

## UNRAVELLING POWER DYNAMICS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF VOLODYMYS ZELENSKIY'S ADDRESS TO THE UK PARLIAMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*This study critically analyzes Volodymyr Zelenskiy's speech to the UK Parliament using Norman Fairclough's 3D model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It examines how textual, discursive, and social practices are constructed to exercise power and shape perceptions during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Using a qualitative approach, the findings reveal that Zelenskiy's strategic use of language significantly influenced audience sentiment, positioning Ukraine as a victim of aggression and Russia as the aggressor. The study highlights the potent role of language in constructing political reality and mobilizing international support. In addition, certain linguistic strategies were constructed, emphasizing similar values with the audience and reshaping the discourse of the war between Russia and Ukraine. The research concluded that through his speech, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy managed to influence the UK parliament members as the audience and further shaped the discourse of the war between Russia and Ukraine wherein Russia is portrayed as the culprit assailing the core value of humanity and Ukraine, on the other hand, is depicted as the victim.*

**Keywords:** CDA, Norman Fairclough's 3D model, power dynamics, speech

The prevalence of language within our society implies a significant role and contribution that language offers in our lives. The utility of language enables us to convey meaningful information, express our thoughts, develop social connections and achieve not only mutual understanding but also cooperation. We are constantly engaged in an interaction that involves frequent use of language and it is the case on the grounds that communication is an inherent part of our being social creatures. Hence, language is not simply an efficient social tool for us to use in performing the totality of our responsibilities and duties as social creatures because more crucially, language or rather our distinct linguistic capability is one of the human qualities that sets us apart from other animals.

However, the ubiquity of language and its prevailing use in our daily interaction lead us to believe that the sole objective of language is the attainment of communicative purposes. While it is indisputably true that language serves a communicative purpose to ensure mutual understanding, Barber et al. (2009) emphasize that language also has a basic function to influence others' behaviours thereby guaranteeing human cooperation. In light of the latter function, it is evident that in its utility, language aims at not only achieving mutual understanding among people but also

driving others to do something and therefore, it implies that language provides its users with the power to exercise their influence over others. Within this framework, given the prevalence of language within our society and how language is closely associated with power, it can be safely assumed that our daily interaction through language amounts not only to fulfilling communicative purposes and mutual understanding but also to persuade others to do something and see the reality the way it fits our interest (Richardson, 2007). In this light, we are prompted to view language not merely as a benign tool we can use in our interaction within our society but rather as a formidable medium that people in power can utilize to maintain their influence or control others. Language, as a pervasive aspect of human society, transcends mere communication. It not only conveys information and fosters social bonds but also serves as a tool for exerting influence and control (Barber et al., 2009; Mayr, 2008). In political contexts, this persuasive potential of language becomes particularly significant, making Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) an essential method for uncovering power dynamics embedded within discourse.

Needless to say, language used in daily conversation is simpler and easier to understand because the main use of language in this context is generally to achieve the communicative purpose. Conversely, the more language is manipulated to gain control and influence over others, the more complicated and opaque it becomes. Hence, it is apparent that language used within the political stage and media differs from ordinary speech and writing. The linguistic purpose of the language utility within the areas of politics and media that veers toward control and influence accounts for the constant investigation of CDA within both areas in order to indicate the existing discourse, power, dominance and social inequality (Reisigl, 2017).

In order to pinpoint any trace of a power scheme within language, it is necessary to bear in mind that language is immersed in social power wherein it embodies power, expresses power and plays a crucial role in the contention over power (van Dijk, 1998). Formulated on this notion, it is inevitable that language choice, as well as its structure, are designed accordingly to accommodate power manipulations. Hence, the pressing task is to lay bare the power dynamics involved in language by means of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) whose main objectives include investigating how language is employed within the complex social and political phenomena to determine the ideological implications and power relations within the society. Needless to say, CDA is notably interested in scrutinizing the implementation of certain linguistic forms and varying expressions to provide room for power manipulations. Consequently, its investigation requires a shift of understanding of language as a discourse or a form of social practice where interaction takes place between speaker and listener or between writer and reader (Fairclough, 2001). In this light, the scope of CDA consists of the whole process of social interaction contained within the text either written or spoken. Having outlined the key elements of CDA and its scope, we are able to grasp the notion of power discussed in terms of CDA and the manner in which such power is manoeuvred by means of language. The power within the linguistic viewpoint is defined as control gained from manipulating others' thinking with the use of language (Flowerdew et al., 2018). Therefore, it is evident that CDA concerns itself with the analysis of texts which consists of the process of its production, distribution and consumption of the texts (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002) and at the same time takes the stance that language use is never neutral, objective and value-free and therefore, it necessitates the application of linguistic analysis on any form of discourse (Wodak, 2015).

