

A Critique of Pronominal Choices in Political Discourse as Rationalization Tool

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Abstract

Political discourse is often replete with various linguistic choices or devices which play different roles mainly that of the sustenance and rationalization of one's role and stance. These linguistic choices also help the authors or speakers to intricate and obscure things and matters in their own favour. In this paper, an exploration of the role of pronominal choices is made in the backdrop of their nature as rationalization tool in political discourse to unearth the hidden agenda of the author. A critical reading of Ms. Benazir Bhutto's political autobiography named "Daughter of the East (2008)" is done under the umbrella of critical discourse analysis generally and the ideas of Simpson and Mayor (2010) specifically. The special concern was only made on the usage of personal pronouns by the author in the aforementioned discourse. After a critical analysis, as outlined by the prominent figures in critical discourse analysis, it has been found that pronominal choices play prominent role as rationalization tool for the justification of the author's role by showing and highlighting its positive side and obfuscating and mystifying the negative one. This phenomenon can also be discerned in other discourses too where the standpoint of the author is to show his/her positive picture and rationalize the policies and stances adopted in controversial and polemic issues.

Key terms: *Critical discourse analysis, political discourse, pronominal choices, rationalization*

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Introduction

In Pakistani political history, two very opposing figures civilian politicians and military Generals have been observed as rulers (Khan, 2015). One struggled and followed the other in the pursuit of power. In their discourses, they seem busy in rationalizing their own roles as positive and constructive and others as negative and destructive ones. Despite the pompous claims in their discourses speeches, interviews, books etc. the deterioration on political, social, economic and geographical fronts of the country is quite obvious. People also talk everywhere against them but when they come across their discourse; they seem to accept their positions and roles. Interestingly, the masses time and again accept them as their rulers. Various reasons have been pointed out for it. One of them is the usage of linguistic devices or choices which they make in their discourse to persuade the masses in their favour. One such choice is that of the use of pronouns (Simpson & Mayor, 2010).

In the current study, the researchers have also made their concern with this linguistic device and its role in the political discourse especially in the backdrop of rationalization of the author's political role. The major thing in political discourse is the justification of one's unwanted and controversial acts (Khan et al., 2016). There are various linguistic choices which can be of help for such purpose. The use of pronoun is one of them. It may be used to shift responsibility for some unwanted act as well as claiming responsibility for something that is appreciated generally. So many studies have been done to point out various linguistic choices which serve the above mentioned aim but not much has been said or written about the usage of pronominal choices – the usage of pronouns – which are used abundantly by the political actors in their discourses.

This study is one such effort to point out the crucial nature of the usage of pronominal choices in the perspective of rationalization of one's acts in "Daughter of the East (2008)", a political autobiography by Ms. Benazir Bhutto who remained the prime minister of Pakistan twice from 1988 to 1990 and from 1993 to 1996. She was the daughter of the ex-prime minister and a big land owner of Pakistan, Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who was hanged by a military dictator, General Zia ul Haq in 1979. In her autobiography, Ms. Bhutto described a full length detail of her life specially related to the brutalities of the Martial law of General Zia and her struggle against the dictator. At the same time, she tries to rationalize her own role during the office.

Daughter of the East

This autobiography of Benazir Bhutto was firstly published by Hamish Hamilton in 1988 the year when the author herself was elected as the prime minister of Pakistan for the

first time. Its new edition came on the scene in 2007 when Benazir Bhutto was in exile and preparing to return to her homeland to take part in the general elections of 2008. The new edition was published by Simon & Schuster in Great Britain. The researchers have taken the new edition of the “Daughter of the East” for the present study. It consists of 442 pages, is divided into two parts which are further subdivided into seventeen chapters along with a preface to the new edition. The first part entitled “The Years of Detection” describes the long and torturing life of the author during the military takeover of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977 and the period onwards.

The author portrays the brutalities of the martial law, in minute details, as she observed them in Pakistani politics. The second part labeled as “Taking on the Dictator” illustrates her untiring struggle against the military regime and her laborious battle for the restoration of democracy in her country. Later, she describes her becoming a prime minister and the so called achievements she made during the time. In the end of the new edition of her autobiography, she also complains strongly against the role of the military establishment in destabilizing her government and party (Pakistan People’s Party), the cores of terrorism in Pakistan and the danger to her life from terrorists. So part three and four are, in fact, those in which the author tries to rationalize her rule and role and the kind of forces against it.

