

Research Article

Linguistic and Pragmatic Features in Yaya Jammeh's Political Speech During the 49th Independence Anniversary: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: This paper focuses on employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in studying a political speech. The objective of the study is to explore the linguistic and pragmatic features and the set of themes in the political speech delivered by President Jammeh during the 49th Independence Anniversary of the Gambia on Thursday, February 20th, 2014. The speech, composed of 22 paragraphs, has been taken from the Internet as corpus. In order to achieve the main goal of the study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used as a theoretical framework to analyze the speech. The analysis of the obtained data is conducted by drawing upon Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA; particularly, the language text, whether spoken or written, discourse practice and socio-cultural practices. After a macro analysis (semantic macrostructures) and micro analysis (local semantics) of the political speech, the findings show that Jammeh's language had a specific aim that was linguistically expressed and pragmatically implied through figures of speech, repetition, religious expressions, pronominalization and a set of themes such as criticism of foreign politics, economic progress, political program, appeal to citizenship and threat/warning.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Linguistics, Features, Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Discourse Analysis, Independence Anniversary, Yaya Jammeh.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of language is a tool that permits to conduct a communication with other people. There are two forms of communication such as communication directly (spoken language), meaning that there is no barrier between the speakers and (hearers), and communication indirectly (written language), meaning there is a bridge between the speakers and hearers. Moreover, Brown and Yule (1983) propose specific definitions to a spoken language and a written language. They define a spoken language as a form of communication that produces effects such as facial expression, postural and gestural systems, from one person to another. As for a written language, they consider it as the representation of language by means of writing systems such as grammar of English and punctuation.

Nowadays, a language is as well a linguistic device through which an ideology of a person or a group of persons can be spread or defended. Moreover, it is considered as a part of a society including linguistic

phenomena and social phenomena. The first phenomena have a social character because people practise it in the environment, that is to say when the latter speak, listen, write or read they are socially determined and have social effects. As for the second phenomena based on social contexts and practices, they are linked to linguistic activity. Thus, this scientifically proves that language is a part of discourse and plays an essential role in social life.

However, this study is framed within the theory of critical discourse analysis as conceived by the theoretician, Norman Fairclough with his model of analyzing discourse (1992 & 1999). According to him, political discourse can be considered as: an uttered or written text, discourse elements, and socio-cultural elements. In the process of analyzing the discourse in order to know the connections between the text and the socio-cultural factors, Fairclough (1999) proposes some approaches such as: (a) linguistic description of the language text, (b) interpretation of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive

processes and the text, and (c) explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes”.

This paper is a study on President Jammeh’s speech during the 49th Independence Anniversary in 2014 so as to find out the linguistic and pragmatic features and the set of themes used by the latter, when addressing his fellow Gambians.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual Background

According to Van Dijk (1997a), discourse is a spoken language; it means what is said in public. He adds that discourse is a social interaction. The examples that he gives are: political discourse, interviews, conversations, diaries, propaganda, meetings, letters, discussions, laws, contracts, songs, poetry and short stories (Van Dijk, 1981). Regarding the term of discourse analysis, Paltridge (2006) states that it mainly focuses on knowledge of language, which is the language, consists of phrase, clause, word and sentence. Moreover, Zellig Harris is the first linguist to introduce the term ‘discourse analysis’ in 1952. That concerned connect speech and writing. The term involves an analysis of the functioning of discourses such as written discourse (text) and spoken discourse (talk). Language is the concern of discourse while text refers to film, images, etc. As for talk, in social fields, it needs a device to communicate each other, and people need a language.

Now, as for critical discourse analysis, it deals with language and power. It considers the use of language as a form of social practice, meaning it aims for addressing social problems. Van Dijk defines critical discourse analysis as:

Critical Discourse Analysis has become the general label for a special approach to the study of text and talk, emerging from critical linguistics, critical semiotics and in general from socio-politically conscious and oppositional way of investigating language, discourse and communication. (1995: 17).