The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine prompted a global alarm as it tilted the world balance and incurred the fear of another impending world war. Western countries led by the United States were quick to impose various sanctions intended to cripple Russia's economy as an attempt to

discontinue their invasion. However, instead of capitulating to the demands of the western countries, Russia enacted certain retaliatory measures as a response to the western sanctions. This manoeuvre suggested Russia's determination to persist in their invasion and it was certainly detrimental not only to the western countries and Russia but most specifically to Ukraine. Given the dire situation in which the Ukrainians found themselves, the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy managed to solicit more support from other countries of the world particularly the western allies through a historic address delivered to the UK parliaments at the House of Commons via video link (The Guardian, 2022). Through his speech titled *Thirteen Days of Struggles*, Zelenskiy narrated not only the early days of the Russian invasion but more strongly emphasized the perseverance of the Ukrainians in the face of the cruelty of the Russian invasion, the portrayal of Russia as the antagonist of the narrative and the obligation of the western to intervene by sending a supply of weapons and imposing more sanctions of Russia. Zelenskiy's speech that lasted over nine minutes culminated in a standing ovation from the audience of the UK House of Commons and it implied the accomplishment of Zelenskiy's oratory competence to move his audience and lead them to see the reality the way he intended them to.

Zelenskiy's political address piqued the interest of the researcher to conduct a linguistic investigation in light of CDA. The nature of political language replete with opaqueness and complexity of language aiming at gaining control, influence and power coincides with the need for a close CDA investigation. Hence, it is apparent that in the said investigation there are factors to be considered such as Zelenskiy's choice of words, sentence structure, and the social context in which the speech was produced, distributed and consumed in order to look beyond the existing discourse and identify the presence of power battle relationship. Such focus of the investigation is inevitable due to the fact that every word Zelenskiy selected, every sentence he constructed and the narrative he wove in his speech was meant to influence and thereby gain support from his audience. Hence, given the key concern of CDA to analyze the way individuals and institutions use language in relation to power, dominance and control (Richardson, 2007), Zelenskiy's political address to the UK parliament serves as a perfect object of this research study.

## METHOD

This study deals closely with the word choice, language strategies and meanings, this study applied a qualitative method whose focus involves the textual data, using Fairclough's (1993) 3D model of Critical Discourse Analysis (Ary, et al., 2010). The option for Fairclough's 3D model ensures a systematic approach to identifying power dynamics and ideological influences through linguistics analysis of vocabulary, grammar and textual structures. The primary data comprise the transcript of Volodymyr Zelenskiy's speech to the UK Parliament, retrieved from The Guardian. Data collection involved categorizing textual elements according to CDA's three dimensions: text analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. Consequently, Therefore, applying the aforementioned method will certainly offer a theoretical lens and an explanatory investigation in analysing the data.

The main data of this study is the speech transcription of president Volodymyr Zelenskiy retrieved from official site of The Guardian published on Tuesday, March 8, 2022. This study adopted the data collection techniques proposed by Ary et al. (2010) that consist of document analysis, interview and observation. In light of the nature of this study, a document analysis was selected to facilitate the data collection process. There were three steps in data collection process such as retrieving the speech transcription, collecting the textual data relevant to the analysis from the speech and categorising the aforementioned data according to Fairclough's 3D model of CDA to indicate the manifestation of power dynamics.