Theoretical Framework

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)

The study of political discourse is very old. It has been carried out since the ancient Greeks to the Romans and middle ages to modern era. Rhetoric as the main feature of political discourse was the main concern of the study during the Greek and Roman civilizations (Moreno, 2008). The political practitioners and orators were supposed to be the experts of persuasive language. This tradition is still on going and language is manipulated in the political process for personal gains – the sustenance of power. In politics, language plays an integral part rather it is inherently political (Gee, 2011). Language as a Performative act is political in itself (ibid.).

For its most consequential nature, discourse is an effective tool for those who want to manipulate or exploit others. The main motive behind politics is to attain power that helps to practice certain political, social, cultural and economic ideologies (Wodak, 2002). Politics can also provide power to change behaviors of certain individuals and groups in favour of some other individuals and groups. Political strategies and actions are arranged, escorted and manipulated by the use of language. Thus language plays a crucial role in all these practices

regarding the attainment and sustenance of power (Fairclough, 2015). Teun van Dijk (1997, p. 25) points out following elements exploited by some politician in some political discourse:

- It helps to combat one's opponents on various fronts
- It helps to point out the bad policies and politics of one's rivals
- It provides the opportunity to ridicule and degrade one's political enemies and their policies
- It also favours one to justify or rationalize one's own policies and actions
- It helps to convince the audience of the legitimacy of one's claims

Schaffner (1996) calls political discourse as the sub-category of discourse and formulates two types of criteria for it, viz., thematic and functional. On thematic level, it passes around political topics like political ideas, relations and activities etc. As political discourse comes into existence due to the process of politics and is surrounded and determined by cultural and historical underpinnings, it carries out various functions on historical and cultural fronts owing to various political pursuits (Bayram, 2010, p.28).

While critical discourse analysis observes the manipulation of power under any discourse and of any individual and social group, political discourse analysis observes various dimensions of power, viz., struggle for power, practice of power, inequality, resistance, exploitation, specific and general effects of power on masses and society etc. particularly in some political discourse. It also discerns how power is achieved and sustained through political discourse. Due to a critical approach to political discourse, PDA can also be termed as critical-political discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1997, p.11). Thus, PDA is significant so far as political discourse is concerned. It can help to point out the following points in some political discourse (ibid. p. 19):

- political domain or organizations and actors
- political actions and processes
- covert ideologies or motives in discourse

As there are many complexities in discourse which cannot be easily understood by the common reader or listener so it is the job of the critical discourse analysts to unearth those intricacies of discourse. In this way, critical analysts try to show these elements as a social work in the welfare of the human beings (Wodak, 2001; Fairclough, 2015). Here, in the current study the same ideas are in the view of the researchers while deconstructing the selected discourse.

Research Methodology

The current study is qualitative in nature because of the exploration it has focused. The general ideas regarding language, power, exploitation, discrimination and inequality have been borrowed from the paradigm of critical discourse analysis as propagated by Fairclough (2015), van Dijk (1997) and Wodak (2002). A functional model is developed out the outlines laid down by Simpson and Mayor (2010) in their book titled “Language and Power: A resource book for students” regarding the use of pronouns or the pronominal choices by the powerful class for their benefits. These general and specific ideas have been explored in the selected political discourse keeping in view certain objectives and questions of the current study.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been intended in the current study:

- to point out the various usage of personal pronouns in the selected political discourse
- to know the implications of the pronominal choices adopted by the author
- to find out the objectives of the author behind the usage of pronouns
- to know the role of pronominal choices as rationalization tool

Research Questions

The research study relies on the following research questions:

- What type of pronominal choices have the author made in her political discourse?
- How do the pronominal choices play the role of rationalization tool in the selected political discourse?

