

*Dialogue among Civilizations: A Critical Discourse
Analysis of Permanent Member States' Speeches at the
64th Session of the UN General Assembly*

الحوار بين الحضارات: تحليل نقدي لخطابات الدول الأعضاء
الدائمة في الدورة الرابعة والستين للجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة

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Abstract:

Since its official adoption by the UN as a counter-discourse against the Clash of Civilizations theory, Dialogue among Civilizations has emerged as a key concept in global discourse. In this regard, the aim of this paper is to conduct a critical discourse analysis of UN Permanent Member States' speeches that were delivered at the 64th session of the UNGA. It attempts to unveil the ideological underpinnings embedded in the Presidents' speeches, revealing the extent to which their discourse echoes the Dialogue among Civilizations.

To this end, this study draws upon the CDA framework of Fairclough. The findings showed that there are three key ideological underpinnings incorporated within the president's speeches and found

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that they strongly resonate with the discourse of Dialogue among Civilizations.

Key words: Dialogue among Civilizations; The United Nations; Ideological underpinnings; CDA; UN Permanent Member States.

ملخص:

منذ اعتماده رسميًا من قبل الأمم المتحدة كخطاب مضاد لنظرية هنتنغتون لصراع الحضارات، أصبح الحوار بين الحضارات مفهومًا أساسيًا في الخطاب العالمي واكتسب مناقشات واسعة النطاق على الساحة الدولية للجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة. وفي هذا الصدد، فإن الهدف من هذه الورقة البحثية هو إجراء تحليل نقدي لخطابات الدول الأعضاء الدائمة في الأمم المتحدة التي أقيمت في الدورة الرابعة والستين للجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة، كما تحاول الكشف عن الأسس الأيديولوجية المضمنة في خطابات الرؤساء، وكشف مدى تطابق خطابهم مع خطاب حوار الحضارات.

تحقيقًا لهذه الغاية، تعتمد هذه الدراسة على نظرية فيركلاف في التحليل النقدي للخطاب. كشفت النتائج أن هناك ثلاث أسس أيديولوجية رئيسية مدرجة في خطاب الرئيس، وأن لها صدى قوي مع حوار الحضارات.

كلمات مفتاحية: الحوار بين الحضارات، الامم المتحدة، الأسس الأيديولوجية، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الدول الأعضاء الدائمة في الأمم المتحدة.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The post-Cold War era saw the rise of the civilizational paradigm as a significant model of global politics. In an increasingly interconnected world, the discourse among

civilizations has played a pivotal role in shaping international relations since it was officially embraced by the United Nations. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) serves as a platform where states converge to address global issues, articulate their foreign policies, and engage in dialogue aimed at collective problem-solving. Within this forum, the political discourse of permanent members of the UNGA holds particular significance, given their influential roles in shaping international policies.

In this respect, the aim of this research paper is to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the United Nations Permanent Member States' speeches delivered by the President Barak Obama, President Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, President Nicolas Sarkozy and President Hu Jintao at the General Assembly Debate on September 23, 2009. The paper attempts to unveil the underlying ideological underpinnings of the discourse of the Dialogue among Civilizations embedded in the presidents' speeches. To this end, this study sets out to answer the following research questions: 1. What are the key ideologies that could be discerned within the presidents' discourse? 2. To what extent does the presidents' discourse resonate with the Dialogue among Civilizations discourse?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Development of Dialogue among Civilizations

Before becoming an international concern, the historical development of the Dialogue among Civilizations went through four distinct phases. The first stage occurred during the 1970s. It

was initiated by the French philosopher Roger Garaudy who is considered to be the pioneer in introducing the term of “dialogue among civilizations” in 1977. Garaudy proposed that the West should adjust its worldview, form alliances with other civilizations, and collaborate with other civilizations to create a prosperous future (Mohamad, Yusof, Salleh, & Hisham, 2017). Unfortunately, Garaudy’s proposals failed to garner attention as they were interpreted as harsh criticism against the Western world. As a result, his appeal went unanswered.

The second phase of the Dialogue among Civilizations took place in the 1990s. It marked a resurgence of the concept within the Euro-Arab context, particularly in the inaugural Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, it was eclipsed by Huntington’s theory of the Clash of Civilizations.

