

Subjectivity in Discourse: A CDA Approach to the Study of Adjectives in Two Political Speeches

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Abstract

This paper studies the use of adjectives as subjectivity markers in one of former U.S. President George W. Bush's political speeches and another of the current U.S. President Barack H. Obama. Combining both quantitative as well as qualitative methods, the paper argues, from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, that the use of adjectives as subjectivity markers can be better explained as reflecting their users' world views and bias. Having in essence a rhetorical function, these linguistic triggers namely possessive and descriptive adjectives help polarize representation, reconstruct identities and enhance the power relations of their users. Differences and similarities in use are investigated in both speeches. The analysis of possessive and descriptive adjectives in these two different speeches has revealed that there is a high level of similarity in their occurrence and frequency distribution. More importantly, the analysis has also revealed that most instances of similarity in use reflect similar ideological frames projected by both speakers in their discourse. More specifically, it is found that both speakers are most likely to echo the voice of one single political agenda over different periods of time in dealing with the same topic.

Keywords: subjectivity, possessive and descriptive adjectives, CDA, political speech, the Iraq war