



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Obama's Some Selected Inaugural Tweets on Twitter in the 20th January 2009

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Abstract

A Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is a socio-politically oriented approach which deals with language in terms of the social relations through the written texts and spoken talks. Politically, CDA is seen as a crucial factor which helps analysing the covert and overt ideologies presented by politicians' statement. Accordingly, the current study tries to shed some light on some selected inaugural tweets on Twitter by the 44th American President Barack Hussein Obama. The analysis, carried out in this study, is basically based on the assumptions of CDA viewed by Norman Fairclough (1995) who states that "ideologies reside in texts and it is not possible to read off these ideologies from texts and these texts are open to diverse interpretations". In this case, an analysis should critically be presented in order to read off the ideologies resided in texts and talks. Therefore, the followed CDA in this study is ideologically oriented in order to reveal the persuasive strategies enshrined in Obama's inaugural tweets on Twitter.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Politics; Obama's Tweets.



1. Introduction

CDA is a socio-politically oriented approach which views language as a system of social behaviour. CDA analyses written as well as spoken texts in social institutions taking into account the social relations and distance between the communicants. Scholars of CDA believe that the linguistic behaviour and the social behaviour are two complementary poles of discourse. These two poles examine the modality of power relations by language use. Politically, language can be formulated in a specific way to bridge the social distance between communicants by using certain ideological persuasive strategies. However, this study tries to analyse ideologically the inaugural tweets of the 44th American President Barack Hussein Obama in the 20th January 2009 adopting Norman Fairclough's (1995: 97) assumptions "on discourse and power, and discourse and hegemony". This study tries to relate the linguistic behaviour to the social one. Thus, the analysis presented in this study interprets the societal power relations to the audience through the linguistic use on the light of CDA. In view of that, Batstone (1995: 199) claims that CDA aims at showing how talks and texts are built up. Having known how talks and texts are built up reveals how certain points of view are expressed both "delicately and covertly, because they are covert and elusive of direct challenge", facilitating what Lakoff (2002: 57) calls the "retreat into mystification and impersonality".

Since the analysis of Obama's selected tweets is based on Norman Fairclough's (1995) assumptions of CDA, there will be three dimensions of analysis. Fairclough (1995: 15) states that these three dimensions aim at mapping "three separate forms of analysis onto one another". These three forms have complementary roles with one another. The first form analyses spoken and written talks and texts in language. The second form analyses "processes of text production and consumption". The third form analyses the "discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice". In order to work

properly, these forms must find field to work on. Accordingly, politics is seen as the best rich ground to hunt analyses from as far as CDA is concerned. Politics is the rich ground where equality vs. inequality become obscure clearly. Politics is the rich ground where racism vs. patriotism are shown in the behaviour of politicians. Politics is the rich ground where treason vs. sincerity are reflected in the course of every four years. Accordingly, CDA is regarded the key interpretive tool which helps revealing the intentions laid beyond all the above political statements. It also acquaints the public with politicians' coded talks and texts even if what is mentioned is not spoken or written verbatim.

This study is limited to analyse ten of the inaugural tweets delivered by the 44th American President Barack Hussein Obama on the 20th January 2009. It deals only with the Standard English tweets posted on Twitter. The study analyses these tweets in terms of the ideological CDA. It, therefore, focuses only on the ideological aspect and excludes any other analytical aspects. The study depends in its analysis upon the assumptions of Norman Fairclough (1995) of CDA. It, therefore, excludes any other approaches of analysis. Besides, the study historically views CDA with regard to the framework proposed by Norman Fairclough (1995). It, therefore, excludes any other historical backgrounds of CDA.

However, the current study consists of five sections. The first section is presented as an introduction to the study. Section two historically reviews CDA. In section three, Obama's most important inaugural tweets are quoted directly in order to analyse them in terms of CDA. The ideological analysis applies a diachronic method in order to compare Obama's tweets with one of the American Presidents before him. Section four gives an ideological CDA of the tweets selected. Section five is devoted to the main concluding remarks arrived at throughout this study.



2. Critical Discourse Analysis: Historical Review

CDA dates near back in history to the 1970s. The founder of this interdisciplinary linguistic approach is, as Roffee (2014: 14) states, Norman Fairclough at Lancaster School of linguistics in which he was the most prominent figure of critical linguistics. Fowler et al (1979: 30-33) state that CDA is originally derived from critical linguistics in order to analyse the societal power relations which are build up upon certain spoken talks and written texts in the communities and social institutions. They add that CDA is concerned with race, class, politics, power, ideology, dominance, and so forth. Besides, Roffee (2016: 50) mentions that most of the statements, especially political statements, were analysed from different perspectives. Therefore, the aim of this CDA was to analyse these statements on the basis of certain logical and scientific evidences in order to close the distance among those different perspectives. Thus, CDA studies the tactic in which politics, ideology, power are enacted through the spoken talks and the written texts within the circle of the socio-political context.