In September 1998, President Mohammad Khatami formally articulated the idea of Dialogue among Civilizations in his speech at the UNGA, propelling the dialogue on the global agenda. President Khatami advocated for the UN to designate 2001 as the year of Dialogue among Civilizations (Selim, 2009, p. 50). In November 1998, the UNGA adopted the resolution that recognized Khatami’s initiative, leading to the third phase of Dialogue among Civilizations.

The onset of the 21st century marked the advent of the third stage of Dialogue among Civilizations. During the 55th session of the UNGA on November 21, 2001, the UN adopted a resolution to underscore its strong commitment and shared interest in promoting globally dialogue among civilizations. The

events of 9/11 terrorist attacks, however, interrupted the program of the year of Dialogue among Civilization.

Therefore, the fourth and final phase occurred following the 9/11 attacks which elevated the Dialogue among Civilizations to a more profound level. These events fuelled desire the UN desire for Dialogue among Civilizations as a measure to prevent a recurrence of such tragedies. Secretary General Kofi Anan proclaimed the launch of the “United Nations Alliance of Civilizations” in UN Headquarters in 2005.

2.2 Understanding UN Dialogue among Civilizations

Dialogue among Civilizations has been enhanced and become a part of the fundamental structure of the United Nations. It is founded on the principles and values of cultural understanding, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. The opening sentence of the UN Alliance of Civilizations mission statements states the aims of this alliance which are “to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions, and to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism” (UNAOC, 2008 as cited in Urbain, p. 16)

Moreover, the UN resolution adopted in 2005 reiterated the main requirements that capture the discourse of the UN Dialogue among civilizations. Initially, it highlighted that all cultures and civilizations contribute to the enrichment of humankind. Therefore, cultural differences are considered as opportunities for enrichment rather than sources of conflict. Secondly, it acknowledged the importance of respect and understanding for

religious and cultural diversity worldwide. Thirdly, the resolution underlined the commitment of UN Member States to taking action to promote a culture of peace and dialogue at the local, national, regional and international levels (UN General Assembly, 2005).

These principles are enshrined in UN nations resolutions on dialogue among civilizations and through the Alliance of Civilizations for two main reasons. The primary objective is to reduce and prevent the potential for local and global conflicts and violence. In addition, promoting social cohesion and peace for a more harmonious, inclusive world (Ben-Naouar & Holilulloh, 2020, p. 40).

All in all, these are the main requirements encapsulating the discourse of the UN Dialogue among civilizations. The subsequent section delves into the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

This research paper adopts CDA as its approach. Hence, it is essential to define CDA, exploring its core concepts of discourse and ideology. Additionally, Fairclough's CDA framework is introduced in this section as this work draws upon it.

Critical Discourse Analysis is an analytical practice and a critical perspective. It is an approach to language analysis which is related to the issues of language, power and ideology (Van Dijk, 2001). The objective of CDA is to consider language as social practice. In other words, language users are not operating independently; they rather function within various social,

cultural and psychological contexts. Therefore, not only does Critical Discourse Analysis examine the relationships between textual structures, but also the connections between textual elements and their function in engaging with society (Fairclough, 2010).

Accordingly, CDA aims to understand how language is influenced by historical contexts. Thus, CDA depicts the connection between discourse and ideology, seeking to unveil the hidden ideologies within both textual and verbal communications.

Fairclough (2010) defined discourse as “language as a form of society” (p. 16). This indicates that language is integral to society and shaped by social factors. Van Dijk (2001) viewed discourse as text in context. He suggested that discourse extends beyond mere textual content to encompass its social context. Hence, crucial to discourse analysis is the significance of context.

Moreover, CDA is concerned with the issues of language and ideology. Van Dijk (2000) defined ideologies as being core beliefs held by a group and its members. In his view, there exist a close connection between politics, ideology and discourse. He asserted that political ideologies are produced by discourse. In this regard, this study aims to unfold the ideological underpinnings of the discourse of Dialogue among Civilizations embedded in the political speeches of the UN Permanent Member States. To achieve this objective, the paper employs Fairclough’s framework of CDA.

2.4 Fairclough's Framework of CDA

Fairclough (2013) outlined three dimensions of discourse. The initial dimension concerns the text itself, which is influenced by the subsequent two levels. The second dimension of discourse involves the processes of production and interpretation. And the third dimension encompasses the social conditions surrounding production and interpretation, which are social factors that shape the organization of the text and influence its interpretation. The analysis of a particular discourse necessitates examination of each of these three dimensions.