## FINDINGS

The findings of this study centre on two primary objectives namely identifying the roles of textual, discursive practice and social practice dimensions in Volodymyr Zelenskiy's speech and discovering how the textual, discursive practice and social practice dimensions constructed to represent power within the context of power dynamics in Volodymyr Zelenskiy's speech.

### The Roles of Textual, Discursive Practice and Social Practice Dimensions

#### a. Textual Dimension

The focus of textual dimension analysis is to identify the use of word choice and certain language features within the speech. In that light, the results of the study indicate the existence of such linguistic manoeuvres with the intention of influencing the behaviour of the audience and thereby gaining control over them. Hence, the findings of this study are presented with two primary focuses such as the word choice and the use of language strategies. In terms of textual dimension, several linguistic strategies were employed by Zelenskiy in his address to the UK parliament such as *word choice, identification, idiomatic expression, metaphor, repetition, historical reference, moral framing and humility appeal*.

Strategy	Example from speech	Function
Word Choice	<i>"I am addressing you as a citizen, as a president, of also a big country, with a dream and big effort."</i>	President Volodymyr Zelenskiy placed himself humbly as a citizen; the person that every national leader should strive to serve and further emphasis on a dream and big effort evidently aims to solicit the empathy from his audience.
	<i>"I would like to tell you about the 13 days of war, the war that we didn't start and we didn't want."</i>	The expression of the war that we didn't start and we didn't want was chosen by president Volodymyr Zelenskiy to emphasize the innocence of Ukraine.
	<i>"Just the same way you once didn't want to lose your country when the Nazis started to fight your country and you had to fight for Britain."</i>	President Volodymyr Zelenskiy stressed the similarity of the current situation faced by his country Ukraine with the circumstance the UK had to deal with when they faced the Nazis. Therefore, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy both justified and lauded the Ukrainians' determination to keep fighting for their country because such action is what his audience would have done also.
Identification	<i>"I would like to tell you about the 13 days of war, the war that we didn't start and we didn't want. However, we have to conduct this war; we do not want to lose what we have, what is ours, our country Ukraine."</i>	By switching the pronoun I to we, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy attempted to establish a sense of emotional closeness with his audience. Hence, the story contained in the speech is not simply his story of all the Ukrainians but rather a story that also belongs to his audience.

<b>Idiomatic Expression</b>	<i>“On day 10, the Ukrainians started protesting and stopping the armoured vehicles <b>with their own hands</b>.”</i>	President Volodymyr Zelenskiy employed an idiomatic expression to give a hyperbolic touch in this part of the speech. Hence, with a considerable degree of exaggeration, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy wished to tell his audience that the Ukrainians do not have anything even the weapons to fight against the force of the Russian army.
<b>Metaphor</b>	<i>“On day 11, the children and cities were being hit and hospitals as well with the rockets and constant shelling, and on that day we realized that <b>Ukrainians became heroes, entire cities, children, and adults</b>.”</i>	President Volodymyr Zelenskiy applied metaphor in this part of the speech where he likened the Ukrainians to heroes. The universal concept of a hero refers to a person who sacrifices his life for the sake of others. Furthermore, taking into consideration the context of the war in Ukraine, this metaphor of heroes delineates clearly the victims (Ukrainians) and the oppressors (Russians).
<b>Repetition</b>	<i>“We’re thankful for this help and I’m very grateful to you Boris, please increase the pressure of sanctions against this country (Russia), please recognize this country as a terrorist state and please make sure our Ukrainian skies are safe. Please make sure you do what needs to be done and what is stipulated by the greatness of your country.”</i>	President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in this part of the speech uses the language strategy of repetition again. The application of such language strategy aims to develop an interpersonal engagement with the audience and considering the word please that is repeated four times implies the great necessity and urgency on the part of the Ukrainians as represented by the president himself. Each please echoes a call for help from the audience to take the necessary steps.
<b>Identification and Repetition</b>	<i>“We will fight until the end, at sea, in the air. We will continue fighting for our land, whatever the cost.”</i>  <i>“We will fight in the forests, in the fields, on the shores, in the streets.”</i>	There are two language strategies used by president Volodymyr Zelenskiy in this part of his speech such as identification and repetition. The use of identification can be seen in the pronoun we in this speech. Whereas repetition is evident in the reiteration of several phrases and expressions. The combination of both language strategies implies that President Volodymyr Zelenskiy sought to develop an emotional closeness with his audience and after achieving such closeness, he proceeded to increase such personal engagement even further by means of repetition.



