusconi, Sarkozy and Cameron and others make sure now you are ere in the sea And you chasing a mirage And you must be dreaming."

Elsewhere in his speech, the dictator made an attempt to threat his opponents by these sentences:

"Today, I am addressing you ten months after the outbreak of the unfortunate events which befell the country imposing new circumstances on the arena. For all of us, these conditions represent a serious test of our national commitment, and we cannot pass this test except by our continuous work and honest intents based on our faith in God, the genuine character of our people, and its solid nature which has been polished over the ages and made brighter and more robust. Although those events have made us pay, until now, heavy prices which made my heart bleed, as it made the heart of every human bleed."

In order to depict a good image among people, Hitler, on the other hand, declares an obvious paradoxical statement, meaning I am not the cause of war and just exposed to defending. He utters this statement:

"I, on the other hand, have been striving for two decades, with a minimum of intervention and without destroying our production, to arrive at a new socialist order in Germany, one that not only eliminates unemployment but also permits the productive worker to receive an ever greater share of the fruits of his labor. The achievements of this policy of national economic and social reconstruction -- which strove for a true national community by overcoming rank and class divisions -- are unique in today's world."
Kim Jung, however, utilized the following language to present his policy as the best:

*Today, under the leadership of his respected Excellency President Dmitri Anatolyevich Medvedev, the Russian government and people are obtaining many successes in work to reinforce the country's national defence capabilities, modernize the economy, and achieve social and political stability, and they are actively working to oppose coercion and tyranny and establish a fair international order.*

Public speech is primarily motivated by the need to justify an activity and obtain social legitimization. Following theories are considered to be manifestations of the obtained move structure aimed at reality manufacturing.

Regarding media as a state organization, Thompson (1990) has outlined a model for realization of ideology domination through language functions:

- **Legitimation**: Unequal power relationships are created and maintained by being represented as legitimate and as being in ‘everybody’s’ interest.
- **Dissimulation**: This occurs where relations of domination (such as gender inequality) are denied, hidden or obscured.
- **Unification Hegemonic or dominant ideology unifies members of a society into a collective entity usually in opposition to a real or imagined ‘enemy’. This serves to further deflect attention away from the unequal power relationships between the rulers and the ruled.
- **Fragmentation Hegemony** is achieved and maintained through dividing or fragmenting the potential opposition and thus reducing or removing the perceived ‘threat’ they might otherwise pose. In short, the powerful adopt a ‘divide and rule’ approach.
- **Reification**: Unequal social structures are represented as being ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable’. Relations of domination are represented as if they were divorced from history and were without specific economic and political contexts.

Later, Wodak and Weiss (2005; 131) proposed three forms of legitimizing the political construction of the EU:

*Legitimization through idea (identity, history, culture), Legitimization through procedure (participation, democracy, efficiency), And Legitimization through "standardization" (of humanitarism, of social standards, economic standards).*

On the other hand, exploration of argument structure is based on the framework developed by Stephen Toulmin in The Uses of Argument (1958). Toulmin’s goal was to understand formal developing logics, human reasoning and notion of logical form based on the analysis of reasoning practice. Taking the view that argumentation is a primary site of practical human reasoning; he offered a scheme for analysing the logical microstructure of everyday arguments:

- **Data**: The facts or evidence used to prove the argument
- **Claim**: The statement being argued (a thesis)
- **Warrants**: The general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data.
- **Qualifiers**: Statements that limit the strength of the argument or statements that propose the conditions under which the argument is true.
- **Rebuttals**: Counter-arguments or statements indicating circumstances when the general argument does not hold true.
- **Backing**: Statements that serve to support the warrants (i.e., arguments that don't necessarily prove the main point being argued, but which do prove the warrants are true.)

Reisil and Wodak (2000) suggest that *topoi* are argumentation strategies in representational discourse. Topoi are
defined as content-related warrants or conclusion rules to connect the argument with the conclusion. Defining topoi as "common-sense reasoning typical for specific issues" (97) Van Dijk (2000) declares that the following list can provide powerful framework for deciphering persuasive nature of arguments:

- Topos of advantage/ usefulness.
- Topos of danger/ threat.
- Topos of definition/ name-interpretation.
- Topos of burdening/ weighting down.
- Topos of law/ right.
- Topos of culture.
- Topos of abuse.
- Topos of authority.
- Topos of finance.
- Topos of equality.
- Topos of human rights.
- Topos of responsibility.

Van Dijk also believes that his theory of ideological square is a useful asset for determining guilty language of discrimination. "Positive self-presentation" and "Negative other-presentation" are overall strategies that are usually present in every representative discourse accompanied by euphemistic and derogatory words.

### 3.3. State orders

Euphemizing: one of the main exigencies of being a dictator is being well-familiar with lexicology and euphemization (the process of disguising offensive side of something and displaying it normal or even as value). By way of illustration, the third move (state orders) can be misinterpreted through euphemized words and be valued rather than hated. For instance, in order to disguise the threat to his government Stalin repeated the phrase of "danger over our country" several times to claim the danger over the country and make people to support his state.

"What is required to put an end to the danger hovering over our country, and what measures must be taken to smash the enemy? Above all, it is essential that our people, the Soviet people, should understand the full immensity of the danger that threatens our country and should abandon all complacency, all heedlessness, all those moods of peaceful constructive work which were so natural before the war, but which are fatal today when war has fundamentally changed everything."

Likewise, Mubarak uttered the following sentences to euphemize his command and quell the opponents:

"Egypt's safety and stability. The enemy is cruel and implacable. He is out to seize our lands, watered with our sweat, to seize our grain and oil secured by our labor. He is out to restore the rule of landlords, to restore Tsarism, to destroy national culture and the national state existence of the Russians, Ukrainians, Byelo-Russians, Lithuanians, Letts, Esthonians, Uzbeks, Tatars, Moldavians, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaidzhanians and the other free people of the Soviet Union, to Germanize them, to convert them into the slaves of German princes and barons"

Mussilini also, to pull people to death in war front uses these words:

"People of Italy! Rush to arms and show your tenacity, your courage, your valour!"

As the closing move, Wishing for further success has been observed without exception throughout the analyzed corpus. Frank Bainimarama: "a journey to build a better Fiji for all"

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