In this definition, Van Dijk (1995:17) considers that critical discourse analysis is a kind of research on discourse and that analyze how the themes such as inequality, abuse of social power and dominance are practiced and reproduced by texts and speech in the social and political context.

Van Dijk is as well considered as one of the first linguist to work on the critical studies of media discourse. His theory focuses on the discourse analysis of media text, on the representation of minorities and ethnic groups in Europe. In his work entitled *New Analysis* (1988), one can notice the way Van Dijk integrates his general theory of discourse to the analysis of news in press both in a national and international level. However, in his theory, the latter suggests an

analysis of the structure at different levels; that is, not only analysing the grammatical, phonological, semantic and morphological level but also higher levels such as coherence or the rhetorical dimensions of texts.

Apart from the analysis of words, critical discourse analysis also examines the social context as suggested by Norman Fairclough. The latter (2003) mentions that discourse is a way of representing the world, feelings, belief, thoughts, the social world, etc. He defines (1989:26) critical discourse analysis in three different levels, the first one focuses on analyzing and identifying the formal features of a text, the second one deals with the participants’ cognitive processes and the last one studies the relationship between interactions and social structures.

After reviewing the relevant studies done on the theme of our article, we consider it necessary to apply it in the political speech of an African President like Yaya Jammeh, to understand the nature and functioning of his speech when he addresses his fellow Gambians.

Previous Studies

Before analyzing our corpus, it is necessary to review different previous studies of some researchers and that have analyzed political speeches from the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis.

Duran (2008) conducted a contrastive study of the acceptance speeches, delivered by President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry in addressing the Republic and Democratic National Conventions before the 2004 Presidential Election in the United States of America, expressing honor, gratitude and gratefulness. On the one hand, Duran, in his contrastive work, focuses on three main parts such as: the introductions of both speeches, one segment designed in terms of counter-addressee, and quantitative analysis of the participants and processes. Duran mentions that the introduction of Georges Bush’s speech is a short summary about events in the past four years in the form of positive experiences. In this speech, Bush addresses John Kerry, the democratic candidate, and considers him as being the candidate of actions, that’s to say, the Middle East, the United States of America and the whole World. On the other hand, Duran states that the introduction of John Kerry’s begins with telling anecdote about American literature. According to the latter, John Kerry addresses his political opponents by giving an account of their negative aspects in the last four years when Bush was still ruling the USA, and considers himself the interpreter of the current situation based on his ethical values.

In another study that aims to analyze the 31 speeches of Malcolm X, Ambrosio, by using Halliday approach of systemic functional linguistics, unravels Malcolm X’s counter-hegemonic discourse. This approach enables

the researcher to assert that Malcolm X, the American activist of civil rights, uses slang and informality as his linguistic tools. Moreover, his counter-hegemonic discourse of resistance is expressed through intertextuality, lexis, genre, and transitivity. The main findings of the study reveal that Malcolm X uses language to denounce important social issues, like those of struggle and resistance. These findings also demonstrate the manner one can bring about social change, in standing up in the face of hegemony.

The aim of a study conducted by Ahmad Al-Harashsheh focuses on critical discourse analysis as a theoretical framework to analyze Arabic political discourse in general but particularly the translatability of figures of speech in three political speeches of Mashaal and that were translated into English. The findings obtained from this study not only revealed that figures of speech are numerous in these three speeches, but also mentioned the obstacles related to the translatability of these figures of speech into English, what is due to the translated version that lost the flavor of emotiveness that the original text had. Indeed, there are some techniques suggested by the researcher, Ahmad Al-Harashsheh, for translators to overcome these obstacles when translating.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this analysis, the speech transcription text that will be analyzed is the speech transcription text of the Former Gambian President, Yaya Jammeh. It was delivered on February 18th, 2014, during the 49th Independence Anniversary. This speech composed of 22 paragraphs has been obtained at the following website: <http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/statement-by-president-yahya-jammeh-on-the-occasion-of-the-gambias-49th-independence-anniversary-18t>.