**b. Discursive Practice Dimension**

The focused analysis in the dimension of discursive practice includes the textual level in terms of its production, consumption and the distribution of the speech itself. Consequently, the analysis results of the dimension of discursive practice reveal the production process of the speech including the personal stance of the president Volodymyr Zelenskiy himself as the addresser, the consumption aspect of the speech that refers to the audience of the speech and their circumstance and knowledge and the distribution concern that investigates the manner through which the speech is delivered and spread. The results of the analysis of the dimension of discursive practice are as follows:

**i. Production of Speech**

In terms of the production of the speech, it is evident that the form of the discourse is an oral form; a speech delivered by the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy. From the previous textual dimension analysis, it can be inferred there was a few key themes that underlined the core of his speech and by extension his personal stance. The brutal war inflicted on the Ukrainians by the Russians, the resilience and sacrifice of the Ukrainians, as well as the urgent need for military aid and accountability of the Russians, serve as the fundamental themes of the production of the speech delivered by Volodymyr Zelenskiy. In addition, the inclusion of the excerpts from the speech of the former British prime minister Winston Churchill sought to emphasize the patriotic sentiment of the speech deeply relevant to the audience who were mostly British.

**ii. Consumption of Speech**

While the production of the speech deals mainly with the author of the speech himself and in this case president Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the consumption of the speech evidently deals with the target audience of the speech and in this case the British members of parliament. The story shared in the speech was aimed specifically at British parliament members and the indication of such intent is evident in president Volodymyr Zelenskiy's quoting the excerpts from the speech of Winston Churchill. Such excerpts highlighted the resilience of the British and their patriotism against the Nazis and now such sentiments were reawakened to help the Ukrainians in their war against the Russians.

**iii. Distribution of Speech**

The speech was delivered by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy via a video to the UK parliament members and furthermore, such speech was transcribed and then published in The Guardian; a distinguished daily newspaper based in the UK. The speech is available online and it implies its availability worldwide. Hence, such distribution of the speech ensures its immediate access to anyone around the world.

**c. Social Practice Dimension**

The dimension of social practice focuses on the layers of underlying power relations and the presumed ideologies or norms present in the speech. It, therefore, follows that in identifying the underlying power relations and upheld ideologies or norms in the speech, the power dynamics that shaped the production of both the textual dimension and dimension of discursive practice will be evident. Hence, the results of this analysis provide insights into the power dynamics and the accepted ideologies or norms upheld not only by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy but also by the general audience.

Example from the speech	Function
<p><i>“Mr Speaker, all the members of parliament, ladies and gentlemen, I am addressing all the people of the United Kingdom and all the people from the country with a big history.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am addressing you as a citizen, as a president, of also a big country, with a dream and big effort.”</i></p>	<p>President Volodymyr Zelenskiy began his speech by addressing not only the UK parliament members present at the moment but also the entire UK citizens. In that light, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy upheld the value of respect that he showed to the UK as both his audience and guest. He then proceeded to emphasize another value of equality in considering himself first as a citizen who, like all the world's citizens, who has dreams and strives to realize them.</p>
<p><i>“I would like to tell you about the 13 days of war, the war that we didn’t start and we didn’t want. However, we have to conduct this war; we do not want to lose what we have, what is ours, our country Ukraine.”</i></p> <p><i>“Just the same way you once didn’t want to lose your country when the Nazis started to fight your country and you had to fight for Britain.”</i></p>	<p>President Volodymyr Zelenskiy emphasized the general patriotism of every citizen to defend their country against the war threat of the enemy. Consequently, he shed some light on the ongoing Russian attack on the Ukrainians. He, furthermore, reminded his audience the British of their similar patriotism in defending their country against the Nazis. Hence, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy hinted at the necessity of his audience to help the Ukrainians in upholding the norm of patriotism.</p>
<p><i>“On day five, the terror against us took place against children, against cities, and constant shelling has been taking place around the country, including hospitals, and that didn’t break us, and that gave us feeling of big truth.”</i></p> <p><i>“On day six, the Russian rockets fell on Babi Yar – that is the place where the Nazis killed thousands of people during the second world war – and 80 years after the Russians hit at them for the second time, and even churches are getting destroyed by shelling.”</i></p>	<p>President Volodymyr Zelenskiy emphasized again the horrific terror of war against innocent people, against humanity. In addition, he also compared such terror with the brutality of the Nazis in attacking Babi Yar; a place currently under attack by the Russian forces. The emphasis on the sentiment of crime against humanity and the mention of the Nazis aim to reawaken the horrific impact of a brutal war on innocent people.</p>

