

**Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)****Examining Power Dynamics in George W. Bush's Address to A Joint Session Of Congress on the 9/11 Attacks: A Foucauldian Lense****Umair Ahmad<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Ihsanullah Khan<sup>2</sup>**

1. Undergraduate Student, Department of English and Modern Languages, University of Science &amp; Technology Bannu, KPK, Pakistan.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of English and Modern Languages, University of Science &amp; Technology, Bannu, KPK, Pakistan

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**Corresponding Author:****Umair Ahmad**Email: [UmairAhmad5450@gmail.com](mailto:UmairAhmad5450@gmail.com)**License:**

**Abstract:** *This research paper deals with the examination of the power relations embedded in President George W. Bush's speech, delivered at the Joint Session of Congress after the September 11 attacks. Foucault's concept of power abuse is reflected in the speech. Foucault's views on power, language, and governmentality conflict are useful when assessing the relationship between language and images of leadership and sovereignty in times of turmoil. The paper concentrated on such issues as identifying the discursive field, power dynamics and knowledge production, resistance and counter-discourses, archaeology and genealogy, description of terrorism, and the call for American unity in Bush's address. In this way, the study emphasized the fact that the speech was aimed not only at calming the US citizens as perhaps the President intended, but also at explaining how the American government frames its presence in search of order and security. This analysis shows how different forces 'captured' power through various forms of speech in the aftermath of the attacks. Finally, this study provides insights into crisis management techniques featured by political discourse of power and its meanings in a wider context during the times of terror.*

**Introduction**

September 11, 2001, can be considered a black day in the history of the US, when it witnessed one of the most dreadful terrorist strikes. Efforts of Al-Qaeda operatives working together resulted in the burning of the World Trade Centre in New York City and an assault on the Pentagon in Washington, DC, which caused the death of thousands of people. After this horrible event, in relation to the attacks, President GW Bush made a key address on the 20th of September 2001 to the Congress Joint Session. Such speech was not only aimed at the causes of the disaster and at the events that took place on the earlier day, but it also became a precursor for the USA's internal as well as external policies for the rest of the years. Viewing the events narrated in this speech from the Foucauldian perspective is also useful for analyzing the power relations in the context of the USA during the traumatic events.

Michel Foucault, an often-quoted French philosopher, focused on the connection between power and knowledge and distributed this power not only to institutions that hold it but throughout society,

everywhere where power is present. Foucault's concept emphasizes that power is not held solely by institutions but is distributed throughout society: "Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds onto or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1980). Certain groups utilize and abuse authority through power, a phenomenon that can be observed in how "discourses are dispersed unevenly in society" and how language "not only represents social realities but, through representation, also contributes to creating them" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 12).

Using Foucault's theories, we can interpret why certain phrases made it into Bush's speech and what their purpose was, such as how "economic knowledge" and "scientific discourses" are reconceived as political apparatuses that create power relations in the social realm" (Foucault, 1972, p. 121). The speech utilized public fear to unite people toward governmental measures and control societal behavior, reflecting how "the longevity of power is proportional to its ability to hide the mechanisms it uses" (Foucault, 1972). Bush's statements following the attacks demonstrate the dual function of a crisis leader: to provide comfort and to establish authority. This is akin to how leaders "control discourse to maintain power and create a sense of national purpose during difficult circumstances," highlighting the power relations between the people and the government, which can be seen in how "discourse points to important dimensions of social and historical change" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 15). Bush's speech also demonstrated how leaders may control discourse to maintain power and create a sense of national purpose during difficult circumstances, reflecting the power relations between the people and the government.

The study investigates several poignant issues present within Bush's address; particularly how the achievement of constructing the 'other', hierarchy based on strong calls for national togetherness and collective United States, as well constructive action serves wider interests. A Foucauldian discourse analysis of the speech is suitable to show the ways in which certain discursive constructions shape our conceptions of crises and the relations of power in society. This study, surely, will answer many questions on the political misuse of the language and the ways it affects the political processes in any country, especially during the time of crisis. It allows us to take a closer look at the political influence of the National Security rhetoric on the public opinion and policies in the United States and how such speeches shape the national identity in the long term.

