

# A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Address of President Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani to the Joint Meeting of Us Congress

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to find out the important themes and the ideologies behind the linguistic features used in the speech of President Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, the president of Afghanistan. The speech was delivered to the joint meeting of the US Congress on 25 March 2015 in the United States of America. This speech is important because it has been delivered in a critical time when Afghanistan was passing through a critical phase of taking the responsibility of the war against terrorism from the international forces. The researcher has analyzed the introductory part of the speech through the three-dimensional approach of Fairclough. The analysis of the linguistic features indicated that the speaker was not only seeking to strengthen the existing relations but also trying to establish new economical, educational, and political ties with the US. The speaker has also tried to convince the audience (The US Congressmen and women) that the US in harmony with the world has to take serious steps toward terrorism, and the war against terrorism should be supported as long as the terrorism is rooted out from Afghanistan.*

**Keywords:** Discourse Analysis, CDA, Linguistic Features, Ideology

## 1. Introduction

Language is tied with the social and cognitive development of the human from childhood. In fact, it forms our identity within society (Bayram, 2010). The use of language helps us express our attitude toward phenomena in society. The attitude that a speaker expresses and the listener adopts is of paramount significance in sociolinguistics (Bayram, 2010). Considering the fact that language is a means for expressing an attitude, it can be said that the purpose of speeches is to express one's attitude toward phenomena. In today's world, speeches, particularly, political speeches are prone to various sequences of interpretations. Different social groups make different interpretations of the speeches. That is why the role of language is considered crucial in politics (Bayram, 2010). Saville-Troike (2008) stated that the choice of appropriate linguistic options depends on the topic, the participants, the social distance between the participants and the setting. According to Wilson (2003), the use of linguistic features for expressing the attitude toward the world is significant, but it is the central issue in political discourse.

Political language consists of abstract conceptual terms which are more moral than philosophical. It carries information about people's affairs and issues such as peace, war, and economics. Political speeches are produced in a way to transform and deepen a particular issue. According to Al-Majali (2015), political speeches are mainly used to convince the audience to adopt the attitude expressed by the speaker. Seidel (1985) stated that political speeches have three main elements, namely the addressor, the addressee, and the political speech itself.

For the current study, the address of President of Afghanistan, Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, to the joint meeting of US Congress on 25 March 2015 in United States of America has been selected to be studied. In this critical discourse analysis study, the themes and the linguistic features which have been used in his speech to depict his political viewpoints will be focused. Although, this speech was delivered more than four years ago, it has been delivered in a critical time. The time was crucial because Afghanistan

was just passing through the process of the withdrawal of International forces, and taking the responsibility of Afghan war from the international forces. According to the timetable announced by the president of the United States, then President Barack Obama, the troops should have been withdrawn by the end of 2016. This was a turning point in the history of Afghanistan because, after 40 years of civil war and almost around 14 years of combat mission of the International forces in Afghanistan, the Afghan forces were taking the responsibility of fighting toward the terrorism in the country which was previously performed by international forces. Besides the issue of withdrawal, Afghanistan was not in a very stable economic situation; Therefore, for President Ashraf Ghani, it was vital to establish better and deep economic and political relations with the United States of America.

The purpose of our current study is to analyze the political speech of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and find out the main themes of his speech and the linguistic features which he has used to represent these themes in the Congress of the United States of America.

### 1.1 Research Questions

The following questions will be answered by the end of the study.

- 1) What are the themes in the speech of President Ashraf Ghani to the joint meeting of the US Congress?
- 2) What linguistic features represents/depicts these themes in his speech?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is the study of language and its use in relation to the social and political context where it occurs. In the use of language, it explores issues such as culture, ethnicity, gender, ideology, identity, power, and how these things are constructed and reflected in the text. It studies the ways in which language constructs social

relationship and the ways in which social relationships constructs language. The Critical Discourse Analysis approach does a detailed analysis of the text. It explores, explains, and interpret discursive practices, texts, events, social and cultural structures, and relationships. Through CDA the underlying ideologies and the bias in the text are uncovered from the linguistic features of the text. It relates the texts to other texts and the beliefs and experiences of the people (Paltridge, 2012).