Accordingly, Fairclough (2013) presented a three-stage framework for critical discourse analysis. The first stage is description. It examines the formal properties of the text, drawing upon the tradition of textual and linguistic analysis. The second is interpretation. It is concerned with the connection between text and interaction. And the third one is explanation. It focuses on the connection between interaction and the social context.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative method of data analysis. It applies the methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. The research paper is grounded in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis.

The main corpus of data comprises complete official transcripts of five political speeches delivered by the presidents of the permanent Member States of the United Nations at the General Debate of the sixty-fourth session of the UN General Assembly that was held from September 23 to 29, 2009. These

speeches were delivered by President Barack Obama of the United States, President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia, Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Great Britain, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, and President Hu Jintao of China. The choice of these speeches is justified by the fact that the theme of this debate, which is “Effective Responses to Global Crises: Strengthening Multilateralism and Dialogue among Civilizations for International Peace, Security and Development,” aligns with the discourse of dialogue among civilizations.

Moreover, the analysis of the five speeches proceeds concurrently. This study attempts to divide data analysis into two stages. While the first explains discursive and social practices, the second stage shifts focus to the description and interpretation of salient linguistic features of the political speeches.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Explanation: Social and Discursive Practices

This section of data analysis is related to the explanation of both the social and discursive practices. For the social practice, it is essential to provide the historical context surrounding the speeches during the time the United Nations convened the 64th session of the UN General Assembly. The historical context can be understood against the backdrop of global events and the evolving dynamics of international relations during that period.

President Obama delivered his speech at the General debate during his first term of his presidency. The United States was grappling with the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, which had led to a severe recession and widespread unemployment. As

a result, efforts to stabilize the economy, including stimulus measures and financial sector reforms, were underway. Besides, under the Obama administration, the United States was pursuing a shift in foreign policy towards multilateralism and diplomacy, following the perceived unilateralism of the George W. Bush administration.

President Dmitry Medvedev delivered his speech one year after he succeeded Vladimir Putin in 2008. his presidency was characterized by efforts to modernize Russia's economy and institutions, including initiatives to diversify the economy beyond its reliance on oil and gas exports. Additionally, Russia's relations with the West were complex during this period. While there were efforts to reset relations with the United States under the presidency of Barack Obama, tensions persisted over issues such as NATO expansion and missile defence.

Gordon Brown became a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 2007, succeeding Tony Blair. He delivered his speech during a challenging period for the UK, facing the aftermaths of the financial crisis and addressing domestic issues as healthcare, education and welfare. The UK's foreign policy priorities during Brown's premiership included participation in international peacekeeping missions, support for multilateral institutions, and diplomatic engagements with allies around the world.

President Nicolas Sarkozy became a President of France in 2007. He sought to revitalize France's economy, promote social cohesion, and strengthen France's position on the world stage. Thus, Sarkozy's government implemented measures to stimulate economic growth, support industries affected by the recession,

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and address unemployment. France also maintained a strong commitment to multilateralism and cooperation within the United Nations framework.

President Hu Jintao's speech at the 64th session of the UNGA occurred during a period of economic growth, diplomatic engagement, and global influence for China. Hu Jintao's presidency, which began in 2003, was characterized by efforts to promote economic development, social stability, and political reform in China. In addition, China was increasingly engaged in international efforts to tackle issues like trade, poverty, terrorism and regional security, including participation in multilateral initiatives and agreements.

As for the discursive practices, the speakers produced their speeches in front of the audience of the United Nations. They delivered their speeches on the same day of September 23rd, 2009 during the 64th session of the UNGA, at the General Assembly Hall at UN Headquarters, New York City, the United States of America. The United Nations convened this General Debate emphasizing on Dialogue among Civilizations as an important element in addressing the complex array of global challenges facing the world. The Presidents met during a period which was marked by a confluence of economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, and pressing global challenges. These challenges included the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, ongoing conflicts in regions such as the Middle East, the threat of terrorism, and the urgent need to address climate change. In order to address these issues, the presidents used linguistics

strategies conveying a number of hidden ideologies. These are described in the second stage of the analysis.

4.2. Linguistic Practices: Description and Interpretation

A two-level analysis of the political speeches under investigation was conducted: macro-analysis in terms of themes and micro-analysis in terms of the salient linguistic features of the texts.

