Text as Constitutive of Social Reality: The Case of the Inaugural Speech of the 9th Vice Chancellor of the National University of Lesotho

B. Ekanjume - Ilongo, R. Thuube

National University of Lesotho, Department of English

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at speeches as a generic form of discourse which employs persuasive linguistic and textual strategies to establish a common understanding with the audience. Taking a critical discourse analysis perspective, the paper analyses the inaugural speech of the 9th Vice Chancellor of NUL to determine the ways in which linguistic resources are discursively used to construct social reality. The analysis considered the textual features of the speech in relation to both micro- and macro-level goals of academic or institutional discourse. The discursive patterns reflected in the address were analysed following the linguistic and communicative resources the VC deployed to persuade his audience as well as to guide them towards a commonly shared vision. It is argued in this paper that the Vice Chancellor uses specific linguistic strategies to convey his ideas of obligations, morality and his views of the future of the National University of Lesotho.

Keywords: text, social reality, critical discourse analysis, speech, textual representations

INTRODUCTION

Public speeches are delivered orally, and are often well-prepared in writing and presented on formal occasions (Feng and Liu, 2010). Based on the functions and contents, an inaugural speech is a kind of public speech with purposes that tries to influence a certain group of people. Inaugural speeches are precisely the first speeches presented by people occupying leadership positions. Such speeches often serve as a major means of appealing to people after a major selection, election, or appointment is announced or confirmed, as is the case of the inaugural speech of the 9th Vice Chancellor of NUL. The presentation of inaugural speeches further serves as a diplomatic means of selling new leadership ideas to the people. It can also be referred to as "Acceptance Speech". According to Ayeomoni (2007), an inaugural speech is equally regarded as a Maiden Speech.

A speech cannot be made without the use of language. Language is distinctively a human phenomenon. As Akinkurolere (2013) argues, language is the best gift to man and it is as old as man himself. It is very obvious that the society at large depends so much on language for its continual existence. Once an individual acquires a language, it becomes the greatest tool in his or her existence as a social being as they can use it to deliver speeches of various nature, including an official speech like the one of the VC.

According to Fairclough (2003), official speeches are regarded as the most important textual representations which are constitutive of social reality. This paper looks at the VC's speech as a generic form of discourse which employs persuasive linguistic and textual strategies to establish a common understanding with the audience. It analyses the linguistic and textual data extracted from the inaugural speech of the VC to determine the ways in which he uses linguistic resources discursively to construct social reality. The discursive patterns reflected in the VC's inaugural address were analysed in light of the linguistic and communicative resources which he deployed in order to persuade the members of his audience as well as to guide them towards a commonly shared vision.

Address for correspondence:

b.ekanjume@nul.ls

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main aim of this study was to investigate the ways in which the 9th Vice Chancellor of NUL discursively employed particular linguistic expressions in his inaugural speech to construct meaning as well as to establish the nexus between the socio-political and economic circumstances surrounding the country and their impact on institutional realities of the NUL. The study shows how the CDA framework can be used to reflect the complex interplay between textual features and other wider social and contextual factors, which are linguistically employed by the speaker to shape social meaning (Fairclough, 2003). The CDA is also used in this study to show how the VC's strategically manipulates specific linguistic and rhetorical devices to underscore the need to re-construct institutional ideology for the future of NUL through the persuasive discourse of his inaugural address (Cockroft & Cockroft: 1992; Fairclough, 1996 and Flowerdew, 2002).

Moreover, the critical discourse analytic framework (CDA) to linguistic and textual analysis of the NUL's 9th Vice Chancellor's inaugural speech takes into account institutional (academic) discourse as the speaker's strategy for constructing social reality (Fairclough, 2003). A study by Byram (2010) used the approach of CDA to explore the dialectic between language and social reality and the critical role played by the former in the construction of the latter. To highlight the role played by language in creating social reality, Byram (2010: 23) states, "(t)he way we perceive language is the foundation of our social construction and individual or group relationships, ….." Through a detailed analysis of the political speech of Eldorgan, the Turkish Prime Minister, Byram's study found that the former's speech is a political discourse that embodies various contextual sources such as cultural, political and social identities reflected through linguistic expressions (.