For answering these questions, the researchers have formed a model out of the ideas outlined by Simpson and Mayor (2010) and reinforced it with the views of Thomas et al. (2004). According to them, with the usage of pronominal choices, the authors or speakers intend to achieve various aims and objectives in their discourse. The use of pronouns is also significant in political discourse. Politicians use these for the accomplishment of the varied purposes such as (Thomas et al., 2004, p.52):

- to shift responsibility of some undesirable act to others
- to obfuscate agency of some act
- to achieve prominence of something with positive outlook
- to create the sense of unity with others

Politicians select diverse pronouns for themselves at the same time to show their involvement with the public and the topic (Dunne, 2003, p.34). This technique is applied to

influence the minds of the audience that is the main objective of the politicians. Thus these ideas have been analyzed by the researchers in the political autobiography of Benazir Bhutto entitled “Daughter of the East (2008)” keeping in concern the aforementioned guidelines.

Analysis of Pronominal Choices in “Daughter of the East”

The data described here has been retrieved from Ms. Benazir Bhutto’s political autobiography and has been analyzed under the critical dimensions described earlier. Some of the pronominal choices which have been selected here are related with the issues much relevant to the author’s life: the controversies and the issues for which she has been criticized. In these selected illustrations, she seems to rationalize her stance and position. Here the choice of the use of pronouns by the author is related with the justification of the author especially so far as her rule and struggle for power are concerned.

“Clearly it’s not easy for women in modern society, no matter where we live. We still have to go the extra mile to prove that we are equal to men. We have to work longer hours and make more sacrifices” (Page xii).

With the use of the pronoun “we” Benazir Bhutto makes an effort to establish camaraderie with women in general besides arousing the feministic views about women. It’s true that life is not easy for women in Pakistani society than men but so far as Ms. Bhutto is concerned, she belonged to an aristocratic family where she was brought up without any discrimination of sex. She was the only daughter of her father along her two brothers. She was brought up by her father in complete liberty which she seems to enjoy and narrate in her life-story as well as compared to her brothers especially she received a political training from her father who remained a successful politician and twice elected prime minister of the country. Later in her struggle against the military dictator, and during her elections campaigns, she seems quite vibrant activist without any issue of sex or the like. She moved in the whole country freely. Here in the above illustration, she seems to create solidarity with women who suffer a lot in their practical or domestic life to create a soft corner for her among them.

“They killed my father in the early morning hours of April 4, 1979” (Page 3).

In this opening sentence of the chapter, “The Assassination of My Father”, the personal pronoun “they” is creating ambiguity regarding the identity of the killers on the one hand and the collaborative efforts in his killing on the other. Though, it is now a general consensus in Pakistan that Benazir’s father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was judicially murdered by the military dictator General Zia-ul-haq. Ms Bhutto and her party (Pakistan People’s Party) have always used the name of Z.A. Bhutto to win sympathies of the public. The possessive

form of the personal pronoun “I” is used in singular form which has the same objective that she is trying to show herself as the sole heir of her father. Later in her other political discourse, she seems to raise the slogan “Bhutto was alive yesterday, he is alive even today”. Mr. Bhutto was a very popular personality among his followers. She implies herself in the position of her father. So the effort is being made to strengthen her own political position among her followers and the countrymen.

“We are all culprits. We are all guilty and burdened with sin.” (Page 14)

In this statement, personal pronoun “we” is creating the sense of inclusion. She is, in fact, including every person of her country as responsible for the death of her father. This inclusion is causing an implication of every of her countrymen as guilty for not raising their voices on the judicial murder of her father against the military dictator. In a way, it’s a type of rationalization of her role as making a struggle to revive democracy in her country. She is trying to bring more and more people to her struggle that is for the revival of democracy in the country explicitly and for her own rule implicitly.

“I cannot permit you to come in here and violate its sanctity, I told him. You killed my father. You sent him here.” (Page 17)

These lines occur when she was brought to the graveyard where her father was buried by some military men during the martial law of General Zia ul Haq. She shows a great contempt towards those men. Benazir Bhutto’s father was killed by General Zia but she has generalized it to every army man with the use of personal pronoun “you”. This pronominal choice is also implying her as a great resistant of military rule and torch bearer of democracy. This eventually helps to show her role as justified and rationalized one during her struggle to be the prime minister of the country.

