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### Panjab university

**Department of english**

**SYNOPSIS**:

**Discourse Analysis of the Written Electoral Materials from the 7th Presidential Election in Iran**

*Supervisor*

#### *Co-Supervisor*

*By*

##### ABSTRACT

The term discourse analysis has come to be used with a wide range of meaning which cover a wide range of activities. There are many existing approaches to the study of language. One of them which this study is based upon, is critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach grew out of work in different disciplines in the 1960s and early 1970s, including linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology and sociology. CDA analyses social interactions in a way which focuses upon their linguistic elements, and which sets out to show up their generally hidden determinants in the system of social relationships, as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system. Since CDA is not a specific direction of research, it does not have a unitary theoretical framework. Therefore, in this research project, in order to overcome the potential weaknesses of any single method, a critical linguistic analysis will be adopted from some of the most influential linguists in the field to analyse the formal linguistic features of the written electoral materials from the 7th presidential election in Iran, to explain discourse structures in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure, and to focus on the ways discourse structures enact, conform, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of power and ideology in society.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

1. To help correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power in Iran.
2. To refer to the order of discourse of the society as a whole, which structures the orders of discourse of the various social institutions in a particular way.
3. To show that orders of discourse are ideologically harmonized internally or (at the societal level) with each other.
4. To stress both the determination of discourse by social structure, and the effects of discourse upon society through its reproduction of social structures.
5. To examine the relationship between discourse and sociocultural change.

So this research project aims to answer the following questions:

1. What were the formal textual features of the conservatives’ and reformists’ discourses at the 7th presidential election?
2. How did their discourses and strategies change and why?
3. What were the ideologies behind the discourse of each group?
4. What was the relationship between language of each party and power?

**SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

There are many existing approaches to the study of language (e.g. linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive psychology, etc.) but while each of them has something to contribute to critical language study, they all have major limitations from a critical point of view.

The critical discourse analysis upon which this study is based, does not adhere to any particular approach. It is similar to a qualitative research method in that it deals with non-numerical data and can only be validated by other researchers examining the same data. However, its similarity can only be detected to a certain point because a qualitative research method is either synthetic or holistic, whereas critical linguistics is analytic in nature. A qualitative method on content analysis is rejected on the grounds of its inability to get beneath the textual surface where the crucial meanings lie. So in this research a critical linguistic analysis will be adopted from some of the most influential linguists in the field (in order to overcome the potential weaknesses of any single method) including Fairclaough (1989, 1992, 1995), Fowler (1991) and van Dijk (1981, 1985) to :

1. Study the theoretical aspects of the subject i.e. explanation and definition of the concepts of ideology, power, discourse, discourse analysis, order of discourse, critical discourse analysis, etc.
2. Study the descriptive aspects of the subject, i.e. giving a systematic presentation of a procedure for critical discourse analysis; setting out a view of interrelationship of language and society; illustrating the place of language in society, and showing that language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power.
3. Study the analytic aspects of the subject, i.e. analysing the formal textual features of their statements, press interviews and electoral speeches and manifestoes of the two main candidates for presidency – Khatami and Nategh Noori and their main supporters.

As the primary sources of the present study, the written electoral materials such as the speeches and manifestoes published in newspapers and the published interviews and debates of the candidates, and as the secondary sources the speeches, statements and articles of other politicians as well as the editorials of the newspapers regarding the presidential election, from the 8th of May, 1997 when the Council of Guardians announced the names of the eligible candidates upto the last day of election (23rd of May, 1997) would be taken into consideration.

**Time period required to complete the research project:** Approximately two years.

**Field work:** No specific field work is required in this research project.

**Place/libraries where research work is to be carried out:** In order to establish a good, rich theoretical framework for the study, I have to visit and search so many libraries and universities such s American centre library, British council library, library of Delhi University, library of JNU (all located in Delhi) as well as the library of Panjab University, Changidarh.

Since this research project aims to analyse the texts from the seventh presidential election in Iran, and as per the recommendation of the committee I have co-opted a co-supervisor from Iran in my research work, therefore for collecting the relevant materials as well as visiting my co-supervisor I also have to visit Iran.

**PROPOSAL**

**Background of the Study:** The 1970s saw the emergence of a form of discourse and text analysis that recognized the role of language in structuring power relations in society. At that time, much linguistic research elsewhere was focused on formal aspects of language which constituted the linguistic competence of speakers which could theoretically be isolated from specific instances of language use (Chomsky, 1957). Where the relation between language and context was considered, as in pragmatics (Levinson, 1983), with a focus on speakers’ pragmatic / socio-linguistic competence, sentences and components of sentences were still regarded as the basic units. Much socio-linguistic research at the time was aimed at describing and explaining language variation, language change and the structures of communicative interaction, with limited attention to issues of social hierarchy and power (Labov, 1972; Hymes, 1972). In such a context, attention to texts, their production and interpretation and their relation to societal impulses and structures, signalled a very different kind of interest (de Beugrande and Dressler, 1981). The work of Kress and Hodge (1979) and Wodak (1989) serve to explain and illustrate the main assumptions, principles and procedures of what had then become known as critical linguistics.

Kress (1990 : 84-97) gives an account of the theoretical foundations and sources of critical linguistics. By the 1990s the label critical discourse analysis came to be used more consistently with this particular approach to linguistic analysis. Kress (1990 : 94) shows how critical discourse analysis by that time was ‘emerging as a distinct theory of language, a radically different kind of linguistics’. Many of the basic assumptions of critical discourse analysis that were salient in the early stages, and were elaborated in later development of the theory, are articulated in Kress’s (1989) work.

