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A Discursive Analysis of the U.S. President's Comments
on the Iranian Nuclear Issue (2005 – 2008)

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Dedicated to

*Late Professor Hesabi, who
worked and suffered all his life for
the progress of our homeland,
J.R.A.N.*

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to seek what linguistic features (syntactic and semantic) George W. Bush as the U.S. president had employed to state his views and attitudes concerning Iran's nuclear program and how he was going to manipulate the public minds about the perils of Iran's nuclear activities. To do so, 20 excerpts of his comments were extracted randomly from 20 of his political speeches and press conferences between 2005 and 2008. To analyze his comments, the researcher adopted the Hallidayan model as his framework of analysis. The analysis focused on the linguistic choices within the three functions or meanings of Hallidayan model of language. Therefore, the linguistic choices chosen to be analyzed in President Bush's comments regarding Iran's nuclear issue were: *active and passive voices*, *nominalization* and *emotive language* within ideational meaning, *modality* within interpersonal meaning and *thematization* within textual meaning. After the analysis, the researcher came to this conclusion that George W. Bush had utilized the above-mentioned linguistic features manipulatively. He had employed these linguistic strategies in his interests and against the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Key words: *discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, ideology, linguistic manipulation, Hallidayan model of language.*

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List of Abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
EU3	European Union states including: England, France and Germany
HEU	highly enriched uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
SFL	Systematic Functional Grammar
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The art of speech is a vital part of a politician's role in announcing policy and persuading people to agree with it (Atkinson, 1984, cited in Walker, 2004). In Atkinson's words, "an ability to speak effectively in public is one of the oldest and most powerful weapons in the armory of professional politicians" (ibid., p. 3). Therefore, speech plays a very important role in the arena of politics because those in power show their ambitions and views first of all in their speeches and then in their actions. Politicians use language as a strong means to prepare the ground for their interests. Fowler (1979) believes that our words are never neutral, they carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak or write (cited in Taiwo, 1994). Consequently, analysis of political speeches can be of great significance, since politicians can play a key role in pushing societies towards war or peace through their speeches concerning internal and international affairs.

According to Walker (2004), the term 'political speech' includes a large quantity of forms ranging from negotiations and formal meetings to briefings, interviews, press conferences and speeches. Political speeches are a part of politics and are therefore historically and culturally determined. Each speech has a certain function to fulfill, depending upon the political activity at hand. Thus, it is highly important for researchers to get familiar with the motives, objectives and attitudes behind each speech. It seems one of the best ways to discover statesmen's attitudes, beliefs and objectives is through careful examination of their political speeches and comments. As Kress (1983) states, "Ideologies find their clearest articulation in language. Hence, a powerful way of examining ideological structure is through the examination of language"(cited in van Dijk, 1985, p. 29). In other words, ideologies, attitudes and feelings are expressed

through language (written or spoken) and by analyzing speeches we can figure out the speaker's thoughts and emotions about or towards an event or phenomenon.

The investigation into politicians' remarks and comments becomes more essential when we find out that their ideologies and intentions are not always stated clearly and explicitly. As van Dijk (1993) contends, the text (written or spoken) is like "an iceberg of information," and it is only the "tip" which is really expressed in words and sentences. Therefore, he concludes that the analysis of the implicitness is very helpful in the study of the underlying ideologies. Reah (1998) states that when language is used explicitly, it is a powerful tool and probably the most powerful when it is used implicitly. As he puts it, "it is easy to resist a particular viewpoint or ideology when you know it is being presented to you, but not so easy to resist when the viewpoint or ideology is concealed" (cited in Nordlund, 2003, p. 4). And this is the main objective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to discover and shed light on the hidden part of discourse.

According to Nordlund (2003), the two main domains in society which are using language manipulatively are probably politics and journalism. Fairclough (1989, p. 3) argues that "politics is not just conducted through language, but much of politics is language". In an essay entitled "Politics and the English Language", George Orwell also comments that "language can control, manipulate and corrupt thought" (cited in Wales, 2004, p. 2). In the domain of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this use of language is termed "linguistic manipulation". According to van Dijk (2006, p. 360) "manipulation implies the exercise of a form of illegitimate influence by means of discourse: manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator and against the best interests of the manipulated". In Fairclough's (1989) words,

"linguistic manipulation is the conscious use of language in a devious way to control the others" (p. 53). Therefore, it is instrumental to know how politicians employ language and its potentials to legitimize their policies and actions and how they manipulate minds linguistically to realize their political interests.

According to the French Marxist theorist, Louis Althusser (cited in van Dijk, 1985), the dominant group maintains its power through two apparatuses: a) repressive state apparatuses, e.g., the armed forces, the police; and b) ideological state apparatuses, such as church, the law, education and mass media. Political comments and remarks are placed in the second category. If we take a look at the political history of the United States and its role at the international community after World War II, we will notice that she has taken advantage of the above-mentioned apparatuses to maintain and reproduce her hegemony across the globe. The United States has employed these two strategies to remove or seclude her rivals throughout the world. U.S. is still widely affecting global affairs. Thus, putting the speeches and comments of American politicians and leaders under the CDA microscope sounds justified. This is why the researcher has chosen a set of President Bush's remarks regarding Iran's nuclear program. The focus of the study will be on the examination of Bush's linguistic manipulation of syntactic and semantic features which may unveil his attitudes and opinions towards a very controversial issue -- that is, Iran's nuclear activities.

