

# Navigating the Complex Terrain of Political Discourse: A Multidimensional Review and Future Pathways

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## Abstract

This paper offers an exhaustive review of political discourse studies, emphasizing its multifaceted nature by exploring four primary perspectives: pragmatics-oriented linguistics, critical discourse analysis, cognitive processes, and cultural and rhetorical influences. Beginning with a delineation of political discourse, the paper retroactively delves into prior research from these perspectives, highlighting the advancements in understanding political discourse's complex nature. Despite these advancements, notable gaps persist in the literature. This study's significance lies in its synthesis of major political discourse research, underscoring the multidimensionality of the subject, pinpointing existing research voids, and advocating for future studies that merge theoretical insights with real-world implications. To further the comprehension of political discourse in a dynamic sociopolitical landscape, upcoming research endeavors should champion interdisciplinary collaborations and embrace innovative methodologies.

**Keywords:** Political Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (Cda), Pragmatics In Politics, Cognitive Processes In Politics, Cultural Rhetoric

## Introduction

With the rise of critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis (hereafter referred to as CDA) in the 1980s and 1990s, political discourse emerged as a distinct genre (Bull & Simon-Vandenberg, 2019; Chilton, 2003, 2005, 2017; Mikhailovna, 2014; Mustafinova & Nurseitova, 2013; Kakisina et al., 2022; Randour et al., 2020; Sardoč & Wodak, 2023; You & Chen, 2008; Lakoff, 1990). For proponents of critical discourse analysis, all discourse is inherently political, with underlying power dynamics at play (Wilson, 2008, p. 398). However,

scholars recognize that while most discourses are political to some extent, certain discourses are particularly linked to politics in real-life and the study of politics. van Dijk (2001) suggests that political discourse should be narrowly defined as directly related to the political process and behaviors of political leaders. Conversely, the fate of ordinary people is influenced by unequal power dynamics and ideological battles embedded in institutionalized political practices, which are heavily influenced by policies and ideologies (Aina et al., 2022, Cairney, 2021; Chilton, 2017; Swinkels, 2020). Within this context, political discourse has the potential to significantly impact world security and peace, making its study crucial from multiple perspectives.

This paper centers on the study of political discourse from four key perspectives: the pragmatics-oriented linguistic perspective, the CDA perspective, the cognitive perspective, and the cultural and rhetorical perspective. Firstly, it provides an overview of the concept of political discourse. Secondly, it reviews previous studies on political discourse conducted from the aforementioned perspectives. Lastly, it identifies the existing gaps in the current body of literature. The objective of this work is to offer a comprehensive understanding of political discourse studies, presenting the latest advancements and highlighting areas that require further research. By addressing these research gaps, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing development of political discourse analysis and foster deeper insights into this crucial aspect of political communication.

### **Concept of Political Discourse**

When delving into the analysis of political discourse, the first crucial consideration lies in defining the term "political discourse". The word "discourse" originates from the Latin "discursus" and is primarily a linguistic term. In the context of politics, political discourse entails the language used within political settings. However, due to diverse interpretations of politics across social science, politics, economy, and linguistics, there is no universally agreed-upon definition for political discourse.

In a broad sense, the term is often associated with the intersection of politics and language. Conversely, a narrower perspective interprets political discourse as "an act of communication used in formal or non-formal political contexts that relates to, deals with, or describes any political event, organization, or actor" (Mátyás, 2015, p. 140). Additionally, van Dijk (1997) defines political discourse as functional political activity within the political process. It encompasses all forms of political contexts generated by political actors, including political advertisements, regulations, policies, laws, government-issued bills, party platforms, documents from other agencies, political elections, political speeches, parliamentary debates, media interviews with political leaders, political talk shows, and government news conferences.

To maintain a focused scope for this research, it is imperative to delineate political discourse as the discourse of political figures on political occasions. This excludes instances of non-political figures engaging in political discourse, such as student parades and worker strikes on political occasions, as well as political figures conversing in non-political contexts, such as their everyday conversations. By establishing this delineation, we ensure a more precise and targeted exploration of political discourse and its specific impact within political contexts.

### **Methodology**

The present literature review explores the complex domain of political discourse, analyzing it from four interconnected viewpoints: the linguistic perspective focused on pragmatics, the

perspective guided by CDA, the cognitive perspective, and the cultural and rhetorical views. The inclusion of studies examined within each perspective was determined by their significant contributions to the development of the academic conversation on political discourse, with a focus on both seminal works and more recent advancements. The selection of these four views is intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of political discourse, emphasizing its complex nature and the diverse factors that shape it.