The CDA approach is important in reflecting the ways in which linguistic forms are discursively employed by speakers to create new or alternative forms of social reality through coherently organised texts (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). According to Goffman (as cited in), the manner in which an individual linguistically constructs or "frames…an activity organises meaning and prescribes a normative type of behaviour for the participants" (1986:22-23). From Goffman's argument in the quotation above, it is clear that in public discourse, speakers strategically use texts (oral or written) essentially as representations of both individual and collective identities, which are filtered through linguistic form(s).In the same manner, a study by Van Dijk (2004) shows that texts are a by-product of wider social and cultural realities. It is clear from the foregoing discussion that texts (oral or written) are representations of linguistic structures which are coherently built to mirror macro-level social realities. Van Dijk (2006a; Foucault, 1986 and Fairclough, 1989). According Shoeb (2008), CDA plays an important role in the establishment and legitimization of language and institutional actions. He states, "CDA posits that text and context mirror each other" (Shoeb, 2008, p. ii).

Furthermore, two more studies analysed the persuasive strategies used by the former US President, Bush's political speeches which sought to outline the relationship between the US and China. In presenting the nature and character of discursive and persuasive strategies used by Bush, Li and Xiao (2002) and Meng and Hu (2002) draw on the theoretical framework to analyse Bush's political speeches in China. On the one hand, Li and Xiao's study found that the speaker heavily relied on persuasive strategies to influence the future course of action between the two countries. On the other hand, Meng and Hu's study studied the same political speech by Bush from the point of view of the audience rather than the speaker. That is, they studied the ways in which the Chinese audience reacted to Bush's persuasive text. They found that language plays a major role in the discursive construction of social realities.

In sum, this study adopted the CDA perspective in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the complex and dynamic association between the micro-level linguistic features of the VC's oral text and the ways in which it has been discursively organized to reproduce and account for the macro-level institutional realities of NUL as an academic institution. That is, the macro-level purpose(s) of the NUL's 9th Vice Chancellor's inaugural speech are revealed through the linguistic analysis of the VC's oral text. Additionally, the rationale behind adopting the CDA perspective is primarily to show how the speaker discursively employed specific linguistic resources in his inaugural address to demonstrate the ways in which prevailing socio-political and economic realities of the country in general routinely affect and shape the micro-level institutional realities of the NUL (cf. Ricento, 2003 and Schäffner, 1996). Lastly, this study used the CDA approach to demonstrate how the textual

analysis of the VC's speech reflected the ways in which the speaker discursively employed various linguistic devices as strategies to persuade his audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Apart from the use of personal pronouns to construct identity and social reality, research has shown that public speakers also strategically use other linguistic resources to establish some connection with their audience. Jespersen (1992 [1924]) states that modality expresses "certain attitudes of the mind of the speaker towards the content of the … (topic)." The sections that follow discuss different types of modality in the context of political discourse.

Amongst these linguistic resources are deontic markers which are primarily used by a speaker to impose, inter alia, obligation prohibition, or even permission on the part of the listeners (Palmer, 2001; Huddleston and Pullum, 2002 and Kratzer, 1978). A study by Frawley (1992) has shown that politicians discursively construct interpersonal rapport and partnership with their audiences through the use of deontic modals which express "the imposition of a state of affairs on individuals …." (Frawley, 1992: 420). Other studies have revealed that deontic modals serve different pragmatic functions in an act of communication (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002; Frawley, 1992; Palmer, 2001). Chief among the pragmatic functions served by deontic modals are strong obligation, which is expressed by the modal verb *must*. In addition, deonticity in public communication has been found to express weak to express possibility, which is designated by the use of the modal verb *may*. The last discourse function of deontic modals is the expression of *futurity* or the prediction of the direction future event(s) might take. Frawley (1992: 424) states that "deontics always point to some upcoming state of affairs in the reference world."