Indeed, Yahya Jammeh, born May 25, 1965 in Kanilai, is a Gambian officer and statesman. In power on July 22, 1994 after a coup, he was President of the Republic of The Gambia on October 18, 1996. On December 12, 2015, he proclaimed Islam as the state religion and The Gambia as an Islamic republic. He was defeated in the presidential election in November 2016. He refused to cede power, declared a state of emergency and obtained a three-month extension of his mandate by the National Assembly. However, in the face of international pressure, he left power on January 21, 2017.¹

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After a macro analysis (semantic macrostructures) and micro analysis (local semantics) of the political speech, the findings have shown that President Jammeh, when addressing his fellow Gambians during this special Independence Anniversary, conveyed some

messages (topics) through linguistic and pragmatic features. However, the findings are explained in the sections below:

Figures of Speech

In President Jammeh's speech three are main figures of speech such as metaphor, hyperbole and comparison. These figures of speech used in the political speech are nothing than the fact of using words out of their usual use or their literal meaning in order to add beauty and emotion to the text. Moreover, according to Al-Hamad & Al-Shunnaq (2011), figures of speech enable the speaker to express his/her ability of producing an emotive and effective speech that will affect the audience's thoughts and attitudes towards the points rose in the speech.

Metaphor

A metaphor, according to linguists, involves a semantic mapping from one conceptual domain to another, often using anomalous or deviant language (Crystal, 1994). Through the use of metaphor, politician use a word or phrase to establish from a comparison between one idea and another. In political speeches, the use of metaphors is intentional and functional, what also permits to draw the attention of the audience and to gain their sympathy and emotions towards what is being said. Moreover, this pragmatic aim of metaphors can be noticed in the speech of President Jammeh as follows:

- (1) *No amount of blackmail, smear campaign or bullying tactics would make me deviate from this position and allow those marauding locusts to loot our Natural resources to our own detriment.*
- (2) *We will fight these vermins called Homosexuals or gays the same way we are fighting malaria-causing mosquitoes; if not more aggressively.*

In (1), President Jammeh uses the word "locusts" to address western powers. He is accusing them of interfering in the political affairs of his sovereign Gambian state under the pretext that he changed his way of governing. However, he considers that the sole aim of this interference is only motivated by the intention of plundering their natural resources.

In (2), the word "vermins" is used by President Jammeh to describe Homosexuals. When addressing his fellow citizens, he suggests fighting these unnatural acts as the way of fighting mosquitoes for Malaria. He conceives that this social phenomenon is a devastating weapon that could contaminate the Gambian society if nothing is done.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a rhetorical trope through which a speaker aims to dramatize an ordinary situation or a fact in order to produce more impression towards his/her audience. According to Claridge (2011, p. 20), speakers express their emotional orientation towards a state of affairs, by using hyperbole. President Jammeh,

¹ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahya_Jammeh.

acting like a politician, seeks to capture the special attention of his audience, by expressing in his speech an exaggerated emotion or even making a value judgment, through the use of words or expressions such as:

(3) **“Every citizen should be willing to pay with his/her sweat”**

(4) **“Every citizen should be willing to pay with his or her blood and tears and sucking of African blood and resources”.**

These expressions of amplification is not only a way for the Gambian President to ask his fellow citizens to work for the socio economic development and the stability of their country, but also to describe the massive presence of Westerners in Africa, and which is motivated by a clear desire to plunder natural resources.

Repetition as a Persuasion Strategy

According to Reynolds (1995: 185), repetition is defined as **“multiple instances of an idea or word, and the greater the number of repetition the more we notice it”**. It is clear that political speakers develop a manipulative and indirect language through the use of repetition in their speeches in order to deliver some ideologies. Ideologies are usually referred to socially-shared mental representations of a social group and the basic social cognitive basis for the identity of a group.

