



POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND POLITICAL COGNITION: AN ANALYSIS
THROUGH THE LENS OF TEUN A. VAN DIJK

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Abstract: *This article examines Teun A. van Dijk's analysis of the complex connection between political discourse and political cognition. It illuminates how political language influences political conduct and public opinion while illuminating the cognitive processes that underpin how political information is processed. Understanding the function of language in democratic processes and the ways in which cognitive biases can affect political communication are the two main goals of the study.*

Key words: *political cognition, public opinion, discourse analysis, political discourse, political speeches;*

Introduction

Social power relations are shaped and reflected in political speech. By examining the language used in political circumstances, one might learn how particular factions shape public opinion and hold onto power. The way issues are framed and the agenda is defined is greatly influenced by political discourse. The way a political problem is portrayed has a big impact on how the public feels and reacts. Researchers can learn more about how public opinion is formed and the mental processes that influence voting behavior and civic engagement by examining the communication of political issues. Identity and belonging are topics that are frequently discussed in political debate. Examining this can reveal how different



demographic groups respond differently to political themes. Clarifying how people receive political information, come to conclusions, and create ideas based on that knowledge is made easier with an understanding of political cognition. A more complex understanding of how decisions are made is offered by political cognition, which includes the interaction of emotional and logical reasoning in political circumstances.

Literature review.

Definition of political discourse.

Language used in political contexts to discuss, debate, and mold political ideas, policies, and identities is referred to as political discourse. Speeches, debates, media coverage, political jargon, and casual discussions about politics are all included. According to Westen (2007), political discourse is important because it shapes public opinion, upholds or undermines established power systems, and inspires citizens to take action or express disapproval. People's level of political engagement is influenced by their political cognition since more comprehension might result in more people taking part in democratic activities like voting or activism. Van Dijk's model of discourse and cognition: key concepts and frameworks employed. Identity development is aided by political cognition, which enables people to identify their values and views with particular political parties or ideologies. People's cognitive processing of political information influences public discussion and discourse, which in turn shapes larger society narratives. Discussion of socio-cognitive theory and its relevance to political discourse. Socio-Cognitive Theory's Applicability to Political Discussion. Because it emphasizes how social influence and cognition interact to shape political knowledge, socio-cognitive theory is pertinent to political discourse. It shows how communication and interaction can lead to the development of collective understanding and offers insights into how people receive political information within their social environments. Researchers and analysts can gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of political conduct, the dynamics of public opinion, and tactics for successful civic involvement by looking at political discourse through the prism of socio-cognitive theory.



Research methodology

Political Discourse Analysis

According to van Dijk (2008), political discourse refers to the ways in which language is used to convey political ideas, opinions, and agendas, often in the context of speeches, media representations, and public discussions. It shapes public opinion and can influence political outcomes. The structure and strategies of political discourse are central to how messages are crafted and interpreted. Political speech reflects and upholds power dynamics and ideological stances; it is more than just a channel of communication. Politicians' writing and speech patterns have the power to shape public opinion and behavior.

Structures and strategies in political discourse (e.g., framing, bias, metaphors). These refer to the organized patterns of language that are used in political communication. They include: *Narrative Structures:* Political discourse often follows a story-like structure, with clear protagonists (e.g., political parties, leaders) and antagonists (e.g., opposition or perceived enemies). This can simplify complex issues and help frame public perception. *Frames and Framing;* the way a political issue is framed can drastically affect how it is perceived. For instance, an economic crisis might be framed as either a failure of government policy or as a global issue beyond anyone's control. *Discursive Strategies:* These are techniques used to persuade, manipulate, or inform the audience, such as repetition, appeals to emotion, use of metaphors. Political leaders and media outlets use several strategies to craft their messages and influence audiences: *Rhetorical Devices:* These include ethos (credibility), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical argument). Politicians often use these to convince their audiences of the validity of their stance. *Polarization and Us vs. Them:* This strategy divides people into groups, creating a sense of "us" (those who support the political message) and "them" (opposing groups or entities). This technique can rally support but also create division. *Appeal to Nationalism/Patriotism:* Politicians may use national symbols, historical narratives, or pride in national identity to resonate emotionally with the audience and promote unity. *Populism:* This involves appealing directly to the general population, often in



opposition to elites or the establishment. Populist discourse can be marked by direct language, emotional appeals, and promises of major reform.