### **Literature Review**

Numerous significant principles of Foucault theories and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are borrowed to provide the theoretical framework that underlies the current study. The more you learn CDA, the more you get to see the relationship between language and social setup and issues such as power and ideology. Fairclough holds the view that language presents a social practice (Fairclough, 1992) in alignment with the fact that language is developed and conditioned by social institutions.

Moreover, this knowledge is extended with the help of Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), which incorporates the concepts of power relations suggested by Foucault in CDA. It states that discourses are not neutral, but that they are covered by power relations that can go on to silence some voices and further reinforce the voice of others. Foucault states that, power is everywhere; not because everything is covered by it but because it originates everywhere (Foucault, 1980), which means that everywhere in society power manifests itself through various discursive practices.

Moreover, the 3D model created by Fairclough will enable you to view discourse in three directions such as text (linguistic factors) discursive practice (production and consumption of text), social practice (sociocultural context). This line of reasoning allows scholars to analyse the process of meaning in the

discourse through the prism of certain linguistic practices used in the speech of Bush, as well as discussing the overall implications of this fact to the social norms and values.

Additionally, CDA has dealt with the role of language in perpetuating and maintaining social power. According to Van Dijk (1998), discourse structures reflect as well as contribute to social structures, a fact that indicates that there is a duality of discourse in relation to its twin aspects of reflection and construction of social norms. This perspective is important in the evaluation of political speeches including the speeches after 9/11 made by President George W. Bush where discourse is employed to create discourses that will uphold the idea of a nation by the means of authorization.

Moreover, FCDA builds on to the provisions of CDA, as it integrates the work of power and knowledge by Michel Foucault in the analysis of discourse. According to Foucault, power is everywhere; it is not everywhere because everything is involved in it, but everywhere because it is originary (Foucault 1980). This statement means that the rules of power are dispersed in the whole society, and new forces of power are produced in a variety of discursive practices. This method allows a scholar to investigate how different discourses are not only revealed but also change existing relations of power.

Moreover, FCDA focuses on setting and historical and cultural context in which discourses are traced, as knowledge is also established and located in some power dynamics. Foucault (1977) says, rather, that knowledge is crafted not to be understood, but to be utilized, so that understanding discourse will require assessing the socio-political environment in which the discourse functions. This point of view is particularly relevant when testing it against the speech given by Bush after 9/11 attacks because it shows how specific language has been employed to construct national security problems and create a discourse of menace.

Lastly, both CDA and FCDA use ideology to lead conversation. Discursive practices often contain ideologies that determine people's vision of social realities. According to the words of van Dijk (1998) ideologies can be translated into discourse, meaning that political terms can exist and therefore perpetuate a dominant ideology that excludes certain groups but favours others. This interaction is particularly evident in the post 9/11 rhetoric where depictions of terrorism more often than not revolve around constructions of terrorism as a way of establishing the image of the other in a sense alien to the national identity.

### **The idea of the Otherness**

Learning the concept of Otherness is very important in the analysis of the address of President George W. Bush after 9/11. Bush in the speech makes a clear distinction between Americans and terrorists. Americans are shown as innocent, peaceful and free spirit people but the terrorists are shown as cruel, uncivilized and dangerous. The difference between we (us) and they (them) united and stimulated the American population but it also made it easier to dehumanize the opponent. By declaring the terrorists as the enemies of freedom, Bush made out that they are not only enemies of America but are also enemies of the native values of joy and civilization in general.

Edward Said's notion of Orientalism is strongly related to this concept of Otherness. According to Said, in order to defend authority and control, Western societies frequently paint the East as alien, archaic, and dangerous. "The Orient was almost a European invention...a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences," he composes (Said, 1978, p. 1). To put it another way, the West's perception of the East reinforces its own sense of superiority. Knowledge of the Orient, according to Said, "creates the Orient, the Oriental, and in a sense obliterates him as a human being" (Said, 1978, p. 26). This implies that rather than being a genuine person, the "other" is frequently dehumanized and reduced to a mere adversary.