Research on epistemic modality has revealed that public speakers strategically use this kind of modality to express their judgements regarding certain action, events or state of affairs (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002; Coates, 1983 and Hoye, 1997). Bybee et al. (1994: 179) state that epistemic modality "indicates the extent to which the speaker is committed to the truth of the proposition." In other words, Studies on epistemic modality show that speakers use them as linguistic resources to signal their conviction about the truthfulness of a particular proposition. For example, epistemic modality is characterized by phrases such as *"There must be…."* A study by Palmer (2001) found out that through the use of epistemic modality, speakers express their "attitude towards the truth-value or factual status of the proposition." Thus, it can be realised from the foregoing argument that public speakers express discursively use modality, among other communicative strategies, to establish rapport with the audience, to express their personal views, beliefs or convictions as well as to construct social reality.

ANALYSIS OF THE LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF THE VC'S SPEECH

Analysis of the Personal Pronoun 'I'

Immediately after his salutation address, the VC uses the personal pronoun 'I' to construct 'self' in relation to the 'others', namely, members of the audience. By using the first-person singular in "I too…," the VC discursively constructs a shared world with the members of the audience, particularly those who graduated from the NUL and its predecessors. However, his subsequent use of the personal pronoun 'I' seems to serve a different pragmatic purpose. Data further reveals that the VC's strategic use of the personal pronoun 'I' is primarily intended to signal self-reference as well as to reinforce his involvement with the topic under discussion.

1. *"I may be subjective…"*
2. *"I believe…"*
3. *"I concede…"*
4. *"I assume..."*
5. *"I would say..."*
6. *"I am fully conscious of..."*
7. *"I am equally alive to the hurdles..."*
8. *"I know..."*

Analysis of the Second-Person Pronoun 'Your'

Data for this study demonstrate that public speakers discursively establish interpersonal rapport and solidarity with their audience by choosing the second-person pronoun 'your' in its plural form. In this instance, the VC strategically solicits the government's financial support through the use of second-person pronoun 'your' as is evidenced in the following words, "Please step up your financial support to give the University the...." The results illustrate that the VC consciously selects 'your' in order to create involvement with his audience. Again, a further examination of the data reveals that the VC strategically uses this pronoun in his speech as an involvement strategy. That is, he is persuasively seeking the government's partnership in his plans to revamp the NUL through his discursive use of the second-person pronoun 'your' as an involvement strategy.

Analysis of the use of 'we'

This study found out that the VC's strategic use of the inclusive pronouns 'we' is meant to establish communicative common ground and solidarity with his listeners. A close examination of the data further reveals that the VC's use of the inclusive pronouns 'we' is not only intended to express his stance in relation to the material being presented but it is also used for negotiating some mutual understanding with his audience. Additionally, the results generated by this study suggest that the public speakers consciously pronominal choices as a communicative strategy to do identity work as well as to express their own stance. This is achieved through the deployment of linguistic markers such as personal pronouns. Additionally, our findings show that in all these instances below, the inclusive pronoun 'we' is deliberately deployed in the VC's speech to discursively construct himself as an integral part of the in-group belonging as his audience. That is, our data reveal that the VC juxtaposes 'self' and 'other' into a single and specific group of people, namely, the academic community, thereby, simultaneously constructing his identity along with that of his audience (the NUL Community).

1. *"we shall have to pay urgent attention to .."*.
2. *"we must overcome ..."*
3. *"we call upon the private sector to.."*.
4. *"we shall work towards .."*.
5. *"As we call upon…"*
6. *"We also take it as a given that…"*
7. *"We acknowledge that…"*

Analysis of the Inclusive Possessive Pronoun 'Ourselves'

On some rare occasion, our findings further demonstrate that the VC strategically uses the inclusive pronoun 'ourselves' to include the audience in the reforms that are already taking place at the NUL. For example, the phrase *"...to inform ourselves…"* is consciously selected in the VC's speech to include the audience in the reforms that are already taking place at the NUL.