However, the critical linguistic theory was not the only stilt for founding CDA. Instead, van Dijk (1998: 57) states that the CDA was authentically resulted from the contributions made by the well-known Marxist figure Karl Marx. Karl Marx based CDA mainly on social theory to investigate the societal power relations and the ideologies included in discourse. As a result, language becomes a social medium between the public and the other officials for analysing the ideological intentions of the spoken talks and the written texts. Wodak and Meyer (2001: 40) maintain that the ideological analysis forms the infrastructure of the groups' social needs. Hence, CDA is viewed as an interdisciplinary approach of dialogue which accounts for the need of the public and the need-based promises of the officials. Therefore, CDA turns into a tool of control for the public to dissipate any future bad intentions and avoid any other political misunderstandings.

To begin with the core this study, Fairclough published three books: *Language and Power* (1989), *Discourse and Social Change* (1992) and *Media Discourse* (1994). Fairclough first focused on 'Textual Oriented Discourse Analysis (henceforth TODA). As soon as published his books, Fairclough's focus became engaged in the relation between language and society. The relation between language and society represents the heart of M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL). Fairclough (1999: 15) writes that the basis of SFL is formed by the personal and social needs, while the basis of CDA is formed by the language practice which establishes the personal and social relations. Having mentioned that, CDA takes part with other approaches of linguistics, such as critical linguistics. However, the difference between CDA and critical linguistics is that the commitments of the former with the social analysis are greater than the commitments of the latter.

Regarding its edifice, Fowler (1997: 421) states that CDA consists of "a three-dimensional framework, where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of spoken or written language texts, analysis of discourse practice processes of text production, distribution and consumption and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice". David et al (2006: 90) maintains that "the first dimension is textual, and the analysis employs functional linguistic methodologies. The second dimension examines discourses as communicators of ideology, and makes important use of the methods of genre, heteroglossia and intertextuality. The third dimension is concerned with social and institutional relations and practices and it has particular commitment to the critique of hegemonic practices". Fairclough (2001: 10) claims that if these three dimensions are applied entirely in the analysis, CDA "would offer far greater completeness of analytic statement than comparable models such as critical linguistics" (cf. Alvesson and Dan, 2000: 75).



3. Obama's Inaugural Tweets⁽¹⁾: 20th January 2009

In this section, ten of Obama's vital inaugural tweets are listed. It is worth mentioning that the tweets dealt with are selected as being rich ground to hunt from, first regarding CDA, and, second, regarding the influence of such tweets on the intrasocietal relations among the public on one hand, and the interrelations between the American president and public on the other hand. The tweets selected can be represented into the following points:

1. "My fellow citizens: I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust which you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors".
2. "That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age".
3. "Today, I say to you that the challenges we face are real, they are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America: They will be met".
4. "For us, they fought and died in places Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sahn".
5. "What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long, no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works, whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where

(1) The tweets listed can be retrieved on: twitter.com/potus. This page is official. It is changing with every new USA president. Now, it is Trump's as being the new president of USA.



the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end".

6. "Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is supreme".
7. "The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on the ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart – not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good".
8. "Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with the sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use. Our security emanates from the justness of our cause; the force of our example; the tempering qualities of humility and restraint. We are the keepers of this legacy, guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort even greater cooperation and understanding between nations".
9. "For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth. And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace. To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict or blame their society's ills on the West, know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy".



10. "To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders, nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it".

4. Data Analysis

In this section, an ideological analysis of the tweets listed above is presented. The analysis, carried out in this section, is based on the assumptions of Fairclough (1995) in CDA. Besides, the current analysis depends on a linguistic diachronic method which will be applied in order to compare the inaugural tweets of Obama with the 43rd President George Walker Bush. In order to convey full interpretation, the analysis of some tweets above will be put together so as not to miss the message that Obama wanted to deliver.

To begin with, a closer look at the opening lines of Obama's first tweet reveals an evident shift from Bush's style "my fellow Americans". The form of this tweet tells that Obama's speech is very inclusive representing an umbrella under which all the other nationalities and races can live safe. Thus, this style differs from Bush's style which is very exclusive planting the hatred among the members of different races, ethnics, nationalities, religions, and so forth. Accordingly, one can say that the heart core of Obama's concern is the American citizen irrespective of the different belongingness. As a result, Obama's style states that citizenry is the belief which founds the infrastructure of the American society.

The second tweet shows that not only does Obama convict the public "greed and irresponsibility" public in his comment on the influences of the "financial crisis" of the world, but he condemns the "collective failure" caused

by the working systems. Therefore he tells that the former is prosecutable, whereas the latter is not. As a result, the message delivered urges the working systems to make necessary institutional reformation for the delinquency. Besides, Obama refers to war, yet makes no comment on war against terrorism. He also prefers using the preponderant possessive pronoun "our" in order to convey the unity of the American public at the time of national peril.