The same language is used in Bush's address. Bush creates division in the globe by labelling the terrorists "barbaric criminals" and asserting that "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Speaking in this manner incites fear and defends war. Additionally, it upholds the notion that America has the authority to take action in the sake of security and freedom. The idea of Otherness thus turns into a political power instrument. It facilitates the manipulation of public opinion and makes violent acts appear justifiable and moral.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To analyse the discursive strategies employed by Bush in constructing national identity and the 'other': This includes examining how language is used to delineate between "us" (Americans) and "them" (terrorists or foreign adversaries).
- To explore the ideological implications of Bush's rhetoric: Investigating how his speeches reflect and reinforce power dynamics and societal beliefs post-9/11.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are discursive strategies, present in George W. Bush's post-9/11 speeches to construct a narrative of national identity?
2. How does Bush's rhetoric reflect and construct perpetuate ideologies regarding 'us' versus 'them'?

### **Methodology**

#### **Qualitative Study**

This research employs a qualitative methodology, specifically focusing on discourse analysis to examine President George W. Bush's address to Congress on September 20, 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Qualitative research is characterized by its emphasis on understanding human experiences and social phenomena through the collection and interpretation of non-numerical data. Most unlike the quantitative research which always attempts to quantify aspects and determine statistical associations, the qualitative research aims at examining the significance and perception held by individuals or groups of what they term as their experiences. Discourse analysis will be used in this research as a qualitative method applied to the study of the language used in the speech with information about implicit power relations and ideological constructs are revealed.

Discourse analysis will be especially appropriate to the research because it is concerned with the functioning of language in social context and the ability to explain how certain set phrases together with themes influence the perception of the public and policy. The method allows the researcher not only to consider what is said, but the uses of language to construct social reality and power relations as well. The aim of the study is to indicate recurring themes connected to the national security, unity, and collective identity through analysis of the speech using several approaches such as thematic analysis, linguistic analysis, and contextual analysis. It shall also see how the linguistic choices made by Bush convey power and evoke an emotional engagement in the listener, and considering the socio-political situation of the post 9/11 America. Lastly, this qualitative research will indicate how the speech of Bush was an effective tool to unite the masses behind him and transform the governmental policy during a crucial time in the history of America, which can be summed up by wider cultural trends and political activities.

#### **Data Collection**

The qualitative study information collection is to utilize both the primary and secondary sources in order to discuss the speech of President George W. Bush to Congress on 20 September 2001 in details. The

very data will be the official version of the speech of Bush, selected on the basis of credible archives of documentation or official sources in order to ensure correctness. The speeches were read and analyzed and in particular much emphasis was put on the use of words, rhythm, and appeal to motivate through the language and arguments. The words the writing styles employ will be considered, as well as metaphors and other objects to make a person feel something or shape the story in an organized manner.

The research additionally enquired into how Bush's address used methods like repetition, appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos, and the development of a "us versus them" dynamic to create a sense of urgency and national unity. Moreover, the analysis will pay attention to the historical situation after 9/11 to better see how the speech was received and what effects it had on policies.

Secondary data will enrich the original research with further explanations and concepts. Scholarly studies on political rhetoric, crisis communication, and discourse analysis will provide context for analyzing Bush's speech within larger academic discourses. Books on post-9/11 politics, national security rhetoric, and Foucault's theories on power and discourse will also be read to contextualize the speech in its ideological and historical context. Looking at reliable websites and news reports about the public's responses will let you see what the society's reaction was about the speech. This study brings together several sources to learn how Bush's speech influenced the public and helped set policy as the world faced a major challenge.

#### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The speech of President George W. Bush will be analyzed with the help of multiple instruments of discourse analysis to demonstrate hidden meanings and power relationships the text implies. The discussion of the speech topics will simplify the investigation of modes of producing and controlling such concepts as national security, unity and communal identity. They explore the use of language in demonstrating superiority, creating feelings or ideas and calling people to trust and sympathy through metaphor about language styles, repetition and use of ethics, emotions and logic. In this approach, attention will be given to the manner which the language used by Bush was not neutral but also aimed to unite a nation and arouse an emotion that this country is pursuing some kind of national purpose at a time of crisis.