Analysis of the Inclusive Pronoun 'us'

With regard to the use of the inclusive pronoun 'us', the VC seems to have minimally made use of this linguistic strategy. Our findings also show that the use of the inclusive 'us' in the phrases above indicates the VC uses this linguistic device as a persuasive strategy to include his audience in conveying his text. Our data confirms this in the following phrases:

1. *"...all of us are employed by this institution."*

2. *"Few of us would contest the fact that…"*

Analysis of the Possessive Pronoun 'our'

Data for this study show that the use of the possessive pronoun 'our' in the VC's speech is a deliberate attempt to persuade the members of his audience to regard themselves collective as belonging to share world. That is, through the use of phrases like "our continent…," "our times…" etc., the VC strategically instils a sense of belonging in his audience by making them regard themselves as belonging the same in-group as his. The following phrases contain the possessive pronoun 'our' to illustrate this point:

1. *"...our continent..."*
2. *"...our students..."*
3. *"...our staff..."*
4. *"...our times..."*
5. *"...our compatriots..."*
6. *"...our context..."*
7. *"...our appeal..."*

Analysis of Deontic Modals

As mentioned earlier in this study, public speakers make use of a variety of linguistic resources to express, inter alia, their attitudes towards a particular proposition as well as to impose some obligation on the audience. This study found out that the VC strategically imposed some obligation on his audience through the manipulative use of deontic modals such as *must* , *shall have to* and *have to*, respectively. To illustrate this point, the discourse fragments below were extracted from the VC's speech:

1. *"...the diversity..., must include programmes..."*
2. *"NUL shall have to engage..."*
3. *"....must unapologetically lead to..."*
4. *"these programmes have to be overhauled and modernized..."*

The examples above reveal that the VC, as a public speaker, discursively induces a sense of obligation on the part of his audience as a way of providing guidance on future direction. That is, his strategic use of the deontic modals above lays down a foundation for future direction(s) for the NUL, whilst at the same time, placing the onus and collective responsibility on his hearers to partake in this newly created direction. As such, the findings above suggest that public speakers (the VC) uses deontic markers as linguistic strategy to get his listeners to align with his views as well as to make them oblige (cf. Frawley, 1992).

Analysis of Epistemic Modals

Epistemic modals are among the most frequently used linguistic strategies by means of which public speakers express their conviction or assessment of propositions in terms their truth-value or otherwise (Hoye, 1997). The results for this study have demonstrated that the VC discursively constructed *futurity* through his strategic deployment of the following epistemic modals:

1. *"Will' as in "NUL will be unequivocal in its..."*
2. *"NUL will aim to double its enrolments..."*
3. *"We shall target between 10 to 15 % of our enrolments..."*

 Analysis of the data shows that the VC consciously includes epistemic modals during his oral official presentation as the linguistic resources aimed to enable him to talk about, as well as to project, future time or events. Additionally, analysis of the data reveals that the use of epistemic markers reflects the speaker's stance towards particular states of affairs and the need to move away from the status quo. To this end, the results of this study suggest that epistemic markers are among the most frequently used discourse strategies by public speakers not only for expressing their personal judgments regarding a particular state of affairs but also for making future projections. Thus, epistemic modals have been found in this study to signal *futurity* as supported by the findings above.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

From the findings of this study, it can be seen that personal pronouns do not merely serve the *pointing* function as deictic reference as was generally argued by traditional grammarians. On the contrary, the study found out that personal pronouns can also be used in public discourse to strategically establish "*self*" and *"other"* identity as evidenced in the 9th Vice Chancellor's inaugural speech. Analysis of the data further suggests that the VC's choice of personal pronouns is intended to create interpersonal rapport with his listeners.

Additionally, the findings generated by this study further show that public speakers discursively construct reality through the use of epistemic modals. As indicated in the previous sections of this study, epistemic modality is generally used to predict the chances of occurrence for a certain side effect. Thus, in persuading his audience, the VC strategically uses both epistemic modality and deonticity such as *"will"* and *"must"* in order to make predictions as well as judgements about the future occurrences at NUL (through the use of epistemic markers) as well as to place some obligation on the part of his listeners (through the use of deontic markers). On the basis of these findings, the study shows that public speakers use linguistic markers such as pronominal choice, epistemic modality and deonticity to construct social reality during an act of communication.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to elucidate implicit statements in the language of the NUL 9th Vice Chancellor inaugural speech. The method of analysis was to identify expressions where linguistic choices seem to have been made in order to convey certain views. The paper has shown the strategies of persuasion which the NUL 9th Vice Chancellor used to impose certain moral and ethical values and obligations on his audience.