“If you choose to stay here, know that we are in for heavy weather.” (Page 115)

Personal pronoun “we” in this statement is creating the image of collectiveness. It shows as if Bhutto family is not affected solely by the cruelties of the martial law of General Zia, but the whole nation is suffering with them. With this pronominal choice, she implies every person as sufferer of the martial law and struggling against the military rule. She implies her struggle as the toil and effort of everyone in the country for political system and democracy which can result in her rule. She also indicates a clear conflict with the civilian politicians and military men for the ruling the country.

“Our wills may have remained strong, but our bodies were paying the price.”(Page 204)

Possessive case of personal pronoun, “our”, is creating the effects of inclusion and unity of the author with common people of her country in the statement. Ms. Bhutto, actually,

wants to say that she was not alone against the cruelties made by the military regime. There were others too who had the same cause of democracy like hers for which they were giving sacrifices. The Bhutto family has faced many casualties, for example, Mr. Bhutto was hanged by the military dictator, both of his sons were also murdered (his daughter, the author, faced the same fate later). During her speeches, interviews and written discourse, the author has always made this point and tried to create the feelings of sympathy among the masses. She got elected twice as prime minister of the country but on the face of it she could not bring much progress in the country. Rather she focuses on the sacrifices made by her family.

“We didn’t want to come to power through bloodshed” (Page 325).

In this sentence, the writer communicates her strong democratic thoughts. “We” conveys the sense of inclusion and expresses the message that it was not the author who wants the power alone rather the sharing of power, democracy, is the main objective. She also implies herself and her companions as peaceful people who want to come to power through peaceful means. She is also implying her opponents as having the blood lust. The above pronominal choice gives the impression of the author’s disinterest for power as her sole mission. Rather she implies her effort for power as something positive being done for the welfare of the common people of her country. This remains to the core of power struggle of the politicians who always show and imply themselves as doing something for the betterment of their country and the masses on the whole rather than for their personal gains. Thus by saying such things, the author is trying to rationalize her role.

“But Zia, we all knew, was not one to hold himself accountable to the laws of Pakistan.” (Page 369)

Again, the pronoun, “we”, presupposes all the people in the country, united on ideological and practical fronts, considering General Zia as lawless and anarchistic thus an unfavorable and disapproving personality. The author intends to exhaust the idea that it was just the Bhutto family who had contempt against the military dictator. A clear conflict between civilian politicians and military men can also be observed here. The pronominal choice also helps the author to include others too in the struggle for the revival of political government. The ultimate end can be her own rule. Thus such implications underlying pronominal choices help the author to rationalize her role and rule.

Conclusion

After analyzing some of the selected illustrations from the political discourse of Ms. Benazir Bhutto with critical underpinnings mentioned in the sections of theoretical framework and research methodology, the following findings have been arrived at by the

researchers. These are much alike as pointed out and suggested by Simpson and Mayor (2010) and Thomas et al. (2004). These findings are as under:

- The author tries to shift responsibility from the real issues of her governance when she remained the prime minister of the country twice towards military establishment as a big hindrance in the way of democratic process. She focuses much on such issues rather than showing her own real working.
- The author also tries to obfuscate agency with the help of pronominal choice. The use of person pronoun “we” is used abundantly for the purpose. Sometimes third person pronoun “you” is used for the purpose where nobody was being referred directly or explicitly. This is a harsh reality that she the prime minister of Pakistan twice but about her own rule or role she remains silent. The issues regarding her own faults are kept in backgrounding. Her government has been dismissed by the president who belonged to her own party and who was of her own choice. But she seems to blame the military establishment for all such happenings. Her government has also been charged for corruption charges but she remains silent on this front and tries to obscure agency of various such deeds.
- She has also not left any chance to show or achieve her prominence at different occasions with the help of pronominal choices. Wherever it was something prominent or some big chance of the positive reflection of her own persona, she availed that with the help of personal pronoun “I”. She claimed responsibility very openly for all the positive deeds but shared it whenever something negative came up.
- The author also tried to create the sense of unity with the common people of her country by using pronominal choices. Whether it was her femaleness or other issues related to democracy and power, she brought others to it and used personal pronoun “we” abundantly.

Thus after going through the selected political discourse critically, it is quite obvious now to say that such pronominal choices mentioned above are a big source of rationalization of one’s role. These choices help the politicians to justify and mystify their position. They also try to exploit these for their personal gains that can be the attainment and sustenance of power (such ideas can also be viewed in other political discourses too).

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