Similarly, contextual analysis is another major catalyst of understanding the socio-political reality post September 11. The next part of the investigation will examine the way, in which the speech of Bush was meant to address the attitudes of people and influence the governmental activities following the attacks. By means of the following methodologies, the aim of the study can be described as an exercise demonstrating the possibilities of language as a means of creating power structures and preconditioning the discourse of people in the conditions of crisis. Comprehensive insights into the translation of social attitudes and political processes into the context of the United States during an extremely important point in its history will be received by implementing thematic analysis of the speech by Bush, linguistic analysis of the speech by Bush, and contextual analysis of the speech by Bush.

#### **Data Analysis**

The response of the September 11 attacks speech of President George W. not the administration on September 20, 2001, was a significant moment in the history of American politics because it laid the foundation of how the American nation would respond to the terrorist threat. It was meant to motivate the population through the time of the crisis, and as it turned out, it was the guiding light of the War on Terror. The speech made by Bush affected the public opinion and validated the following governmental steps as various discursive effects, ideological formations, and rhetoric strategies were used. A detailed

analysis by the Foucauldian theory brings to the fore how language and the use of such discourse establish identities, select enemies, and could hold together a particular group of people. In this analysis, this paper has examined the power structure and discursive peculiarities lurking behind the speech of Bush and has provided insight into the general picture of how political speech can be analyzed during a crisis.

### **Elements of the Discourse and Relationships of Power**

The speech presented by Bush is full of the discursive aspects that are deemed to be analyzed in a Foucaultian way. This oration uses the juxtaposed black and white opposites: the freedom against the fear, good against the evil, us against them. As an example, as Bush remarks, we are a country alerted to danger and in a call to defend freedom tonight. We are of all mercies sad, And sad of all to vengeance sad. Either we have to punish our enemies or if not, our enemies will be punished. Either the punishment will be against our foes, or our foes will be punished: in any case justice will be meted out". These divisions enable individuals to perceive the world in a particular manner and find it easy to differentiate between people who are with America and others.

In this speech, Osama bin Laden and his group al Qaeda appears like the bad guys. Bush says that the terrorists are the practitioners of fringe form of Islamic extremism and has been repudiated by Muslim scholars and by the overwhelming majority of Muslim clerics, a fringe movement that distorts teachings of a peaceful religion - Islam. It is a need to comprehend how a foe is portrayed in phrases and why such portrayal causes more hostility. The terminologies like the murderers, terrorists, and the radical network have also reinforced the feeling of these groups as a threat not only to the United States, but also to the world stability and civilization.

The speech throws light on the way America is operated under the principles of freedom and democracy. According to Bush, they despise what we have right in this chamber, a democratically elected government. They have self-proclaimed leaders. They do not like our freedoms and our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other". It is under this argument that the United States has a special role making its attempts to uphold freedom and democracy to be acceptable.

### **Ideological Constructs and Rhetorical Strategies**

This speech uses various concepts and speech patterns that are core to Foucaultian theory. In this speech, the president introduces the War on Terror and paints it as a worldwide battle against terrorism. Bush declares, "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated". As a result, a new approach for addressing terrorism is formed that authorizes both military and diplomatic interventions.

The speech underlines the importance of world unity and working together globally to beat terrorism. Bush notes, "The civilized world is rallying to America's side. They understand that if this terror goes unpunished, their own cities, their own citizens may be next". The discourse links everyone fighting the same enemy, making it clear that the War on Terror belongs to the world, not only the United States.

The speech begins by discussing homeland security and detailing those different areas of the country must coordinate to avoid acts of terrorism. Bush announces, "Tonight I announce the creation of a Cabinet-level position reporting directly to me — the Office of Homeland Security". It leads to the development of a new set of rules and processes to handle domestic security, making it clear that responding to terrorism is a team effort by the federal government.

