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## SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF PUBLIC SPEAKING DISCOURSE

The paper presents some results obtained in the research which was carried out in my PhD dissertation. I looked at different strategies used by speakers on the panel to persuade the audience about their value judgements and opinions.

First, I introduce some basic concepts, describe the corpus I worked with and give comments on the research methods and approaches I used.

Then, I discuss some of the results and finally, I give a few suggestions for further research in this area.

### Introduction and basic concepts

The presented paper is well-founded in interdisciplinary studies—in the research area concerning language, power and ideology. Within the framework of Hallidayan functional grammar (1994). I use insights given by discourse analysis, critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis.

There is a number of studies that touch the topic of this paper, their focus, however, is different. To name a few, there are studies from the borderline of linguistics, theory of communication and psychology, for example Goffman 1967 (*face-to-face interaction*), or Reardon 1981 (*social research*). It is also relevant in this context to look at some studies by Chafe (1982).

Persuasive discourse is defined after Lakoff (1982) as a non-reciprocal discourse whose primary aim is to **persuade listeners or readers to change their behaviour, feelings, intentions or opinions by communicative means**, the communicative means being linguistic or non-linguistic (e.g. gestures).

For the description of the theoretical background it is necessary to mention and operate with terms such as “register”, “field”, “tenor” and “mode”, which are currently used in Halliday (1994), Kress and Hodge (1993), Martin (1986) and Fairclough (1989). The theory of modality according to Hallidayan *Functional Grammar* (1994), in which he distinguishes between “modalization” and “modulation”, is also included in the analysis.

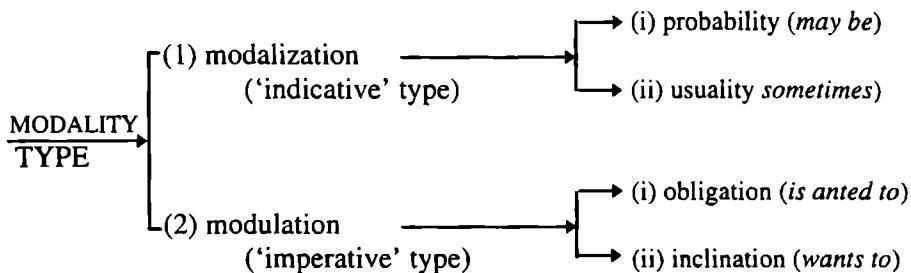


Figure 1: *Types of modality: modalization and modulation* (Halliday 1994.358)

Halliday further distinguishes “orientation”, i.e. whether the speaker is explicitly involved in the activity (*explicitness of speaker involvement*) and “value/strength of modality”.

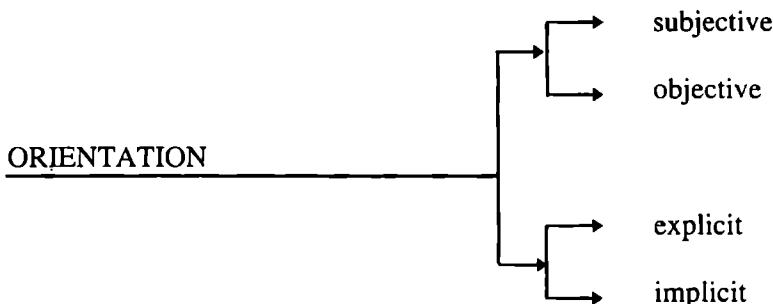


Figure 2: *System of orientations in modality* (Halliday 1994.358)

Value of modality refers to the strength or power and Halliday does not present it as a scale but as a system of possible choices available for the speaker.