The deixis "today" in tweet 3 represents an air of a fresh start after a strong obstinate account full of "far-reaching network of violence and hatred". In this tweet, Obama tells the Americans that "today" you are not what you were. "Today", you are stronger than before. Therefore, you can overcome the challenges, because you are Americans. For Obama, being American means smashing the challenging challenges in America.

In tweet 4 Obama gives a piece of the American grand narrative that can be regarded as a regular practice of an official sermon as such. Raising America's sacrifices historically, Obama reorients war against Vietnam, a step where he equalizes the Independence Revolutionary with the war against Vietnam in order to justify the former and legalise the latter. In this statement, Obama wants to say that Peace is indispensable, but War keeps America victorious forever.

The tweets 5-6 show Obama's pragmatism throughout his campaign. From an ideological perspective, Obama reveals the lack of the ideological viewpoints which are concerned with the role of government during the financial crises in the world. As a turning point, Obama departs from what Bush believes in as "good and evil" dichotomy. Therefore, unless this ideology aims at achieving the goals of his upcoming government, Obama reinforces his determination of not reliance on any ideology as such.

Tweet 7 reveals Obama's remarkable insistence on the importance of economy and states his logical attitude to the means of distributing the



prosperity equally, criticising republican's concept of the free market in the administration of governments. Therefore, Obama shapes his own policy in administrating the economy without referring to the free market.

Tweet 8 explains that the American grand narrative is focused on and put on the unique superiority of the USA great republic, that is devoting the power for the purposes of justice and goodness. The message beyond Obama's sermon is that the justice of the republic in America had to be renewed and such code of justice had to be mutated into a multi-perceptual conception of the international cooperation among the nations of the world as a whole. For him, justice can be looked at as a cornerstone of the ideological principle nourished by the emphasis of Obama's sermon.

Tweet 9 above is considered as an axis where the dreams of the various public can be put upon. In this tweet, Obama, raises the existence of "nonbelievers" in America: a tweet by which Obama shakes the Christians' prerogative for a long time in ruling United States of America in spite of invoking God in his sermon that can be ascribed to what Obama believes in. Besides, Obama talks to the Muslims in the world: a case that generates a different communal self from a worldwide Muslim population who may have experienced marginalization, or may have been stereotyped and depersonalised due to their religious affiliations and ethnic origins in their countries of residence. This tweet reveals Obama's new orientation towards a liberal American society instead of a traditional one. This is orientation is clearly identified in Obama's message to the Muslims all over the word. As a result, another ideological shift is presented in Obama's speech from the traditional administration of the republican's government.

Tweet 10 reveal an additional shift in Obama's ideological attitude towards his new administration of the American government. The message which Obama instigates to is that the "indifference to the suffering" must be ended and put behind the Americans' back. His message also urges the rich people

to be more cautious in their expenses. In view of that, Obama wants to tell the poor nations that the president of the great USA walks hand in hand together with the poor.

5. Conclusion

This study analyses ten of the tweets by the 44th President of the United States of America Barack Hussein Obama.

This study is based on Norman Fairclough's (1995) CDA theory. This theory deals with the ideology residing in text depending on a property of two main poles: structures and events. In this study, Fairclough's concept: "meanings are produced through interpretations" has been used. The study tries to decode the conceivable interpretations of various tweets of Obama. Therefore, it attempts to specify the ideological agenda of Obama's perspectives in his tweets. Besides, the study discusses Obama's selected tweets depending on a linguistic diachronic method of the outgoing administration of George Walker Bush. On the basis of the analysis above, the conclusions arrived at can be summed up into the following points:

1. Obama shows what the government has achieved, what they are doing and what they will do. One can also observe clearly that most of Obama's tweets seek to:
 - i. Remind the Americans about the bad administration of the previous governments.
 - ii. Reassure them about the new elected president and his government administration for the next coming four years.
 - iii. Awaken the Americans' confidence in themselves.
2. The analyses of the selected data show that the major concepts Obama urges the American society to comply with are:
 - i. The equality between all the members of the American society in spite of their different belongingness.



- ii. The departure from the traditional racist behaviour towards a more liberal superiority.
3. The analyses of the selected data show that Obama's major focus is on certain concepts mentioned repeatedly in his tweets, such as "nation", "new", "America" and "our" as a preponderant pronoun reflecting Obama's inclusiveness and revealing Bush's exclusiveness.
4. The message, which Obama wants to deliver, is centered on the inspiring verse: "strength from our heroic past".
5. The main theme of the quotation in (4) above is reflected in Obama's insistent instigation for reviving the past of the great America regardless of the financial crisis and the international terrorism.



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