

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH POLITICAL RHETORIC: LANGUAGE, IDEOLOGY, AND HEGEMONY

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Анотація

У статті розглянуто критичний дискурс-аналіз (КДА) англomовної політичної риторики з акцентом на взаємозв'язок мови, ідеології та гегемонії. Проаналізовано основні лінгвістичні стратегії політичної комунікації, зокрема метафори, займенники, евфемізми та повтори, які формують політичні наративи та впливають на громадську думку. Доведено, що політичний дискурс не лише відображає соціальну реальність, а й активно її конструює, підтримуючи існуючі відносини влади. Особливу увагу приділено концепції гегемонії та її ролі у формуванні домінантних ідеологічних інтерпретацій.

Ключові слова: критичний дискурс-аналіз, політична риторика, ідеологія, гегемонія, політичний дискурс

Abstract

The article examines the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of English political rhetoric with a focus on the interaction between language, ideology, and hegemony. The study analyses key linguistic strategies of political communication, including metaphors, pronouns, euphemisms, and repetition, which shape political narratives and influence public opinion. It is demonstrated that political discourse not only reflects social reality but also actively constructs it by maintaining existing power relations. Special attention is paid to the concept of hegemony and its role in establishing dominant ideological interpretations.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, political rhetoric, ideology, hegemony, political discourse.

Introduction

Language is never neutral. In political contexts, it becomes a powerful tool for persuasion, manipulation, and control. Through rhetoric, politicians do not merely communicate their ideas; they actively reproduce ideologies and maintain specific power relations within society. This paper explores the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of English political rhetoric, focusing on how language, ideology, and hegemony interact to shape political meanings and social power.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a specialized approach developed by prominent scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak [1; 3; 4]. Its primary objective is to study how language reflects and constructs social power, dominance, and inequality.

CDA operates under the core assumption that discourse—defined as the use of language in text and talk—both shapes and is shaped by social structures. When applied to the political sphere, CDA serves to uncover hidden ideologies, implicit assumptions, and the strategic linguistic choices that politicians utilize to influence public opinion and legitimize their authority.

2. The Role of Language in Political Rhetoric

In the realm of political communication, language is a form of action. It is used not only to inform but to mobilize and persuade. Politicians rely on several key rhetorical devices to achieve these goals:

- **Metaphors:** Phrases like the "war on terror" or the "battle for democracy" frame complex geopolitical realities in emotional and easily digestible terms [6].
- **Pronouns:** The strategic use of "we," "us," and "them" creates a powerful sense of unity (inclusion) or division (exclusion).
- **Euphemisms:** Terms such as "collateral damage" instead of "civilian deaths" are employed to soften harsh realities and minimize negative public reaction.
- **Repetition and Slogans:** Phrases like "Take Back Control" or "Make America Great Again" simplify complex political platforms into emotional appeals that bypass rational analysis.

3. Ideology and Power Relations

Ideology refers to a system of ideas that represents the interests of particular social groups. In political rhetoric, ideology is often embedded in language structures that appear as "natural" or "common sense." For instance, when a politician speaks of "hard-working families," they are appealing to a specific moral ideology of labor and responsibility, which inherently marginalizes those who do not fit this narrow definition [3]. Such language choices are rarely innocent; they serve to reinforce dominant values and suppress alternative viewpoints.

4. Hegemony in Political Discourse

The concept of hegemony, introduced by Antonio Gramsci, refers to the way dominant groups maintain power through consent rather than force—by shaping how people think and speak about the world. English political rhetoric often functions hegemonically by normalizing certain worldviews. By making a particular perspective seem like the only logical choice, dominant groups secure the public's voluntary agreement to the existing social order [1].

5. Case Study: The Rhetoric of the "War on Terror"

A classic application of CDA is the analysis of George W. Bush's post-9/11 speeches. The phrase "War on Terror" constructed a rigid moral dichotomy: "good versus evil" and "us versus them" [5]. This discourse did more than describe events; it produced a new global order and legitimized military actions and surveillance policies by presenting them as moral necessities.

6. Contemporary Digital and Populist Rhetoric

Modern political rhetoric continues to rely on strategic framing, adapted for the digital age:

- Populism: Leaders use simple, emotional language to appear closer to "the people" and opposed to the "elite."
- Progressive Discourse: Emphasizes inclusivity, equality, and empathy through specific terminological shifts.
- Digital Rhetoric: Social media reduces complex issues into memes, hashtags, and soundbites. Even a short tweet can carry deep ideological weight, as seen in the viral "Thank you for your attention to this matter," which functions through the very rhetorical mechanisms analyzed by CDA.

Conclusion

To conclude, language in political rhetoric is not merely a vehicle for communication but a weapon of persuasion and control. Ideology operates through discourse to shape belief systems, while hegemony ensures that certain worldviews dominate without resistance. Critical Discourse Analysis allows us to see beyond words, revealing how political language constructs power, identity, and reality itself. As Fairclough famously stated, "Language is a site of struggle" [1]. By analyzing this struggle, we develop the critical awareness necessary to resist manipulation and imagine fairer social alternatives.

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