### Three ‘values’ of modality

	<b>Probability</b>	<b>Usuality</b>	<b>Obligation</b>	<b>Inclination</b>
<b>High</b>	certain	always	Required	determined
<b>Median</b>	probable	usually	Supposed	keen
<b>Low</b>	possible	sometimes	Allowed	willing

Figure 3: *Three values of modality* (Halliday 1994.358)

I investigated different definitions of field, tenor and mode and concluded my attempts

by using the definition of Halliday and Hasan (1985.12). An application of their definition on my corpus description brings the following summary:

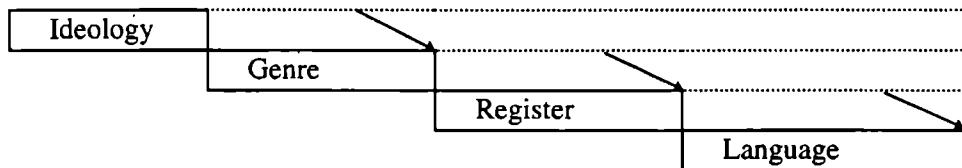
**Field:** A member of the audience asks a question, which is carefully prepared in advance. All four speakers on the panel answer the question in turns, and they do not have to compete to hold the floor. The question usually aims at eliciting opinions and facts on the matters, which have been on the top of the news agenda recently. The chair of the panel asks additional questions, which are frequently face-threatening.

**Tenor:** Interaction occurs between individuals representing institutions. Although the format of the panel discussion seems to support monologue form, individual speakers react to previous speakers. The questions seem to be neutral and they sound rather formal. The presence of the audience is very important.

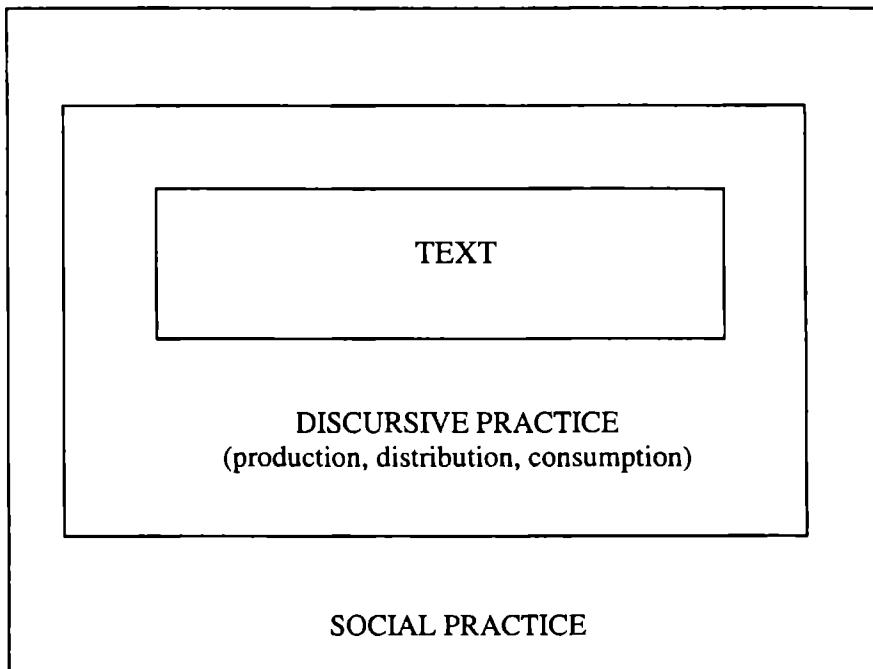
**Mode:** “Any Questions” panel discussion is a public, spoken and institutionalised discourse broadcast on the radio. The programme has its rules concerning the topic and turn-taking management.

Some authors (Heritage 1985) note that there is a potential conflict between some of these aspects. For example, the chair of the panel, giving additional questions, is not always neutral. The panellists also develop strategies, in which they avoid strong formulations (Heritage 1985) and convey commitment to the truth of their propositions. A desirable image they want to create includes features like knowledgeability, honesty and humanness.