Therefore, in the following extracts, one can notice in President Jammeh’s speech this linguistic device is expressed through some ideas or concepts, in order to persuade his audience to better suit some messages of motivation and of information.

(5) The repetition mainly concerns the term independence which comes up three times; which is for President Jammeh a way of reminding the Gambian people what this day celebrated annually symbolizes. In this post, he explains how the Gambian people have fiercely fought to finally achieve national sovereignty so long confiscated by the British. He also tries to implicitly say that this independence obtained before he came to power in 1994, was nothing more than a comedy because these British colonizers had put Gambia in a precarious state of underdevelopment instead of making it emerge economically.

In (6), President Jammeh is addressing his fellow citizens, through the repetitive expression **“every citizen should be willing to pay with his/her”**. Here, this repetition at the beginning of sentences is a discursive strategy showing that President Jammeh wishes to emphasize a particular point which is the need to know the citizenship responsibilities. According to his philosophy, every Gambian citizen should involve in the economic development of Gambia, as well as in its safety and liberty.

(5) *Our independence was achieved through the hard work of patriotic independence minded citizens but that*

independence was a sham as Gambia’s leadership then plunged our country deeper into the complete hegemony of the British Empire and therefore failed to bring about any significant socio-economic development

(6) *Every citizen should be willing to pay with his/her sweat at the least for rapid socio economic development and peace. At the most, every citizen should be willing to pay with his or her blood and tears to maintain our Independence, Freedom, security and permanent stability in a country where all ALLAH-Fearing Muslims and Christians can worship our Creator and Master with absolute peace of mind and soul.*

PRONOMINALIZATION

The use of personal and possessive adjectives is found in abundance in President Jammeh’s speech. Table 1 and 2 below illustrate the number of times each of them is used.

Table 1: Personal Pronouns’ frequency

Personal Pronouns	Frequency
I	8 times
Me	5 times
We	52 times
Us	11 times

Table 2: Possessive Adjectives’ frequency

Possessive Adjectives	Frequency
My	7 times
Our	67 times

As shown in the tables above, the personal pronouns ‘we’, ‘us’ and the possessive adjective ‘our’ are the ones that President Jammeh uses the most in his speech. In using these personal pronouns and possessive adjectives, the latter is able to evoke a sense of rapport and commonality with his audience to gain their support regarding his political projects. Therefore, these linguistic features sometimes enable not only politicians to avoid speaking about themselves as individuals, but also to involve others. Regarding the use of the personal pronouns ‘I’, ‘me’ and the possessive adjective ‘my’, President Jammeh’s speech is so subjective and this is as well a strategy of praising himself or of showing the degree of his authority. The most motivating reasons for a politician to use them is to describe himself in a positive way and highlight personal qualities.

The Pragmatic Features of the Speech

Pragmatic is defined as the study of intended meaning. It is interested in the relationship of signs to their users. According to Yule (1996: 4), pragmatics is the study of the relationship between the linguistic form and the speaker who delivers the utterances. It concentrates on the aspects of meaning and its prediction not only

depends the linguistic knowledge, but also the physical and social knowledge. However, pragmatic aspects expressing emotion is used by President Jammeh, particularly when he is addressing his people through the intimate expression “*Fellow Gambians and friends of The Gambia*”. The intended message is showing decency and close relationship. At the beginning of his speech, the President uses the widely known religious expressions in “*Islam Bismillaahir Rahmaani Raheem*”, “*Alhamdu lillaahe Rabbil Aalameeen*” and “*Assalaamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullaah wa Barakaatuh*”. In a literal way, they successively means ‘*in the name of God, The most Gracious, The most Merciful*’ ‘*Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Universe*’ and “*May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon you*”. Being aware that the majority of Gambian citizens are Muslims, these expressions used by President Jammeh, pragmatically aim to show his Islamic identity to the audience, to gain the sympathy of Gambian citizens or forgiveness regarding his drastic way of ruling the State. According to Welch, Cullbert, and Cull (2003, p. 342), it is believed by many scholars that religion is used by most politicians as a means of propaganda to manipulate the public and this is done through the use of religious references or quotations. They add that “Religion is often used in propaganda because, once established, it rules out all other arguments, such as human rights, vested interests, political privileges, or property rights. It is the ultimate instrument of political power.”