### The construction of Textual, Discursive Practice and Social Practice Dimensions to Represent Power

#### a. Textual Dimension

The second and last objective of this research fundamentally deals with how language can be utilized to influence and obtain power over others. In that light, Fairclough’s 3D model of CDA provided an intensive analysis of how certain textual strategies can be used to not only influence others but also reinforce the existing norms, ideologies and even values upheld by the people or rather the listeners in this case. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy used such textual strategies in his

speech in order to influence his audience to see the reality of war in Ukraine the way he expected and to convince his British audience they have the similar norms, ideologies and values that have come under threat with the constant attack by the Russians. The textual dimension analysis of the speech indicates that there were certain words used specifically in the speech to induce certain effects and sentiments from the audience. Aside from the choice of words, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy also employed certain language strategies to emphasize and describe certain events from the narrative of his speech. The application of such word choice and language strategies allows President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to narrate the horrific experience of the Ukrainians in this war with a greater sentimental effect on his audience. In addition, such application also ensures the Ukrainians of the military aid from the UK and an impending sanctions as well as accountability from the Russians due to this war.

Hence, the relation of power dynamics is palpably present in the speech delivered by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy before the UK parliament members and language plays a significant role in such power dynamics. Hence, the dormant potential of language in influencing the behaviour of others and thereby gaining control and power over them should be noted. The speech delivered by president Volodymyr Zelenskiy earned him not only support from the UK parliament members and the UK in general. In fact, the carefully worded values, norms and ideologies he included in his speech earned him sympathy and solidarity from people worldwide. Language helped him accomplish such a goal and language brings all the people with the same values, norms and ideologies to fight together.

b. Discursive Practice Dimension

Prior to analysing the strategy used to employ discursive dimension relating to power dynamics, it is worth noting that there are three important factors crucial to discursive practice dimension such as the production, consumption and distribution of the speech. As previously explained, the aforementioned factors deal closely with the author and form of the speech, audience and manner in which a speech is spread, respectively. In light of Volodymyr Zelenskiy's speech, it is evident that the underlying objectives of his speech are gaining the support from the UK parliament members and demand an urgent accountability from Russia for committing the war in Ukraine. Hence, the strategy constructed in discursive practice dimension solely aims to achieve such objectives.

In terms of speech production, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy delivered his speech orally aiming to give more rhetorical impact on the UK parliament members as the audience. Consequently, it implies that there is a stark difference between an oral and written text when the impact on the audience is taken into consideration. Furthermore, as the author of the speech, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy attempted to align his values with those of the UK parliament members as his audience. Such approach evidently refers to the consumption of the text as it deals with the upheld values and attitudes of the audience because language, seen in light of power dynamics, attempts to influence them for the benefit of its user. The content of Volodymyr Zelenskiy's speech written specifically with the intention to influence the attitude by touching on the values of his audience, in this case the UK parliament members. The strategy he employed was quoting the excerpts from the speech of the former UK prime minister Winston Churchill which emphasized the importance of resilience and patriotism in the face of the Nazi's aggression in order to suggest the necessary steps to address the ongoing war conflict in Ukraine. Lastly, in terms of distribution of the speech, the speech was delivered through a video and further published by a The Guardian, a UK based daily newspaper. The reputation of such renown daily newspaper



ensures a worldwide reach of Volodymyr Zelenskiy's speech and given the common values he emphasized in his speech, it is likely that his speech will gain even larger support.

