CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: 
POWER IN ACCEPTANCE SPEECHES

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Abstract

The study aims at analyzing the links between identity, institutions and discourse. As a method, the author applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to demonstrate how a prominent figure of the American political life interacts in an exceptional social situation reflecting the macro level of social forces. Within CDA’s language analysis, the study also detects power relations through the lexico-grammatical level of language use. According to the functional theory of language (Halliday 1994), the paper investigates the acceptance speech of Barack Obama on the representational, positional and expressive levels of language use. On the one hand, the contribution intends to reveal that the metaphor, pronoun, and modality system may show the charismatic ways of power manifestation in political talk. On the other hand, the paper concludes that the linguistic means the speaker applies in the speech contribute to the construction of national identity.

Key words

identity, institutions, nation, discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis

1 Introduction

The mutual relationship between identity and discourse represents a prominent issue of social interaction and at the same time a fundamental theme of the interdisciplinary studies.

The paper builds upon three theories, namely Fairclough’s and Wodak’s Critical Discourse Analysis (1995, 2009), Halliday’s functional linguistics (1994) and van Leeuwen’s socio-semantic approach (2008). The latter two systems complement the former method towards a deeper analysis of social interaction. The political speech that makes up the corpus comes from Congressional Quarterly Transcriptions1. Considering the many angles from which the relationship between identity and discourse can be investigated, the study focuses on identity as a discourse product that can be analyzed from a pragmatic point of view. The speech appears as a strain of strategies used by the speaker to achieve the overall purpose: to unite the American people. Although the primary concept of CDA (Wodak 2009) draws on the demonstration of exclusion of certain social actors within discourse, the present study focuses on the linguistic means of inclusion. It is a strategy that enables the speaker to express sameness, unity and solidarity.

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