According to Wodak, “*the power of persuasion can be displayed by different traits. Part of these traits is the display of belief, which can be considered as a necessary ingredient for the staging of politics*” (2009, p. 8). As far as Barakat is concerned, he as well states politicians really know the effect religion believes have on the audience, that’s why they often use quote references or quotations related to religion to enforce their point of view or to emphasize its importance (1993).

The Major Themes

Jammeh’s speech was given during the celebration of the Gambian Independence day. A moment for him to address his fellow Gambians without distinction of race, religion or sex. However, through this political speech, a number of important messages were sent to them and to the whole world. Some of these themes are outlined as follows:

➤ **Criticism of Foreign Politics**

(15) *...then plunged our country deeper into the complete hegemony of the British Empire and therefore failed to bring about any significant socio-economic development*

(16) *For a country that was once labelled as a “hell hole on earth” (hyperbole) by a former US President*

during the height of massive looting of our resources by our merciless colonial Masters.

➤ **Economic Progress**

(17) *The Economist Magazine has ranked The Gambia among the most stable countries in the world and such a feat must never be taken for granted but should propel all of us to stand firm in unity to safeguard and preserve it for posterity.*

➤ **Political Program**

(18) *My Government would give priority to the peaceful resolution of all these deadly and catastrophic senseless proxy conflicts that continue to plague our Mother Africa*

(19) *My Government’s drive to provide education for all Gambians, religious Education will be further buttressed and strengthened from primary, secondary and to tertiary Education*

(20) *My Government will continue to support research on our cultural heritage and also encourage Gambians to make good use of our natural resources for the benefit of everyone*

➤ **Appeal to Citizenship**

(21) *The environment is inextricably linked to our survival and culture. Therefore we must not only preserve our natural heritage but also study it and document it for posterity*

(22) *I call on every Gambian to take greater personal responsibility for the socio economic development, stability, security and Independence; and, in a nutshell, the well being of our Motherland The Gambia*

➤ **Threat and warning**

(23) *This sacred national interest will never be sacrificed, on the altar of satanic and ungodly international standards that continue to promote the evil Agenda of the world powers*

(24) *We will therefore not accept any friendship, aid or any other gesture that is conditional on accepting Homosexuals or L.G.B.T. as they are now baptised by the powers that promote them*

CONCLUSION

One can conclude from the above analysis that the language in President Jammeh’s speech is shaped by the social, cultural and political factors surrounding him. In order to analyze it, the study adopts the framework of CDA. Specifically, the study applies Fairclough’s 3D model which critically examines text, social, and discursive practices. Thus, using Fairclough’s model serves to expose the communicative strategies that are

employed in the speech which, in turn, also helps to expose the ideological messages that are inherent in them. By understanding how these three elements are related, one is better able to understand how the speaker (Jammeh) relies on his position of power and authority to influence his audience.

In this paper, the speech analysis mainly focuses on figures of speech, repetition, religious expressions, pronominalization and a set of themes. This language style has been used by President Jammeh to reinforce the various strategies and persuade his audience. The use of different discourse registers in this political speech reveals explicitly that language as a

means of communication can not only be used by the speaker (Jammeh) to demonstrate his stylistic command but also to convey his opinions, manifested in his attempt to impress and propitiate the audience and recipients. In the speech, President Jammeh uses a positive register to address his fellow Gambians, but uses a negative one when addressing foreign powers in criticizing their interference in a sovereign state and other practices. We have mainly noticed a part of subjectivity in his speech when talking about foreign powers. Such subjectivity expresses or implies his disagreement position against foreign interference in the Gambian state affairs.

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