## 2.2 Language and Ideology

The use of language systems varies according to who the speaker is, how they perceive themselves, and what identity they want to project. Also, the use of language differs according to the situations, whether it is public or private, formal or informal, who are the audience, who might be able to overhear (Wareing, 2004). Meyerhoff (2015) indicates that the way people talk provides a very powerful picture of their personality, knowledge, and attitude. Language has a very strong influence on the attitude of human. According to Wareing (2004), the choice of words in a text affects peoples' perception of others and themselves. He stated that language could not only be used to steer the thoughts and beliefs of peoples, but it is used to control the thoughts and beliefs of people as well. There are two key elements embedded in the use of language, namely Power and Ideology. It is impossible to separate ideology and power from the text.

Power is considered as a systematic constitutive element of society. It is negotiated and performed through the discourse. Ideology is a set of coherent and stable values and beliefs (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) which includes the ways of representing and constructing society such as relations of power, and relations based on gender, class, and ethnicity. Ideology is produced, reflected, expressed, understood, and challenged through the use of discourse (Paltridge, 2012).

The purpose of the studies of the discourse is to unpack the values, presuppositions, meanings, intentions, and ideologies underlying the discourse. The approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, henceforth) enables the researchers to unpack Power and Ideology from the text. Texts are prone to different interpretations, and the CDA helps us produce meaning from the text through interpretations.

## 2.3 Political Discourse

Discourse covers different disciplines from linguistics to sociology, philosophy, and other disciplines. Discourse is the use of linguistic forms to express our attitude, power, knowledge, and ideology. The skillful use of language is a significant element of politics. According to Fairclough (2006), language can be used to misrepresent and represent realities, it can be used to improve human well-being, but it can also be used to obscure the realities. The primary purpose of politicians is to persuade others to adopt their political claims, attitude, and beliefs. Through the skillful use of language, the politicians form the beliefs and behavior of their audience. In political discourses, there are presuppositions and implicatures. These tools lead the listener to make assumptions about the existence of

information that is not explicit in what is said, but it might be deduced from what was said (Jones & Peccei, 2004). In the political texts, the assumptions are underlying beneath the words and sentences. This way of playing with language in politics is useful because it makes it difficult for the audience to identify or reject what is said in that way. The audience should be smart enough to take the underlying concept for granted. Political discourse is not only defined with political discourse structures but also with political contexts.

## 3. Methodology/Theoretical Framework

The data for the current study is the script of the speech of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani to the joint meeting of the US Congress, delivered on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015 in Washington DC. The script of the text is available on different internet websites, but to make sure that the script is original, the researcher has downloaded both the script and the video from the official website of the office of the president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The script of the speech will be analyzed through the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis. This approach is selected to find out the major themes and linguistic features of President Ghani's speech. This approach will help us to explore the relationship between language and ideology. Besides, the analysis of this speech will help us understand how ideology is reflected in political discourse. The study will use the three-dimensional approach of Fairclough (1995): Description, Interpretation, and Explanation.

In the Description level, the text is analyzed to find out the main themes of the speech, the vocabulary choice, and tone of the text. The themes of the speech will be identified by analyzing the topic of each paragraph in the text and the keywords in each paragraph. It is worth mentioning that the word choice and the use of pronouns will help us identify the tone of the speech (Imani & Habil, 2015).

In the interpretation level, the purpose of the genre is interpreted based on the context and the audience. The genre which is studied in this paper is the political speech delivered in the Congress of the United States of America by the president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2015. The context to his speech was the Congress of the United States of America where all the political elites of the USA gather for legislative purposes. The final stage in the three-dimensional approach of Fairclough is Explanation. In this stage, the ideologies and power elements hidden in the text are unpacked, and the social and political effects of the text are explored (Imani & Habil, 2015).