### **Studies on Political Discourse from Four Perspectives**

Political discourse manifests in a myriad of forms, from political advertisements, parliamentary debates, and election speeches to government regulations, policies, laws, press conferences, institutional documents, party platforms, political talk shows, and media interviews featuring political leaders. Given this vast landscape, this section provides an in-depth exploration of the primary theoretical frameworks that have shaped the study of political discourse. These encompass the pragmatics-oriented linguistic perspective, CDA-led perspective, cognitive perspective, and the cultural and rhetorical perspectives.

#### ***Pragmatics-oriented Perspective***

Political discourse, with roots in ancient Greek political rhetoric, has evolved significantly over the centuries. It wasn't until the 1980s, influenced by social critical theory, that linguists began to explore the power dynamics within discourse and its symbiotic relationship with society, all through the lens of language.

At the heart of this perspective lies the intricate dance between explicit and implicit meanings in language. Wilson (1990) pioneers this approach, applying pragmatic concepts to dissect political talk. His analysis illuminates the nuanced use of linguistic devices such as implicature, presuppositions, pronouns, and metaphors in political discourse, offering a comprehensive view of pragmatic strategies (Li, 2013).

Obeng and Hartford (2008) further expand on this by highlighting the role of verbal indirectness in political exchanges. Such indirectness, often driven by political motives or the need for face-saving, is a testament to the delicate balance of politeness and cultural norms in political discourse.

Chilton (2003) brings a fresh perspective by integrating Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) into political discourse analysis. He emphasized the intrinsic link between the concept of 'face' and politics, associating positive aspects with consensus and identity, and negative facets with national security (Yan Eureka Ho & Crosthwaite, 2018; Zhu, 2009). Chilton's subsequent works (2003, 2005, 2017) bridges the gap between pragmatics and critical social theory, including CDA, by extending the politeness model to cater to the diverse audiences in political communication.

Building on Chilton's foundational work, researchers like Mátyás (2015) and Taubayev (2021) delve deeper into the interplay of power, ideology, and text in political discourse. Mátyás explores the implications of these elements for translation, while Taubayev analyzes the pragmatic potential of eponym in political campaigns.

In conclusion, the pragmatics-oriented perspective offers a rich tapestry of insights into political discourse. By examining linguistic devices and their applications, researchers have deepened our understanding of the role of language in shaping political narratives and actions. This line of inquiry underscores the significance of both explicit and implicit meanings, politeness, and indirectness in the realm of political communication.

***CDA-led Perspective***

Political discourse analysis, as conceptualized by Schäffner (1997), emphasizes the profound influence of social and political frameworks on political discourse. Schäffner underscores the need for an interdisciplinary approach, advocating for comprehensive analyses that encompass social, political, and cultural dimensions. She categorizes political communication into three distinct types: internal, external, and intergovernmental political communication. Fairclough's commitment to CDA focuses on the intricate interplay between language, culture, and society. He explores the evolving discourse practices and their relationship with broader social and cultural transformations (Schäffner, 1997). Chilton and Schäffner (2002) further highlight the intrinsic connection between politics and language, asserting that discourse studies offer fresh perspectives to enhance our understanding of political dynamics.

Consider the analysis of a political campaign in which power structures, ideologies, and social inequities are clearly visible. Analyzing a campaign that advocates a contentious policy decision, for example, can expose underlying power dynamics and beliefs. CDA can be used to detect minor linguistic decisions that favor one group over another, exposing fundamental biases and power inequalities.

The CDA paradigm has been extensively applied in analyzing ideology-mediated discourse, encompassing news and political narratives (Fetzer, 2002; Horváth, 2009; Li, 2020; Breeze, 2013; Teo, 2000; van Dijk, 2001). Teo (2000) offers a critical examination of racist discourse in newspaper reporting, highlighting the power imbalances between racist offenders and white law enforcement. Fetzer (2002) investigates the sincerity and integrity of politicians during interviews, while van Dijk (2001) introduces an ideology theory rooted in discourse, cognition, and society.

Horváth (2009), building on Fairclough's CDA framework, analyzes the ideological structure within Obama's inaugural speech. Breeze (2013) critiques CDA and its practitioners, suggesting strategies to address criticisms. Li (2020) delves into political documentary translation within China, exploring the impact of ideo-political manipulation on subtitling practices.

The role of ideology in political discourse has been a focal point for many scholars (Abdul, 2020; Abuarrah, 2019; Butsyk, 2017; Fairclough, 1989; Li & Pan, 2021; Mullet, 2018; Wodak, 1989). While their inquiries have enriched our understanding of political discourse, the multifaceted nature of ideology means that a consensus remains elusive. Nonetheless, their contributions highlight the complexities of political discourse and the pivotal role of ideology in shaping political communication.