1.2 Statement of the problem

There is wide agreement on the importance of language in politics. In accordance with this fundamental assumption, many authors have pointed out the close relationship

between language and politics. For instance, Hall (1972) argues that "the basic element of politics is, quite simply, talk" (p. 51, cited in Gelabert, 2004). Similarly, Lakoff, claims that; "language drives politics and determines the success of political machinations" (p. 51, *ibid.*). Thus, we cannot separate language from politics because politics is conducted through language. In the arena of politics, it is mainly done through language and linguistic techniques to direct people's emotions and ideas in a specific direction (Victoria, 2002). Consequently, politicians adhere to language power to manipulate the opinions and emotions of people in a way that is in harmony with their interests and goals. The interesting point is that many people do not even realize they are being manipulated (*ibid.*). Why is it so? Maybe it is so because most of the people are not aware of the power and role of linguistic features (semantic and syntactic) in the process of mind manipulation.

The linguistic analysis of political texts and speeches is the search into politicians' words and syntactic structures to see what they are trying to accomplish: how they are attempting to influence people to think and act in a specific way. Therefore, it sounds necessary to investigate political discourses for better understanding and interpretation of the aims and intentions of politicians. This study deconstructs an array of speeches and comments delivered by President Bush on Iran's nuclear issue. The objective is to uncover Bush's attitudes and views hidden in his remarks through the investigation of his linguistic choices both at the level of syntax and semantics to see how George W. Bush is attempting linguistically to influence people to think in a specific way regarding Iran's nuclear activities.

1.3 Significance of the study

Due to the significance of political speeches and especially those delivered by the leaders of powerful countries, there seems to be an urgent need to analyze these comments and speeches for better understanding and interpretation of the aims and intentions of politicians and statesmen. As we know, since President Bush has taken office, he has played a pivotal role in pushing the globe towards war and insecurity. He is still striving to fabricate excuses to harm those states which are considered as barriers in his way to establish and maintain U.S. hegemony and leadership all over the world. In his televised State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002 George W. Bush promised an epoch of Terror War, expanding the Bush doctrine to not only go after terrorists and those who harbor terrorist groups but to include those countries making weapons of mass destruction (WMD). He also claimed that Iraq, Iran, and North Korea constituted “an axis of evil”, aiming to threaten the peace of the world. Bush put the world’s most dangerous regimes on notice that he was planning to escalate the war on terror (Kellner, 2004).

In the strategic region of the Mideast, Iran, as the forerunner of the opposition, has been harming America’s interests in the region since the Islamic revolution. In the words of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (2001), “There are few nations in the world with which the United States has less reason to quarrel or more compatible interests than Iran” (p.197, cited in Izadi & Saghaye-Biria , 2007). American politicians in general and President Bush in particular are doing their best to impose more pressure politically and economically on the Islamic Republic in retaliation. To do so, Bush's administration has found Iran’s nuclear activities a good pretext to convince the public opinions and international community that the nuclear program of Iran is a real threat to world’s peace

and security. And that is why the United States has included Iran in the black list of the so-called “axis of evil” group. In most of his comments and speeches, George W. Bush refers to Iran’s nuclear policies so as to put Iran’s menace in the international spotlight. Therefore, it sounds important to have a profound analysis of Bush’s comments on Iran’s nuclear program to see how he employs linguistic structures to distort the reality of Iran’s nuclear activities in a way that is in harmony with the interests of the United States and how he manipulates public opinions to get their support in the forthcoming actions against Iran. Thus, the present investigation aims at analyzing Bush’s comments concerning Iran’s nuclear issue to see how he manipulates language syntactically and semantically to magnify the perils of Iran’s nuclear activities and thereby demonstrates his attitudes and reactions towards Iran’s nuclear policies at linguistic level.

1.4 Research questions:

The two questions this study has sought to address were:

- 1) What linguistic features (syntactic and semantic) are employed by U.S. president to state his views and attitudes concerning Iran’s nuclear program?
- 2) Does George W. Bush use specific linguistic features to manipulate the public minds about the perils of Iran’s nuclear activities?

1.5 Definition of key terms

1.5.1 Discourse

The *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* (2002) defines *discourse* as "a general term for examples of language use, i.e., language which has been produced as the result of an act of communication"(p.160). For Fairclough (1989, p. 17) *discourse* is

"language as social practice". Fairclough (1995, p. 7) has also defined *discourse* as "use of language seen as a form of social practice".

1.5.2 Discourse Analysis

According to Brown and Yule (1983) discourse analysis is:

The study of continuous stretches of language longer than a single sentence; it especially investigates the organization of such general options as conversations, arguments, narratives, jokes, and speeches, looking out in particular for linguistic features which identify the structure of the discourse (discourse markers), such as: *I mean to say* or *well, anyway*. The term has been used to apply to both spoken and written language, but some authors restrict it to speech, and deal with the structural organization of writing under the heading of text. Furthermore, the term discourse analysis is used synonymously with *text analysis*, with a particular interest in well-formedness (coherence and cohesion) and deductive rules e.g. rules of speech acts (p. 43).

1.5.3 Ideology

According to *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2002) ideology is defined as "a set of concepts, doctrines and beliefs that forms the basis of a political, educational or economic system"(p. 245). Hodge and Kress (1993) define ideology "as a body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view"(p.18).

1.5.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

According to *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2002) it is:

A form of Discourse Analysis that takes a critical stance towards how language is used and analyzes text and other discourse types in order to identify the ideology and values underlying them. It seeks to reveal the interests and power relations in any institutional and socio-historical context through analyzing the ways that people use language (p.133).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE

RELATED LITERATURE