Some writers have proposed that language be seen as a semiotic system which realises other semiotic systems, specifically genre, register and ideology. Martin (1986.227), for example, proposes a set of connotative semiotic levels or planes of which language is the lowest and ideology the highest. He draws a mutual relationship between the concepts “ideology”, “genre”, “register” a “language”. Martin attempts to account for all the features in a text by reference to these levels of meaning. In Martin’s model, genre precedes or is superordinate to register. In other words, “The genre ... is predictive of the combinations of field, mode and tenor choices we find”(Martin 1986.248).



The relation between language and ideology is dealt with by authors in the area of *social theory*, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas and others, whose findings influenced *critical linguistics*, *pragmatics* a *critical discourse analysis* (Fowler et al. 1979; Gumprez 1982; Fairclough 1989, 1995). The main problem in studies of this kind is that there are many theories of power and they can lead to different approaches to language. For example, Fairclough’s model, I use, understands discourse in three dimensions.



This three-dimensional conception of discourse is an attempt to bring together three analytical traditions. “These are the tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics, the macrosociological tradition of analysing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or microsociological tradition of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared common sense procedures” (Fairclough 1992.72).

We never judge features of a text without some kind of reference to text production and/or interpretation. Therefore it is impossible to make a sharp distinction between text analysis and analysis of discursive practices. Some of the categories in the framework for text analysis seem to be oriented to language forms and others to meanings. As Fairclough (1992) points out, critical approaches to discourse analysis make the assumption that **signs are socially motivated**, i.e. that there are social reasons for combining particular signifiers with particular signified (de Saussure 1959). This may be a matter of vocabulary choice, grammar and text organisation (Kress and Hodge 1993).

Text analysis is usually organised by critical linguists into four groups: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure. Also, there is an important distinction between the meaning potential of a text and its interpretation. We usually reduce the text potential to a small set of meanings. Discursive practice involves processes of text production, distribution, and consumption of texts and the differences between discourse types vary according to social factors (van Dijk 1987). Texts are often collectively created and institutionalised. This

is probably the case of public political speeches in my corpus.

Individual speakers echo the texts produced by the political party they belong to. As texts are also consumed differently in different social contexts, I notice that speakers in my corpus knew that their texts would be consumed collectively by an audience.

Processes of production and interpretation are socially constrained in a double sense. Firstly, they are constrained by the available members' resources, which are effectively internalized social structures, norms and conventions ... Secondly, they are constrained by the specific nature of the social practice of which they are parts, which determines what elements of members' resources are drawn upon and how ... they are drawn upon. A major feature of the three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis is that it attempts to explore these constraints, especially the second—to make explanatory connections between the nature of the discourse processes in particular instances, and the nature of the social practices they are part of.

(Fairclough 1992:80)

Fairclough's model is especially useful in that it incorporates both the Hallidayan grammar of critical linguistics and the consideration of vocabulary choices, along with aspects of turn-taking and exchange structure. It therefore provides a comprehensive base for linguistic analysis.

The basic framework, seen as a resource for people who are struggling against domination and oppression in its linguistic forms, is called critical discourse analysis (CDA) by Fairclough. **Power** is conceptualised both in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed in particular sociocultural contexts. There is a range of properties of texts, which is regarded as potentially ideological, including features of vocabulary and metaphors, grammar, presuppositions and implicatures, politeness conventions, speech-exchange (turn-taking) systems, generic structure, and style.

Discourse tactics, used in interviews, such as question—answer relationship, reactions in answers of one speaker on the previous answers etc., are looked at in the light of conversation analysis (*adjacency pairs*), variation analysis (*referring expressions*), interactional sociolinguistics (*norms of conduct*—Goffman 1959, 1963; *discourse strategies*—Brown and Levinson 1987; Gumperz 1982; Tannen 1989), pragmatics (*cooperative principle* and *politeness theory*—Lakoff 1973, 1989; Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983).

### Corpus description

I taped unscripted panel discussions broadcast every week by the BBC Radio 4 called "Any Questions". The advantage of the format of this programme is that there is one question answered in turns by all four speakers on the panel

(public figures) which makes it easier to compare with regard to the field of discussion and the tenor, i.e. the relationship between participants. The research deals with the role of questions, which are carefully prepared and asked by a member of the public and the variety of questioning types used in this type of discourse.