It is mentionable that a critical discourse analysis of the speech of Dr. Ashraf Ghani is not aiming to find faults, evaluate and criticize any ideological stance, or support or criticize any aspect of the speech of Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. The only aim and purpose of this study is to contribute to discourse analysis literature in Afghanistan.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

In this section of the study, the findings of the analysis are presented based on the levels of the analysis presented in the methodology section. In the description level, the outline of the speech and the use of pronouns are discussed. In the interpretation and explanation level, the interpretation of vocabulary choice and pronoun use has been discussed. Also, the ideology embedded in the text will be revealed as well.

### 4.1 Description Level

The speech of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani to the joint meeting of the US Congress, delivered on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015 in Washington DC is 5745 words totally. Since the speech is too long, the researcher selected to analyze the introductory part of the speech which is 1311 words. The introductory part of the speech has different themes and reflects different issues. It includes the following items.

- The expression of gratitude and honor
- A review of the sacrifices of the US in Afghanistan.
- Presentation of the natural riches and cultural heritage of Afghanistan.
- Encouragement for a more in-depth relationship between Afghanistan and the US.
- A reminder of the past incidents
- Hopes for future relationships

The above-listed topics constitute the main discussion of the introductory part of the speech. Each part will be discussed in order.

**The Expression of gratitude and honor:** In the introductory part of President Ghani's speech, the word 'thank' and the phrase 'Thank you' has been used 13 times. It is used in the phrases such as "*please allow me to thank you... I would like to begin by thanking... I want to thank...*". The use of the phrase 'thank you' 13 times in 1311 words shows that president Ghani is extremely thankful for the support of the United States and he is expecting more support from the US in the future. It is also evident from the use of the word support six times in the introductory part of the speech. He thanks and appreciate the services of each American general who has been leading the American forces in Afghanistan and each ambassador of the US in Afghanistan.

**A review of the sacrifices and services of the US in Afghanistan:** In the flow of the speech, President Ghani appreciates the sacrifices of the US in Afghanistan. Although, the word 'sacrifices' has been used just two times in the text, once for Americans and the second time for Afghans. It has used in phrases such as *.... tremendous sacrifices* that the Americans have made to keep Afghanistan

We have made great *sacrifices*.

In the text, it can be seen that the sacrifices of the US have been acknowledged by stating the number of American troops killed (2315) or wounded (20000) in Afghanistan. Also, the use of phrases such as 'we owe a profound debt' in sentences such as:

*'We owe a profound debt to the soldiers who have lost limbs to buried bombs, to the brave veterans, and to the families who tragically lost their loved ones to the enemy's cowardly acts of terror.'*

Shows that the speaker appreciates and acknowledge the services (Military and civilian) of the Americans by stating "*We owe a profound debt to many Americans who have come to build schools, repair wells, and cure the sick.*" This phrase has been used three times in the text, which shows that president Ghani is touched by the service of the US in Afghanistan.

**Presentation of the natural riches and cultural heritage of Afghanistan:** In a part of his speech, the president invites the Congressmen and women and the Americans to visit Afghanistan not for military or political needs but to visit the beauties of Afghanistan. He describes the natural and cultural beauties of some provinces of Afghanistan such as Bamyan valley and the architecture of Herat province.

**Encouragement for a more in-depth relationship of Afghanistan and US:** The president expresses gratitude to each general commander of US forces in Afghanistan and the ambassadors who have been assigned to Afghanistan. He names them one by one and thanks them. Calling people with their names, according to Lambrecht (1996) grabs their attention and establishes or maintain the relationship between addressee and speaker. Also, to strengthen his relationships with the congressmen and women, he also thanks some influential congressmen by calling their names. In a part of his speech, he extends his gratitude to the aid workers and NGO and all the civil servants who have served in Afghanistan. Finally, in the congress, he admires and thanks to the president of the United States, Barack Obama, for his support. In this part of his speech, many adjectives have been used, such as '*remarkable, inspirational, principled, disciplined, strict rigor.*' The use of such positive and strong adjectives shows that the president is seeking to deepen and strengthen his relations with the United States.