### **Knowledge Claims and Power Relations**



Several important points about power dynamics are included in the speech. Bush characterizes al Qaeda as a radical network of terrorists with global reach, stating, "Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world — and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere". As a result of this characterization, al Qaeda is regarded as a major threat, which justifies all the action taken to fight it.

The speech relates the Taliban in Afghanistan to al Qaeda and asks them to give up the leaders of terrorist groups and close training camps. Bush states, "The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country". By labelling the Taliban as involved in terrorism, this discourse makes it easier for the US to use force against the country.

Bush's speech reveals a complex web of discursive elements, power dynamics, and ideological constructs. Binary oppositions are used, a clear-cut enemy is put forward, American exceptionalism is highlighted, and this speech is the starting point for the War on Terror. Working with a Foucauldian perspective, we see that speeches can influence general views, justifies government decisions, and upholds specific points of view. It reveals that discourse plays a major role in our understanding of society and the relationships between people in it.

#### **Discussion on Foucauldian Theory and Research Findings**

The following looks at what found out when analyzed President George W. Bush's September 20th, 2001 speech to Congress based on Michel Foucault's ideas about power, knowledge, and how people speak and write. The purpose is to connect what Foucault says about how power works with how the U.S. president talked in this speech, so we can better understand how certain ways of talking about politics can gain or share power, especially during crises.

According to Michel Foucault, power is not possessed by institutions or individuals but is distributed and instantiated in discourse, knowledge, and everyday practice. Power is in Foucault's view relational, productive, and pervasive. It is exercised not merely through repression but most significantly through normalization and control of meaning. Discourse for Foucault is a source through which powerful people exercise power in so much as it defines what can be said, who is entitled to say it, and what counts as truth. Foucault assertively states, "Power is everywhere because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1980). This is what informs the discourse of Bush's speech, a political response in itself but also a discursively active utterance affecting public consciousness and legitimizing state actions.

The findings of the research illustrate that Bush's discourse is abundant in Foucauldian-inspired discursive strategies. A major strategy was the use of binary oppositions like "us vs. them," "freedom vs. fear," and "civilization vs. barbarism." The oppositions are certainly not neutral; they are meant to establish a moral dichotomy with America at the top and its enemies characterized by irrationality and evil. Discourse does not simply mirror reality; it creates it according to Foucault. Bush's discourse in this sense was therefore an active agent in constructing public perception of terrorism and national identity. The constructed enemy was not only a military threat but a cultural and ideological threat.

Another Foucauldian idea evidenced in the speech is production of knowledge as a form of power. Bush's statements about terrorism, Islamic extremism, and global dangers were framed as factual and objective when in fact they were ideologically saturated. This is in line with Foucault's argument that knowledge is constructed in regimes of power to serve to legitimize control practices. Bush's launching of the Department of Homeland Security and global War on Terror was legitimized in terms of the "truth" of potential danger. By so doing, the speech set up a paradigm in terms of which surveillance, military responses, and restrictions on civil liberties became necessary and reasonable.

The Foucaultian idea of governmentality—how governments seek to form the citizen most capable of executing their policies—was also at work. Bush's speech requested unity, patriotism, and unquestioning compliance with governmental actions. This rhetorical move served to align citizens' actions along state goals. By defining how people conceived of their roles throughout this crisis, the speech was a work of governance rather than a work of communication.

In addition to this, the speech used intertextuality to evoke shared cultural discourses such as American exceptionalism and superiority of democracy. As Fairclough (1992) observes, texts use other texts and discourses to build meaning. Bush's references to freedom in America, religious tolerance, and past durability imposed mainstream ideologies and excluded different ideas. This supports Foucault's assertion that discourses silence or exclude alternative truths.

Significantly, however, the speech also demonstrates the limits to resistance in such powerful discourses. While Foucault was clear in arguing that where there is power, there is also resistance, what this analysis establishes is that Bush's account legitimately had very little space for other interpretations. The constitution of the enemy and moral urgency of response meant dissent was tantamount to being unpatriotic or dangerous. Thus, in this manner, the discourse commanded not only external actions but internal thinking and discussion too, a defining feature of what Foucault described as disciplinary power.