Analysis and results of examples from political speeches and media representations.

Example 1: Political Speech

Consider a political speech where a leader addresses a crisis: Structure: The leader may frame the crisis in terms of a clear enemy (e.g., another country or a social issue), creating a narrative where their leadership is essential to overcoming the problem. Strategy: The use of emotional appeals and a call for unity. By invoking national symbols (like a flag) or collective history (like a wartime victory), the speaker tries to unite the audience behind a common cause. For instance, Winston Churchill's speeches during World War II often used the strategy of resilience and patriotism, framing the British people as enduring heroes against the Nazi threat.

Example 2: Media Representation

A news outlet covering a political election: Structure: The media might use binary framing (e.g., "progressive vs. conservative") to simplify the complexities of political choices for the public. Strategy: The outlet might use selective reporting, focusing on one candidate's strengths while downplaying another's weaknesses. For example, highlighting emotional moments in one candidate's speech or framing a gaffe by the opposition as evidence of incompetence.

Role of context in interpreting political messages. The context in which political messages are delivered significantly affects their interpretation: Cultural Context: Different societies have different political and cultural norms. For example, a populist message might resonate in a country facing economic inequality, but could be dismissed in a more egalitarian society. Historical Context: Political messages often reference past events. A speech given after a national tragedy, like 9/11 in the United States, might emphasize unity, resilience, and national strength, using those events as a backdrop for the message. Social Context: The political situation at the time, such as the current government's approval rating or ongoing controversies, also shapes how a message is received. For example, a message that seems hopeful in one



period may seem out of touch if delivered during a recession. In conclusion, the structure and strategies of political discourse are essential for understanding how political messages are created and communicated. Analyzing real-world examples helps reveal how politicians and media use language to influence public perception, while the broader context shapes how these messages are received and interpreted by different audiences.

Political Cognition

Interplay between Discourse and Cognition

How discourse influences cognitive processes in the political domain. Van Dijk (1997) examines discourse patterns, including the ways in which narratives, arguments, and rhetorical devices are developed. This entails looking at the roles played by the different discourse actors (speakers, listeners, etc.) as well as how their contexts and backgrounds affect the communication. The role of media in shaping political cognition through discourse. Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of context in comprehending political discourse, which entails taking into account the historical, social, and cultural settings that influence and are influenced by political communication. Entman (1993) claims that how people interpret political discourse is influenced by their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs is known as social cognition. Discussion on how cognitive biases (confirmation bias, framing effects) affect interpretation of political discourse.

Case Studies and Applications

Discourse analysis, critical discourse studies, and the connection between speech and social power—particularly with regard to racism, ideology, and communication—are the main areas of study for Teun A. van Dijk. His work has had a significant impact on many different sectors, highlighting the role that language plays in creating social realities and power structures. One prominent area in which van Dijk's work has been used is media studies, where his discourse analysis methodology has been used to analyze news reports about ethnicity and immigration. Van Dijk's theories, for instance, are used in works like "The Representation of Immigrants in the News: A Critical Discourse Analysis" to examine how media



narratives influence public opinion and immigration policy. According to the article "Discourse, Power, and Education: A Critical Analysis of Teacher-Student Interactions," scholars have also used his frameworks to investigate how power dynamics appear in classroom discourse. Van Dijk's work has been crucial to understanding how politicians and the media utilize language to shape public opinion and ideologies in the field of political discourse. Using van Dijk's lens, the research "Framing the Nation: Political Discourse and Identity" examines political speeches and demonstrates how discourse techniques are used to shape public opinion and create a sense of national identity. These case studies demonstrate how van Dijk's study may be broadly applied to comprehend and critique the intricate relationships among language, power, and society.

Conclusion and recommendations.

Summary of key findings and implications of van Dijk's work. According to Van Dijk (2009), CDA examines how societal problems like injustice and inequality are expressed via language. This method seeks to expose covert power structures and ideologies in political discourse. In conclusion, van Dijk's research on political discourse analysis is a critical analysis of language in political situations that emphasizes the complex interrelationships among language, ideology, power, and social institutions. Importance of understanding the relationship between discourse and cognition for democracy. Suggestions for future research directions.

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