***Cognitive Perspective***

The cognitive perspective in political discourse analysis underscores the profound influence of knowledge, attitudes, ideology, and other cognitive factors on political communication. As van Dijk (1997) suggests, these elements play a pivotal role in shaping the communicative practices of political participants. The recent "cognitive turn" in this field, as highlighted by Chilton (2007), emphasizes the intricate relationship between political acumen and linguistic proficiency. Chilton employs cognitive methodologies to shed light on this dynamic, aiming to establish a robust theoretical framework.

Political arguments are a classic illustration of the cognitive perspective in action. Consider a heated dispute in which participants frequently use metaphors such as "building bridges" or "breaking down walls." Such metaphors, which are based on cognitive processes, have the potential to affect public perception by stressing separation and conflict or encouraging a

sense of unity and collaboration. This practical application demonstrates how the attitudes, ideologies, and knowledge of participants influence their communication.

The allure of metaphors in political discourse has garnered significant attention from scholars such as Anderson Jr. (2001), Chilton and Ilyin (1993), Li (2013), Guillem (2009), O'Halloran (2003), and Zinken (2003). Chilton and Ilyin (1993) delve into the metaphor of the "common European home," presenting a comprehensive cognitive-interactive viewpoint. Anderson Jr. (2001) adopts a diachronic method, analyzing the evolution of political discourse during Russia's transition from the Soviet Communist regime in 1993. Zinken (2003) critiques the influential cognitive theory of metaphor by Lakoff and Johnson, emphasizing the role of bodily experience in metaphor conceptualization.

Guillem (2009) champions a social cognitive and discourse approach to parliamentary debate, advocating for a thorough analysis of meta-discourse in oral settings, as echoed by Li (2013). This approach provides insights into the strategic use of language within parliamentary contexts.

Recent research endeavors, such as those by May Wong (2017) and Browse (2018), further explore the cognitive perspective, examining the behavior of social actors in political struggles and audio reactions to political discoveries. Stojan and Mijić (2019) investigate the use of conceptual metaphors by politicians from Croatia, America, and Italy, while Chilton and Kopytowska (2022) offer a cognitive-social-pragmatic approach to understanding the rise of cult politics in the age of social media.

In conclusion, the cognitive perspective has ushered in a transformative shift in political discourse studies. By examining the interplay of ideologies, attitudes, and knowledge, this perspective offers invaluable insights, enriching our understanding of political discourse and its intersection with cultural and rhetorical perspectives.

### ***Cultural and Rhetorical Perspectives***

Political discourse, when examined through the lens of cultural and rhetorical perspectives, offers a richer understanding of the diverse styles and tactics of political persuasion. These tactics are often molded by the unique governmental structures and deeply ingrained cultural traditions of a country. In India, for example, political rhetoric commonly draws on historical tales and cultural symbols to elicit feelings of nationalism and cultural pride. China's communist political discourses, on the other hand, are intimately woven with the nation's historical and cultural narratives, emphasizing themes of unity, progress, and the communal good.

Building on this, a plethora of studies, including those by Brady (2008, 2009), Kluver (1996), Lu (2002), Qin (2010), and Roffee (2016), have delved deep into Chinese and other communist political discourses. These studies have been pivotal, especially in the realm of political discourse translation. Kluver's (1996) work, for instance, seeks to demystify the rhetorical elements in politics using discourse analysis. Tian Hailong (2002) pioneers the introduction of the concept of political language specific to China, laying down a foundational framework for political linguistics. Further, Lu (2002) spotlights the infusion of traditional cultural elements in Chinese political rhetoric, drawing parallels with classical rhetorical standards that have been tailored to suit diverse political agendas.

Anne Mary Brady's interest lies in China's political image. Her qualitative study (Brady, 2008) examines Communist Party of China internal documents and interviews with informants from the publicity system, highlighting the continued and enhanced role of mass media and political persuasion in China after 1989. Qin (2010) addresses China's peaceful rise and

academic controversies, affirming China's academic prosperity from a cultural perspective, shaped by its thinking mode, dialectics, and conceptualization of human society. Roffee (2016) analyzes the rhetorical properties of political speech acts, emphasizing structured attention as essential for deeper insights into political discourse.

Interest in domestic studies of Chinese political discourse has increased as a result of recent developments in the construction of a foreign discourse system of China. Gallelli (2018) examines the metaphorical terms that President Xi Jinping deliberately uses in his talks to emphasize the distinctiveness of his rhetorical linguistic style. Brown (2022) discusses the logic and rhetoric in the political language of Xi's China based on the use of some significant government slogans, revealing that the nation is going through the same changes in public language and communication that other places (like the US or Europe) have also experienced. Research topics encompass the relationship between political discourse and culture, metaphor usage, CDA of Chinese political discourse, and external communication (Chen, 2021; Wang, D. P., 2020; Lu et al., 2019; Ren, 2018; Tameryan et al., 2018; Wen, 2014; Yuan, 2020; Chonglong, 2019; Miu, 2019; Toby Ng, 2020; Du & Zhang, 2019; Huang et al., 2014; Li & Pan, 2021; Yan, 2015). The cultural and rhetorical perspective remains an area of burgeoning exploration in the field.