In short, the results reaffirm Foucauldian discourse analysis in relation to political rhetoric in periods of crisis. The example of President Bush's speech illustrates how language is utilized to generate knowledge, form identity, and exert power.

The content of the speech reflected both sorrow about a difficult event and was designed to help the government's agenda, as discovered through a Foucaultian view of things. A post-9/11 security-oriented political and cultural system centered on surveillance and moral divisions was constructed through the speech's normalization of some views and marginalization of others.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The conducted research on the speech of George W. Bush after the 9/11 attack reveals that it is filled with tactics aiming to form the opinion and approve the steps made by the government. Employing the concepts of the discourse and power suggested by Michel Foucault, the paper discovered that the rhetoric employed by Bush is meant to establish a profound dichotomy between the two groups, namely, between us (America and its allies) and them (the terrorists and their supporters). It is within this classification that the US finds it convenient to give justification to implement its military campaigns and people regard America as an ethical nation.

He used to talk much about religion and appeal to American emotions so that to enhance the national unity and shut up the mouth of the opponent. The case that was presented revolved around key words like freedom, justice and evil that was used to support the argument that America also helps in promoting virtue. The language also caused people to be more fearful and perceived a broad scope of threats hence the government had more liberty in making decisions.

With the help of the speech, the president is the one who has the biggest influence and control. The concept of discursive formation offered by Foucault is used to demonstrate how this discourse created a particular type of truth, the kind that validates the U.S. supremacy and justifies the War on Terror.

It is not just a reaction of the attack that Bush talks about in his speech. The chosen rhetoric aims at persuading, controlling thoughts of people, and earning popular favour as well as political influence. It has emerged that it is through ways of speaking that political speeches control the reality and sustain power.



## Conclusion

The speech delivered by President George W. Bush to the Congress on September 20, 2001 leads to the analysis of the role of language and rhetoric in constructing a certain perception and policy of people after the events of September 11. This speech, being given at a moment when the nation was facing a crisis never seen before was more than a speech to console a nation that was grieving but also it helps to give the American nation an excuse to go ahead and do what it has done regarding the war on terror. Bush developed a strict opposition between the two sides, us and them, and placed the turn of the situation as a battle of freedom and fear, good and evil, having used diverse discursive elements to build it. The result of this binary opposition was that it made it simpler to view global problems in a black and white manner and also easier to get people to join forces towards one common cause of action against things which they perceived as threats. In Foucauldian perspective, what the speech demonstrates is that power is exercised by what people say, and language can be utilized to form various groups and identify who their enemies are. The image of al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden as evil pure, created their depiction as perfect to go to war with and people holding their beliefs that USA was certain and superior to most other nations. The focus of the Bush rhetoric was to establish the security of the whole country and this was achieved when the United States was positioned as protector of democracy and freedom, not only to justify the broad military action but also to justify the programs on domestic security such as creating the Office of Homeland Security. The focus on collaboration in international fight allowed creating the War on Terror as the collective undertaking to which not only America was involved. The type of ideological frames Bush cultivated in his speech has left an irreversible print on the American society and the international relations. What has been discussed concerning national security had evolved significantly since the 9/11 event, which has influenced the way people think about security and the policies adopted today. Civil liberty, government spying and application of force in other nations are still debated to date owing to the words spoken by Kennedy. Therefore, the study offers the criterion to investigate meticulously the use of communication in politics to realize how some narratives are constructed and required in the times of crisis.

This qualitative study therefore commends that the relationship between language, power, and social reality remains a complex dynamic as it is posited in the address by Bush. Understanding the application of messages and relations of power in his speeches is one of the ways through which this paper examines how political leaders respond to crises and influence what people can think. They indicate that discourse is used to construct reality and respond to reality which is quite critical when handling contemporary political discussions. The stories, which have been generated since September 11 will continue to dominate our perceptions of national identities, security, and national relations with other countries well into the future.

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