c. Social Practice Dimension

Social practice dimension is the largest dimension of all the three dimensions such as textual and social practice. Consequently, it possesses an encompassing dimension that influences the other two dimensions and shape a certain text produced. It deals with the discourse at work and it dictates the course of power dynamics. Hence, identifying the key factors of social practice dimension allows us to understand both the discourse at work and fundamental values that shape a certain text.

In the attempt to identify social practice dimension strategy employed in the speech, it is crucial to always bear in mind the primary objectives of the speech delivered by Volodymyr Zelenskiy namely gaining the support from the UK parliament members and demanding Russia accountability for the war they initiated in Ukraine. Such objectives provide a clearer understanding of how Volodymyr Zelenskiy utilized social practice dimension strategy to influence and thereby, gaining power over his audience. Hence, the social practice dimension strategy employed by Volodymyr Zelenskiy in his speech becomes apparent. In terms of demanding Russia accountability, Volodymyr Zelenskiy painted them as the culprit by emphasizing the notion of crime against of humanity, cruelty of war and even likened them to the Nazis. This is the narrative that Volodymyr Zelenskiy wished his audience to see about Russia and it consequently shaped the content of his speech. Whereas in his attempt to garner support from his UK parliament member audience, Volodymyr Zelenskiy described Ukraine as the victim of this war who remain resistant in the face of the mighty force of Russia. Furthermore, he also highlighted the shared values that deeply resonate with his audience such patriotism, equality and value of humanity. Hence, by applying such social practice dimension strategy, Volodymyr Zelenskiy shaped the discourse of the war between Russia and Ukraine where Russia is portrayed as the culprit assailing the core value of humanity and Ukraine, on the other hand, is depicted as the victim that continues fighting for such core human value.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the powerful role of language in constructing political realities and influencing public perception, particularly in times of conflict. Through Zelenskiy's speech, it becomes evident that textual choices, discursive framing, and social narratives work together to mobilize support and define moral alignments. These findings underscore the importance of critical language awareness in both media consumption and political communication studies.

It is worth the consideration that even though language indubitably has the potential to afford its user power and influence over others, certain language strategies should be taken into account to realize such power. There are things to consider in using language to influence others and obtain power over them such as the strategic choice of words, certain language strategies, the social circumstances, general values upheld by the listeners or readers and the common historical background. In short, in order to put employ language in its full potential in relation to power, a comprehensive understanding of the strategies of textual, discursive practice and social practice dimensions is necessary.

The use of such strategies is evident in the speech delivered by Volodymyr Zelenskiy wherein he utilized such strategy sufficiently in order to gain support from the UK parliament members and demand Russia accountability. In terms of textual dimension strategy, Volodymyr Zelenskiy made use of certain word-choice and language strategies to move and influence his

audience and consequently, the narrative of his speech deeply resonated with his audience and thereby, gaining their sympathy. Whereas for discursive practice dimension strategy, Volodymyr Zelenskiy made a good use of all the three aspects of the discursive practice dimension. In terms of production of the speech, he emphasized himself as the author of the speech who shared similar values with the UK parliament members as his audience and thereby establishing a connection with them. In that regard, the consumption of the speech was efficiently executed because in emphasizing their shared values, Volodymyr Zelenskiy easily influenced them and gained their support and even larger support as the speech itself was published on a prestigious daily newspaper based in UK (distribution of the speech). In the last strategy of social practice dimension that underlines the discourse at work as well the underlying upheld values shaping his speech. Hence, by applying such strategy, Volodymyr Zelenskiy shaped the discourse of the war between Russia and Ukraine where Russia is portrayed as the culprit assailing the core value of humanity and Ukraine, on the other hand, is depicted as the victim that continues fighting for such core human value.

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