The findings of this paper reveal that the VC's oral text deliberately drew on ideologically-driven discourse strategies that sought to present the NUL's position vis-à-vis her sister universities around the world by evaluating her past achievements and future endeavours. The study found that the linguistic and discursive strategies used in the text were speech acts which sought to position the role of NUL in addressing both micro- and macro-level socio-political and institutional realities. The study found that the VC's inaugural address was presented as a coherently organized text constitutive of social reality. The analysis of the text further revealed that the VC's speech achieved this in terms of the ways in which the meanings it generated and discursively sought to construct collective identities, a shared institutional vision, orientation to joint policy-making, as well as to establish the nexus between the internal and external realities of NUL.

The conclusion to be drawn from this paper is that it is important to be aware of how various public speakers make use of linguistic strategies in order to convince an audience of what they consider to be the best in any context or situation.

REFERENCES

Akinkurolere Susan Olajoke (2015). A Lexical Analysis of an Inaugural Speech of the Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly in Nigeria. Journal of Language Teaching and Research Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 258-264

Brown, Roger and Gilman, Albert (1960). "The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity". In P.P. Gilioli (Ed.) *Language and Social Context* (pp. 252-282). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.

Bybee, J. and S. Fleischman (1995). "Modality in Grammar and Discourse". In J. Bybee and S. Fleischman (Eds.) *Modality in Grammar and Discourse*, 1-15. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Chen, Shu-Hsin (2000). *Personal Pronouns in Political Discourse: A Study of the 1998 Taipei Mayoral Debates*. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Graduate Institute of Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan.

Chilton, P. and Schaffer, C. (1997) *Discourse and Politics* . In T. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction. Vol. 2* .London: Sage , 206 31.

Coates, J. (1983). *The Semantics Modal Auxiliaries*. London and Canberra: Croom Helm.

De Fina, Anna (1995). "Pronominal Choice, Identity, and Solidarity in Political Discourse". *Text* 15 (3): 379-410.

Flowerdew, John (1997). "The Discourse of Colonial Withdrawal: A Case Study in the Creation of Mythic Discourse". *Discourse & Society* 8 (4): 453-477.

Frawley, W. (1992). *Linguistic Semantics*. New Jersey: LEA Publishers.

Hao Feng and Yuhui Liu (2010). Analysis of Interpersonal Meaning in Public Speeches—A Case Study of Obama's Speech. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 1, No. 6, pp. 825-829

Hoye, L. (1997). *Adverbials and Modalityb in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huddleston, R. and G. K. Pullum (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Iñigo-Mora, Isabel (2004). "On the Use of the Personal Pronoun *"we"* in Communities". *Journal of Language and Politics* 3 (1): 27-52.

Jespersen, O. (1992 [1924]). *The Philosophy of Grammar*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Katagawa, Chisato and Lehrer, Adrienne (1990). "Impersonal Uses of Personal Pronouns". *Journal of Pragmatics* 14: 739-759.

Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pennycook, Alastair (1994). "The Politics of Pronouns". *ELT Journal* 48 (2): 173-178.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY

Prof. Beatrice Ekanjume-Ilongo, did her tertiary education at the University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon where she obtained a PhD in Linguistics in 2006. She is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the National University of Lesotho. She has previously worked in the universities of Yaounde 1, Cameroon and Burundi. Her research interests include Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Sociolinguistics, African Linguistics, Error Analysis, Onomastics, Communication and Pragmatics. She has published in several accredited and refereed journals, and also a book on Phonology and another on Phonetics.

Dr R. M. Thuube, obtained a PhD in English Language and Linguistics in 2012 at the National University of Lesotho where he is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of English. He has been the Head of the Communications and Studies Skills Unit, and is currently the acting Head of the English Department. He has published in refereed journals and is currently working on several research projects.