**A reminder of the Past:** President Ghani starts this part with the bitter memory of 9/11 tragedy. Then, he talks about some of his memories in New York City and how he and his wife met in New York City. In this part of his speech, the personal pronoun 'I' has been used eight times. The use of 'I' shows that the speaker wants to share his personal experience, thought, and belief, which may be for the purpose of bringing changes in the behavior of the audience. Talking about the 9/11 tragedy and then sharing his personal memories with Congress appeals that the president wants to connect to the heart of the audience to affect them emotionally.

### 4.2 The Tone of The Introductory Part of the Speech

The tone in the text is defined as the attitude of the author toward a subject which he would like to convey to the people through the choice of words. The tone of the text can be identified by looking at the word choice and phrases (Holcomb & Killingsworth, 2010). In the introductory part of the speech, the choice of words such as the use of 'thank you' thirteen times, the use of strong adjectives in phrases such as '*gracious invitation, unique forum, generous support, immense value*' show that the tone

of the speech is more of appreciative and admiring. The elements of enthusiasm and passion of keeping long lasting relation can also be seen in the text, such as talking about past experience in New York and the time he spent in the United States. This indicates that the relations of president Ghani with the US started in personal level first, and now he would like to continue those relations at the official level as well with more strength and determination.

### 4.3 The Use of Pronouns

In the introductory part of president Ghani's speech, he has used the following pronouns.

No.	Pronoun	Frequency	Example
1	I	20	<i>I am proud to have known and worked with Dan McNeil....</i>
2	We	9	<i>We owe a profound debt to many Americans</i>
3	It	9	<i>It is our shared interest.</i>
4	Our	24	<i>It is our patriotic duty.</i>
5	You	16	<i>I thank you.</i>
6	They form	14	<i>They have come to know our snowcapped mountains.</i>

In the chart above, only the pronouns which are very prominent and crucial in critical discourse analysis are listed.

Bello (2013) stated that in the political speeches, the construction of identity, group membership, and the way one talks about self and others is of paramount importance. Thus, the politicians' choice of pronouns helps them show multiple identities of themselves to others. Fairclough (1995) stated that English pronouns have relational value; it helps the speaker to construct social relationships. In the introductory part of president Ghani's speech, the personal pronouns 'I, we, and our' are used the most. The pronoun 'I' is used 20 times in the speech. According to Bramley (2001), 'I' is a marker of self-reference. The use of the personal pronoun 'I' shows that the speaker is being subjective and state his own position, thought, idea, and experience. It shows the personal involvement and commitment of the speaker, as stated by Bello (2013). The following examples from the speech indicate that by using the personal pronoun, the speaker wants to construct more in-depth relationships with the congressmen and women of the US government.

Examples:

- *I* would like to begin by thanking the people of the United States.
- *I* had a unique opportunity that when Senator Graham was dressed as a colonel.
- *I* have met people from all 50 states of the union

In the first example, the 'I' shows the eagerness of the speaker to start his speech with a particular style. In the second example, the 'I' indicates that the speaker wants to share his experience with the audience, and in the third example, the 'I' shows that the speaker wants to connect to the audience by sharing his view of the American people and his heartily feeling for the American people. Also, the use of 'I' in this speech also indicates that president Ghani wants to

represent himself as a good politician who has been in contact and is eager to have good relations with the US government.

### The Use of 'We'

The pronoun 'We' can be inclusive or exclusive. It is the pronoun which shows solidarity and rejection of inclusion and exclusion (Pennycook, 2001). In the speech of president Ghani, it is used nine times, two times as inclusive and seven times as exclusive 'we.' Another we-from pronoun used dominantly is 'our'. It is used 24 times, but 3 times as inclusive and 21 times as exclusive. Some examples are given below.

- *We* owe a profound debt to the 2,315 servicemen and women killed in Afghanistan.
- *We* must acknowledge with appreciation that...
- *We* saw a seamless handover of responsibility for all combat operations.