4.2.1. Macro-analysis

Through their political speeches, the presidents conveyed a number of ideological messages to the whole world within the discourse of Dialogue among Civilizations. They are presented as follows:

- **Promotion of Mutual Values and Respect:** Each president emphasized the importance of mutual understanding and respect among civilizations. They highlighted the need to respect of the values of human rights.
- **The Pursuit of Peace and Global Security:** The Presidents promoted the idea of peaceful coexistence among nations. They emphasized the issues of conflict resolution in preventing and resolving conflicts, fostering stability, and promoting global harmony.
- **Commitment to Multilateralism and Cooperation:** The Presidents reiterated their commitment to multilateralism and cooperation as essential principles for addressing global challenges. They emphasized the importance of collective action, collaboration between nations, and strengthening international institutions such as the United Nations to tackle shared problems effectively.

In short, the promotion of mutual values and respect, the pursuit of peace and global security, and commitment to multilateralism and cooperation are ideological messages conveyed by the Presidents in their speeches. These ideologies echo the discourse of the dialogue among civilizations. In so doing, the Presidents employed a number of linguistic features as strategies which are discussed in the next level of analysis.

4.2.2. Micro-analysis

The most distinguished linguistic features of the President's speeches can be demonstrated in intertextuality, repetition and the figure of speech of personification.

- **Intertextuality:** Intertextuality is mirrored in the use of direct quotations. The followings are examples of intertextuality:
 - “The structure of world peace cannot be the work of one man, or one party, or one nation.... It cannot be a peace of large nations -- or of small nations. It must be a peace which rests on the cooperative effort of the whole world” (Obama, 2009). President Obama quotes Franklin Roosevelt, emphasizing the idea that achieving world peace is not the responsibility of any single individual, group, or nation. Instead, it requires collective effort and cooperation from all nations around the globe.
 - “[A]toms for peace.” (Brown, 2009). Prime Minister Brown's quotation reflects a call for international collaboration and diplomacy to address the challenges and risks associated with nuclear technology. It emphasizes the importance of collective efforts by the

international community to control the benefits of nuclear energy while minimizing the risks of nuclear proliferation and conflict.

- President Obama (2009) quoting the UN Charter states that the Charter commits each country “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women.” This quotation highlights a key principle outlined in the UN Charter regarding the commitment of member countries to uphold fundamental human rights.
- **Repetition**
 - President Sarkozy (2009) repeats the phrase “we need” multiple times throughout the speech to emphasize the necessity for collective action and cooperation on various global issues. For example, “We need new global governance,” “We need to reform the IMF and the World Bank,” and “We need to change the way we measure our economic and social performance.” This repetition underscores the importance of joint efforts in addressing global challenges.
 - The expression “peace and development” is repeated four times in President Hu Jintao’s (2009) speech highlighting the commitment to peace and prosperity as prevailing global aspirations.
- **Personification**
 - “Russia, on its part, will continue to strengthen the mechanisms of regional interaction together with its partners [...]” (Medvedev, 2009). The personification

extracted from President Medvedev's speech lies in attributing human-like qualities to the abstract entity of "Russia." Here, "Russia" is portrayed as taking action, making decisions, and participating actively in the process of strengthening regional interaction. This corresponds with fostering multilateralism and cooperation.

- "And we will pursue positive engagement that builds bridges among faiths, and new partnerships for opportunity" (Obama, 2009). In this statement, "positive engagement" is described as if it were a person actively building bridges between different religious groups, creating new opportunities by forming partnerships. This personification helps emphasize the active and constructive role of the United States of pursuing positive engagement in fostering cooperation and creating opportunities.

The above analysis demonstrated how the linguistic features of intertextuality, repetition and the figure of speech of personification are employed to support the Presidents' ideologies within the UN discourse of Dialogue among Civilizations.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the lenses of Fairclough's theory and framework of CDA, the present study was undertaken for the aim of unearthing the ideological underpinnings embedded in the political speeches of the Permanent Member States's presidents who delivered them at the 64th session of the UNGA.

The results showed that there are three key ideological messages incorporated within the president's speeches. They are the promotion of mutual values and respect, the pursuit of peace and global security, and commitment to multilateralism and cooperation. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that the aforementioned ideologies align closely with the principles of the Dialogue among Civilizations. Thus, the presidents' discourse strongly resonates with the Dialogue among Civilizations discourse.

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