

Manifestations of Power in Presidential Speeches: a Linguistic Analysis

This study aimed to unearth the linguistic features that indicate power in the presidential speeches made by the former president Mahinda Rajapakse at international forums. A combination of the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposed by Norman Fairclough and the principles of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) introduced by M A K Halliday was used to analyze five recent presidential speeches made in English.

According to CDA, power and discourse have a symbiotic relationship. Power determines the nature and orientation of a discourse. On the other hand, a discourse endows power to its wielders. The approach to CDA proposed by Norman Fairclough is adopted in this research due to its emphasis on both discursive processes and social processes in an analysis of a discourse. According to Fairclough (1995), at the discursive level, CDA deals with the linguistic features of a discourse, such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and coherence. At the socio-contextual level, the analysis is equated with the socioeconomic, political, cultural and agentive aspects/trends relevant to the discourse.

The theoretical framework of the study was further strengthened by the use of SFG in the process of analysis. According to Halliday, language is a meaning potential and use of language means a choice of an option from an available network of options. These networks together forms a system of networks and options within are assigned a rank (preference) by language users depending on their meta-functions. Halliday identify three meta-functions: ideational meta-function, interpersonal meta-function and textual meta-function.(Halliday, 1985), (Eggins, 2004).

The analysis revealed the frequent use of nominalization, parallelism, unification strategies and modality to convey a sense of political unity, solidarity and defiance. The obvious power play between the dominant theses, unity and solidarity versus defiance, is explained in terms of the socio political and economic positioning of the political ideology nurtured by the former regime.

Key Words: Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar, Political Rhetoric

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