Political discourse studies from a rhetorical and cultural viewpoint provide useful insights into political communication's persuasive methods and cultural impacts. Researchers investigate the complex methods that political actors employ to sway public opinion and create persuading narratives, such as metaphor and narrative structures. They also show how historical backgrounds, symbolism, and cultural values affect political discourse. Comparative studies between different social systems help us comprehend the influence of cultural variety on political discourse better. Our understanding of the intricate interactions between language, power, politics, and culture is enriched by the interdisciplinary nature of these viewpoints, which also improves our capacity to evaluate and interpret political discourse in a variety of settings.

### **Identification of Gaps of Research**

As a result of the above review of study contexts, it can be concluded that studies on political discourse have provided valuable theoretical and methodological references for this topic from the four key perspectives — pragmatics-oriented linguistics, critical discourse analysis, cognitive, and cultural and rhetorical. There are, however, several gaps in the existing literature.

Firstly, despite the fact that research has examined the pragmatic aspects of political communication, more research is needed to determine how pragmatic features influence political discourse in different sociopolitical contexts. Secondly, while the CDA-led perspective has offered insightful analyses of power relations, ideology, and social ramifications in political discourse, more research on the intersectionality of power relations and how many identities influence political language is still needed. Thirdly, while the cognitive viewpoint has advanced our knowledge of how thought and cognition function in political discourse, additional study is necessary to examine the interactions between cognitive processes and emotional and affective elements in political discourse. Fourthly, the cultural and rhetorical viewpoint has stressed the role of culture and rhetoric in molding political discourse; however, additional comparative research across many cultures and historical eras are required to fully understand the nuanced ways in which culture shapes political communication.

Other potential gaps in political discourse studies also exist in addition to the ones noted by the four main viewpoints. To understand the influence of cultural, historical, and institutional elements on political language, more comparative investigations that analyze political communication across different countries, regions, and political systems are required. A thorough examination is needed to address the expanding influence of digital political communication, and exploring multi-modal discourse analysis is also crucial to understanding how multimedia platforms affect political communication. In addition, examining the place of gender in political discourse can shed light on gender inequalities in representation and politics. Finally, further study of political discourse in non-Western settings is required to identify the distinctive communication issues and practices that emerge in authoritarian regimes, post-colonial governments, and nascent democracies.

In particular, the translation of political discourse remains comparatively limited in academic research, especially concerning overseas and domestic studies on political translation. In the case of translating Chinese political discourse, although some progress has been made since 2003, more study in this area is needed to fill the gap (Li & Pan, 2021; Mo et al., 2016). To better comprehend political discourse across linguistic and cultural boundaries, more in-depth investigations are required (Qiu, 2018; Randour et al., 2020; Yuan, 2014; Yuan & Guan, 2019).

A more complete, nuanced knowledge of the complex nature of political communication will result from filling in the aforementioned gaps, which will strengthen the area of political discourse studies. To close these gaps and increase our understanding of political discourse in a constantly shifting sociopolitical environment, future research should aim for interdisciplinary cooperation and investigate novel approaches. By addressing the complexities inherent in modern political communication, such efforts can contribute to the advancement of broader societal consequences.

## **Conclusion**

This study offers a comprehensive investigation of political discourse, analyzing it from four different perspectives: pragmatics-oriented linguistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), cognitive processes, and cultural and rhetorical factors. Our work uncovers a complex interaction between language and power relations, highlighting the various methods through which political narratives are formed and conveyed. The pragmatics-oriented approach elucidates the nuanced interaction between explicit and implicit meanings in political language, whereas the CDA-led perspective reveals the significant impact of social and political frameworks on discourse, revealing underlying power dynamics and prejudices. The cognitive viewpoint provides insights into how information, attitudes, and ideologies influence political communication, with a focus on the function of metaphors and cognitive processes. The cultural and rhetorical views emphasize the influence of cultural traditions and rhetorical strategies on political communication, especially in different sociopolitical environments such as China and India.

Although there have been notable progressions in comprehending the intricacies of political communication, our analysis reveals important deficiencies: a requirement for more detailed investigations into pragmatic characteristics within various sociopolitical environments, a more thorough examination of intersectionality in power dynamics, the incorporation of emotional and affective components in cognitive analyses, and comparative studies encompassing different cultures and historical eras. It is crucial to address these inadequacies, namely in the areas of digital political communication, gender dynamics, and non-Western

political contexts, in order to achieve a more comprehensive knowledge of political discourse. The study proposes that future research should actively participate in interdisciplinary collaborations and adopt novel approaches. The objective is to connect theoretical findings with practical implications in the changing field of global political communication.

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