Fowler et al. (1979) has been referred to in order to ascertain the early foundations of critical linguistics. Later work of Fowler (1991, 1996) shows how tools provided by standard linguistic theories (a 1965 version of Chomskyan grammar, and Halliday’s theory of systemic functional grammar) can be used to uncover linguistic structures of power in texts. Not only in news discourses, but also in literary criticism Fowler illustrates that systematic grammatical devices function in establishing, manipulating and naturalizing social hierarchies.

Fairclough (1989) sets out the social theories under planning critical discourse analysis, and as in other early critical linguistic work, a variety of textual examples are anlaysed to illustrate the field, its aims and methods of analysis. Later Fairclough (1992, 1995) and Chouliariki and Fairclough (1999) explain and elaborate some advances in critical discourse analysis, showing not only how the analytical framework for investigating language in relation to power and ideology developed, but also how critical discourse analysis is useful in disclosing the discursive nature of much contemporary social and cultural change. Particularly the language of the mass media is scrutinized as a site of power, of struggle and also as a site where language is apparently transparent. Media institutions often purport to be neutral in that they provide space for public discourse, that they reflect states of affairs disinterestedly, and that they give the perceptions and arguments of the newsmakers. Fiarclaugh shows the fallacy of such assumptions, and illustrates the mediating and constructing role of the media with a variety of examples.

Van Dijk’s earlier work in text linguistics and discourse analysis (1977, 1981) already shows the interest he takes in texts and discourses as basic units and social practices. Like other critical linguistic theorists, he traces the origins of linguistic interest in units of language larger than sentences and in text - and context-dependency of meanings. Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) considered the relevance of discourse to the study of language processing. Their development of a cognitive model of discourse understanding in individuals, gradually developed into cognitive models for explaining the construction of meaning on a societal level. Van Dijk (1985) collected the work of a variety of scholars for whom language and how it functions in discourse is variously the primary object of research, or a tool in the investigation of other social phenomena. This is in a way a documentation of the ‘state of the art’ of critical linguistics in the mid 1980s.

Van Dijk turns specifically to media discourse, giving not only his own reflection on communication in the mass media (van Dijk, 1986), but also bringing together the theories and applications of a variety of scholars interested in the production, uses and functions of media discourses (van Dijk, 1985). In critically analysing various kinds of discourses that encode prejudice, van Dijk’s interest is in developing a theoretical model that will explain cognitive discourse processing mechanisms. Most recently van Dijk has focused on issues of racism and ideology (van Dijk, 1998).

By the end of the 1980s critical linguistics was able to describe its aims, research interests, chosen perspective and methods of analysis much more specifically and rigidly than hitherto. Wodak (1989) lists, explains and illustrates the most important characteristics of critical linguistic research as they had become established in continued research. The relevance of investigating language use in institutional settings is reiterated, and a new focus on the necessity of a historical perspective is introduced (the discourse – historical approach). This was followed by a variety of research projects into discursive practices in institutional contexts that would assist in developing an integrated theory of critical discourse analysis.

**Statement of the Subject:** The fruitless study of language in isolation has led linguists to acknowledge the importance of considering social context in discourse analysis. Deacon et al. (1999 : 147-8) propose : “Discourse conjoins language use as text and practices. What we identify as ‘discourse’ and what we identify as ‘social’ are deeply intervened ... . All talks, all texts, are social in nature. Language is not some transparent medium through which we see the world”. They make the point that “the moving to discourse analysis enabled linguistics to tackle the structures of whole texts, rather than just the sentences, words and parts of words taken in isolation which it had to a great extent concentrated on previously” (Deacon et al., 1999 : 179). So, the analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use and as such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs.

Critical discourse analysis which this research work is based upon, analyses social interactions in a way which sets out to show up their generally hidden determinants in the system of social relationship as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system. Critically study of language would place a broad conception of the social study of language at the core of language study. Critical discourse analysis regards ‘language as social practice’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), and takes consideration of the context of language use to be crucial (Wodak, 2000; Benke, 2000). Moreover, critical discourse analysis takes a particular interest in the relation between language and power.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) have put forward an eight-point programme to define critical discourse analysis as follows :

1. Critical discourse analysis addresses social problems.
2. Power relations are discursive.
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
4. Discourse does ideological work.
5. Discourse is historical.
6. The link between text and society is mediated.
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

Interpretation of text and discourse is, therefore, interpretation of socially determined language, and this means being involved in understanding the processes, functions and meanings of social interaction, and as Birch (1989 : 153) claims, this means being involved in “politics of interaction”. In this way the links between people and society are not arbitrary and accidental, but one institutionally determined. Critical language study aims to select and deconstruct these links and to understand the nature of language and society and their mutual effect on each other. Critical discourse analysis sees discourses as parts of social struggles, and contextualizes them in terms of broader (non-discoursal) struggles, and the effects of these struggles on structures. It puts emphasis not only on the formal textual features of discourse but also on the social effects of discourse, on creativity, and on future. On the other hand, through critical discourse analysis the analyst can show what power relationships determine discourses; these relationships are themselves the outcome of struggles, and are established (and, ideally, naturalized) by those with power. It lays emphasis on the social determination of discourse, and on the past – on the results of past struggles.

The 7th presidential election in Iran took place following a series of happenings which in fact was the aftermath of social forces in a broader competition between ideology and culture. This event was a turning point in the history of Iran because, for the first time two different discourse types, based on two different ideologies, faced and challenged with each other. For the first time some slogans such as “civil society”, “liberalism”, “human rights”, “freedom of expression” etc. were brought up by the reformist party and these new concepts entered the current discourse of the society and somehow changed the social structure. So in this research project critical discourse analysis will be used to describe the formal properties and features of these two discourses in Iran; to interpret the relationship between texts and interaction; to explain the relationship between interaction and social context and their social effects; to explore the relationship between language and ideology; and to illustrate the relationship between language and society and discourse and social structure in Iran.