Not only in the examples provided above, but eight patterns of 'we' in the text are exclusive. It does not include the audience. It includes the author, the government, and the people of Afghanistan. De Fina (1995) explained that the use of 'We' shows that the speaker wants to establish a sense of group unity. In the context of this text, the president wants to assure the world that even though the government is divided between two parties, but the ultimate target is serving the country. Also, the pronoun 'we' here shows the institutional identity of president Ghani. It shows that president Ghani is talking on behalf of the Afghan government and the people of Afghanistan. There is only one case of inclusive-we "We have made great sacrifices, we Afghans, but then it is our patriotic duty to do so. You, on the other hand, had a choice in with came to afford in the road chose to the right thing." Here, the speaker involved himself and the addressee (the speaker + the addressee).

### 4.4 Modality

In the text of the speech, three modal verbs are used, namely 'will' four times, 'would' six times, and 'must' two times. Below are some examples where the abovementioned models are used.

- Veterans *will* always be welcomed in Afghanistan.
- Our deepest hope is that the time *will* come when Americans visiting our country see the cultural heritage and natural riches of the Bamiyan Valley
- I visited Ground Zero that very week. Seeing firsthand the tragedy and devastation drove home the realization that after 9/11, the world *would* never be the same [*Predictability*]. I went home, knowing that American *would* seek justice [*Future Intention*], and I began to write the plan for our national reconstruction.
- I *would* like to thank President Barack Obama [*Desirability*].

Modality is a linguistic device that encompasses a variety of forms such as modal auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, modal adverbs, and modal adjectives (Lillian, 2008). Modality indicates the attitude of the speaker or writer to the proposition they utter (Fowler & Kress, 1985). In the text, the modal auxiliary verb 'will' is used to show the intent of the speaker, and the future hope. In other words, it shows the

predictability — the probable occurrence of the event in the future. Example 1 and 2 well-illustrates this function of the modal auxiliary verb ‘will.’

In the introductory part of President Ghani’s speech, the auxiliary verb ‘would’ is used six times. In the context of this text, it has two functions: Predictability and desirability. The predictability shows the future actions, and the desirability shows moral (Olaniyan & Adeniji, 2015).

#### 4.5 The Choice of Words

If we have a look at the text, it can be seen that lots of positive descriptive adjectives have been used in the text. Descriptive adjectives describe the qualities and features of people, animal, things, or places. It is usually positioned in front of the nouns, for example, “Please allow me to thank you for your **gracious** invitation to address this **unique** forum of **deliberative** democracy.” According to Nevezhkina (2008), adjectives in political discourse are the tools for propaganda and persuasion. The use of the adjective in the speech inspires and mobilizes the audience. It shows a positive or negative attitude of the speaker toward events or each other. It helps the speaker to align with the audience and downgrade or intensify his feelings (Mazlum & Afshin, 2016). In the introductory part of President Ghani’s speech, totally 80 positive descriptive adjectives were used. The use of such adjectives in political speeches show that the speaker wants to make himself acceptable and comprehensible to the audience and provoke the sympathy and encouragement of the listener toward the words uttered by the speaker. In the context of the speech of president Ghani, he is trying to establish a close relationship with the congressmen and women, in general with the politicians of the US.

By the use of such adjectives, in the first place, he wants to appreciate the assistance and support of the United States to the date, and he expects long-lasting economic and political support from them. Some examples are provided below.

Examples:

- 1) Please allow me to thank you for your **gracious** invitation to address this **unique** forum of **deliberative** democracy [**Establishment of close relations**].
- 2) Above all else, I **would** like to begin by thanking the people of the United States, whose **generous** support for my country has been of such **immense** value in advancing the cause of freedom [**Appreciating the US for support**]
- 3) The **overwhelming** majority of Afghans continue to see the partnership with the United States as **foundational** to our future. There is no **better** proof of this than last October’s **overwhelming** and **immediate** parliamentary approval of the Bilateral Security Agreement and the Status of Forces Agreement, both of which testify to our desire to continue the partnership [**Expecting long-lasting relationships**].