### Comments on the corpus examples

#### Example 1: pre-questioning/hedging as a discourse tactic to avoid a face-threatening act

(Question 1)

Member of the public (Alan Webb): *In the light of a report concerning another incident involving a person with a serious mental health problem, how does the panel propose we should deal with these failings of community care of the severely mentally ill?*

### The role of questions

As I observed, questions are not usually straightforward, they are frequently prefaced by a variety of **pre-questioning/hedges** as a discourse tactic, which from the **pragmatic point of view** avoid a face-threatening act. From the **sociolinguistic point of view**, speakers on the panel, on one hand, and the audience, on the other, do not have the same status. As I show, yes/no questions are usually asked by the chair of the panel or by another member of the panel. When a yes/no question is used by an inquirer from the public, it is always hedged and not interpreted as a basic yes/no question.

The form of questions is one of the **discourse tactics** used by the inquirers.

### The role of answers

Each question is answered by every speaker on the panel and they are given an extended turn by the chair. So, there is no need to compete in holding the floor. The main aim of all the speakers is to **persuade** the audience about their views.

The focus of my dissertation is based on the fact that people can get things done with words (Austin 1962). Persuasion refers to affective or cognitive changes of message recipients. Different speakers employ different strategies to influence their audience.

To tackle this task I decided to carry out research into

- (1) **modality** and
- (2) **transitivity** within the Hallidayan framework, also
- (3) **representation of social actors** (how language relates to social cognition), which is used by sociolinguists.

ad 3)

**Speakers** on the panel **differ** from one another **in the** frequency of occurrence of **inclusion and exclusion of social actors**, by exhibiting a different focus. I also show that they change strategy from question to question.

In this section I attempt a question concerning ways in which social actors are represented in my corpus. Which choices do the speakers on the panel prefer when referring to people? How are relevant social actors represented? Are there any differences among speakers as to the perception of relevant social actors?

The analysis of social actors reveals more about the real life roles of people than for instance an analysis of the grammatical subject, since the grammatical subject of a clause does not distinguish between, for example, Agent and Patient. For example, *people* is the subject of the quoted clauses below, but *people* is not the Agent of the processes involved as it refers to 'the mentally ill'.

### Example 2: social actors

Speaker 1 (Diana M., DM1) *people... are requiring care and community, they [people] require ... not just the roof over their head.*

The analysis also proves differences among speakers on the panel in the pronominal distribution. The pronominal distribution of one speaker can change depending on the question. It is primarily the **speaker's intention to manipulate meaning** (see *I/we*, exclusive and inclusive, which is seen as a sociolinguistic marker in political interaction). The **pronominal selection tends to be variable in terms of context and individual choice**.

ad 2)

In the **transitivity** analysis I expected some differences in the presentation of individual participants and processes. The analysis proves that some speakers create an **impression of authenticity and involvement** by using mental process verbs and including themselves under *we*.

### Example 3: *we*

Speaker 1 (Diana M., DM2) *we do need an independent food agency*

Speaker 3 (Chris S., CS2.1) *ministers are busy telling us,*

In the case of speaker 4 (Bruce A.), besides the referent *we*, he also used a more impersonal *one*, e.g. (BA1) "One gets the impression". I think he shows detachment.

### Example 4: mental process verbs

Speaker 1 (DM1) *Well, I think there's an agreement all round...*

Speaker 3 (CS1) *Uhm, the case of Martin Marcel, I fear, is the case that I know all too well ... I can remember*

On the other hand, the lowest frequency of references to himself makes the

speech of speaker 2 (government minister) rather formal and lacking involvement. The intersection of the two types of analyses is significant and gives deeper insights into how meaning is manipulated.

ad 1)

For the introduction into the **modality** within Halliday's framework (1994), see above.

**The importance of modal features** in the grammar of interpersonal exchanges **lies in an apparent paradox** on which the entire system rests—the fact that we only say we are certain when we are not. If unconsciously I consider it certain that Mary has left, I say, simply, *Mary's left*. If I add a high value probability, of whatever orientation, such as *Mary's certainly left*, *I'm certain Mary's left*, *Mary must have left*, this means that I am **admitting an element of doubt**—which I may then try to conceal by objectifying the expression of certainty. Hence whereas the subjective metaphors, which state clearly 'this is how I see it', take on all values (*I'm sure*, *I think*, *I don't believe*, *I doubt*, etc.), most of the objectifying metaphors express a 'high' value **probability or obligation**—that is, they are **different ways of claiming objective certainty or necessity for something that is in fact a matter of opinion**. Most of the 'games people say' in the daily round of interpersonal skirmishing involve metaphors of this objectifying kind.

(Halliday 1994.362-363, my emphasis)

The basic questions on projecting clauses (metaphor of modality) investigate first whether factual knowledge is attributed to agents and second, what linguistic means are used to present facts. I have assumed differences in terms of **different degrees of subjectivity and certainty**. A close look at the choice of report verb confirms that it indicates an attitude of agreement or towards the proposition.

**Ideology** plays its role in deciding whether the **speaker's own self, common sense, an authority or no source** are the bases upon which a judgement is made.

**Example 5: explicitly objective—non-attributed**

Speaker 4 (Bruce A., BA2.3) *Well, it may be that the journalists who told us were wrong.*

**Example 6: explicitly subjective—attributed to the speaker's own self**

Speaker 1 (Diana M., DM1) *I think there's an agreement all round.*

In my data I have included also examples, which Halliday would not include, according to Hunston (1993a), and those are projecting clause complexes which report what other people have said.

**Example 7: attributed to an authority**

Speaker 1 (Diana M., DM2) *our spokesman, Paul Tyler for long time now was saying that “Yes, we do need an independent food agency.”*

**Example 8: attributed to common sense**

Speaker 1 (Diana M., DM2) *Everybody else can see that things have gone badly wrong...*

*...most people in this country have the common sense to see that [things have gone badly wrong]...*

Speaker 3 (Chris S., CS2.1) *everyone knew that a report of this seriousness...*

Implications of attribution of judgement sources or non-attribution at all are evaluated. Non-attributed source, frequently used by speaker 2 (government minister), reflects his social position, his social status, as he is the one who holds power. On the other hand, speakers 1 and 3 (shadow ministers), frequently attribute to self; they sound closer to the audience as they do not show power over people. A cline between non-attributed and attributed to self can be recognised. I also tested my hypothesis concerning the use of modalization and modulation means, in particular various degrees of probability. The analysis shows that speaker 2 (government minister) frequently **does not use modality at all**. As Eggins (1996:183) points out “...the use of any modality at all, however strong it appears, makes our proposition more tentative than it would be without modality.”

I have found that the main difference lies in **the choice of orientation**. Speakers 1 and 3 and also 4 use subjective implicit and explicit modalization and modulation (probability and obligation mainly), whilst speaker 2 uses the objective as well as subjective modalization with similar frequency.

I claim that **speakers have the choice of focus**. Whereas modalization (epistemic modality) concerns mainly knowledge, beliefs and opinions more than facts (Lyons 1977:681) and includes the speaker’s point of view towards the proposition, it is **modulation** (deontic modality) which concerns necessity or possibility of acts which are performed out by responsible actors (Lyons 1977:823) that is used in language primarily **to influence** other people’s behaviour.

**Suggestions for further research:**

- (1) gender differences between speakers belonging to different parts of political spectrum;
- (2) lexis and metaphors, how mitigation is created—how indirectness and tentativeness are achieved;
- (3) investigation into word meaning, words of masking and hiding power (a thousand pages long report is called notes);

(4) comparative study of a related area of public speaking—scripted monologues as public speeches.

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