#### 5. Explanation and Interpretation Level

The speech of President Ashraf Ghani started with thanking the prominent personalities of the US Congress. He called the names of some figures which he knew earlier and had a leading role in relationships between Afghanistan and the USA. He also thanked the people of the US. He praised the

bravery of the American soldiers who have served in Afghanistan. Sharing his personal experience of living in the US and his time in the world bank, and going even more personal to his favorite places in New York City indicated that the president is eager to have a long-lasting partnership with the US. Concurrently, he presented a beautiful picture of Afghanistan by naming the natural, cultural, and historical beauties of Afghanistan in different provinces. His presentation of the beautiful places of Afghanistan was prominent in the text because some very strong adjectives were used in this part. The use of such adjectives “**snowcapped** mountains, our **verdant** valleys, our **windswept** deserts, our **parched** fields, our **unharnessed**, **flowing** rivers, and our plains of **waving** wheat.” gain the attention of the listeners. By presenting the beautiful places of Afghanistan, the purpose of the speaker was to show to the American that Afghanistan is not only a place where there is war, but it is a historical country which has natural and historical beauties as well. The use of such adjectives persuades the audience to visit Afghanistan for its beautiful places. In the introductory part of the speech, president Ghani gives statistics of the American soldiers who have been killed or wounded in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. By doing this, he wants to show that the sacrifices of the US have not been forgotten. In addition, in another part of the speech, he mentions that the war which is going on against terrorism in Afghanistan has brought safety to the US which is the result of sacrifices of both Americans and Afghans. With this president, Ghani wants to point out that Afghans are giving sacrifices on behalf of the entire world because terrorism is a world-class threat. Therefore, the US has to continue supporting Afghanistan in this war against terrorism and has to provide facilities because with that America will be safe.

In a part of the speech, president Ghani talks about the 9/11 tragedy, by remembering that tragedy, president Ghani wants to point out that terrorism is still a danger for the world and it has to be dealt with. He says, “September 11, 2001, was not a **distant** image that I watched on the emotionless screen of the television.” Using the word ‘distant’ here shows that the president is warning the world about the inevitability of such tragedies if the war toward terrorism is not taken serious in the world, particularly in Afghanistan.

In terms of pronouns, in the text, the personal pronoun ‘I, we, and our’ have been the most prominent. As mentioned earlier, the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ shows the speaker’s position toward something. Wilson (1990) stated that ‘I’ is used as a means of establishing rapport with the audience and shows a degree of personal involvement and commitment. Through the use of ‘I’ President Ghani wants to show his personal opinion, experience, and his personal feeling toward the US and the relation with the US. There have been many examples, such as “**I** visited Ground Zero that very week. **I** went home. **I** began to write the plan for our national reconstruction”. The use of ‘I’ here shows two things, one the personal experience of the president, and secondly, it shows that personal plan and the course of action which he took, so in all cases, the use of ‘I’ shows subjective thoughts.

The use of exclusive (the speaker + the government + the people) 'we' along with the pronoun 'I' in the text indicates that President Ghani is not speaking of his own thoughts and ideas, but he talks on behalf of his government and people; such use of 'we' create an image of unity and oneness for the world. In a part of the text, it can be seen that 'we' is used inclusively, which includes both the speaker and the addressee. It shows that president Ghani wants to point out to the audience that war against terrorism is not only the responsibility of Afghans. It is a shared responsibility and commitment, both countries USA and Afghanistan should continue to struggle against.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of the introductory part of the speech of President Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, the president of Afghanistan, through critical discourse analysis approach, revealed different hidden aspects of the text. The researcher found out the purpose behind using pronouns, modality, and the word choice. Analyzing these things helped the researcher to find out the underlying ideology in the text. The analysis of the speech showed that the speaker was seeking to strengthen the existing and establish new relations with the US. Also, the speaker was trying to convince the audience that the world has to take serious steps toward terrorism and the war against terrorism should be supported as long as the terrorism is rooted out in Afghanistan.

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