



From Cause to Concern: Critical Discourse Analysis and Extra-discursive Interests

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JISKA ENGELBERT

Erasmus University Rotterdam
engelbert@fhk.eur.nl

Abstract

*By drawing on Norman Fairclough's seminal study *New Labour, new language?*, this article sets out to address and overcome a problematic issue in a 'Faircloughian' CDA: the premise that discourse's rhetorical orientation is geared towards the concealment of problematic 'extra-discursive' interests. This article proposes that ideological agents' discourse can also be explored without a priori assigning dubious or concealed commitments and investments to these producers. Problematic interests, in this view, are not only something that discourse producers have and conceal, but also what they might anticipate being accused of having. Considering 'stake' and interest as a discursive concern rather than a cause for discourse initially grounds this proposition in a kind of 'emic' discourse-analytical endeavour. Yet, this article does not set out to argue against an 'etic' CDA, but seeks to provide an alternative to approaching projects for social change as discursive operations and sites of hegemonic struggle.*

Key words: Fairclough, New Labour, hegemonic struggle, rhetoric, discursive causes *versus* discursive concerns

1. Introduction

This article addresses and proposes a solution to overcoming a key issue in the branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) that explores the relationship between discourse and social change, and whose most influential architect and proponent is Norman Fairclough. In his vast body of work, Fairclough has set out an analytical framework for exploring how discourse features in projects for social change (Fairclough 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b, 2003) and he has applied that framework to projects he deems particularly characteristic of 'late modernity' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999): the commodification of cultural and social life (Fairclough 1991, 1993, 1997), globalisation (Fairclough 2006), and the rise of 'new capitalism' and its colonisation of all spheres of economic, social and cultural life (Fairclough 2000b, 2002, 2004). In 2000, Fairclough published *New Labour, new language?* (Fairclough 2000a). This seminal study, despite being written in a 'clear and non-technical style' and having inspired and convinced a broad (non-academic) readership, is a prime application of what I term a 'Faircloughian' CDA.

In 1994, Tony Blair introduced the UK electorate to a 'new' Labour Party that embraced the 'Third Way' politics of 'ideological transcendence', a politics that set out to move 'beyond left and right' (Giddens 1994, 1998). Grounded in a conviction that a social democratic politics should be in tune with changes in the nature and requirements of modern times (Blair 1998), New Labour was to pursue a politics that would not depart from Labour values. Instead, according to the 'Blairites' in the party, Britain needed the now notorious adage of 'Labour values in a modern setting.'

Taking an unequivocal stance against the righteousness of New Labour, Fairclough's study (Fairclough 2000a) reveals how the language of New Labour, with a typical Third Way rhetoric as its core, is able to background what he considers its actual neo-liberal political commitment. New Labour's language thereby gradually normalises an inherently problematic view of social life and government. With his focus on how language can construct and validate versions of the social world and on how it can progressively marginalise the validity of alternative and contesting versions, Fairclough provides wonderful insights into New Labour as foremost a discursive operation.

Yet, Fairclough's study highlights an issue pervasive in other (Faircloughian) critical language enquiries: the premise that discourse's rhetorical orientation is geared towards the concealment of problematic 'extra-discursive' interests and commitments. This article proposes that we can actually explore the discourse of ideological agents like New Labour without *a priori* assigning concealed investments to the discourse producer. That is, we can consider discourse constructing particular versions of events for how it bears the traces of actively negotiating and refuting that such problematic interests are at play. Problematic interests or commitments, then, are not only something that discourse producers *have* and conceal, but also something they might anticipate being accused of having.

Considering 'stake' and interest as discursive *concerns* rather *causes* for discourse (cf. Locke and Edwards 2003: 239) firmly grounds my proposition in discourse-analytical endeavour that is typically referred to as 'Discourse Analysis'. Labels like 'Critical Discourse Analysis' and 'Discourse Analysis' wrongly suggest that there are two kinds of discourse-analytical endeavour; a critical and a 'non-critical' variation. Moreover, these two strands have explicitly challenged each other on what discourse is to bear the traces of and on the influence of methodological and analytical frameworks in identifying these traces (cf. Wetherell 1998; Schegloff 1998; Billig 1999a, 1999b; Schegloff 1999a, 1999b). However, I do not set out to argue against Fairclough at all, but seek to provide an alternative to approaching projects for social change as a discursive operation and a site for hegemonic struggle.

To construe Fairclough's view of rhetoric, sections 2 to 5 of this article set out characteristics of *New Labour, New Language?* and, arguably, of a broader Faircloughian CDA: the argued salience of language in projects for social change; the view of discourse producers in these projects as ideological agents; the subsequent view of discourse production as inherently motivated, and the resulting task for the analyst to assess the veracity of rhetoric. The second part of the article, in sections 6 to 8, suggests a reconsideration of this view of rhetoric and illustrates, by drawing on Tony Blair's 2006 valedictory

Labour party conference speech, how considering extra-discursive interests as discursive concerns still allows us to understand New Labour, just as Fairclough does, as a discursive project that attempts to normalise a (problematic!) particular view of social life and governance.

2. *The Salience of Language in Projects for Social Change*

Fairclough's CDA is characteristic for its focus on exploring the role of discourse in particular programmes for social, economic and cultural change. These programmes account for fundamental (and problematic) changes in the way people live their lives, and are distinctively characteristic for how they exist 'as *discourses* [original emphasis] as well as processes that are taking place outside discourse' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 4). This claim highlights a particular view of the role of discourse – or language as Fairclough more commonly refers to it – in social practices.

In this light, Fairclough (2000a: 146-160) considers government as a social practice, as a principle that organises and defines a particular sphere of social life, the groups of people in it and their relationships to each other. What people do in the social practice of government, how they are organised by it, and what they believe in or through it is absolutely vital to its nature. Nonetheless, Fairclough (2000a: 156) considers language in all social practices of government a 'durable' feature because the social action of governing is inherently discursive in nature, as the significance of policies, documents and decision-making illustrates.

Yet, language is more than a mere durable feature in New Labour's social practice of government. It is a particularly 'salient' one (cf. Fairclough 2000a: 156-159), because the social action of New Labour's governance is very much shaped by New Labour's 'Third Way' view of the state and civil society and by its 'politics of reconciliation', a politics postulating that the same means to enable and facilitate the pursuit of social enterprise could and should secure social justice. That salience would manifest itself in two dimensions of New Labour's discourse. On the one hand, the Third Way vision entails an open, transparent and democratic style of government and a 'firm-but-fair' or managerial kind of leadership. Through the careful analysis of discursive genres, such as Green Papers, party manifestos and Tony Blair's performances, Fairclough argues for the relative importance of semiotic practices in constructing and representing such a style. On the other hand, the Third Way vision entails a particular version of the world, one in which irreversible global change is necessitating a new kind of social democratic politics.

Thereby, New Labour not only establishes an agreement that this is what the world is like, but also that New Labour's political response to it is the most adequate and altruistic. That agreement is foremost to be the product of discursive representations of the world and New Labour's politics, both of which are to be certified for their validity, factuality and veracity. And, again, typical genres like Green Papers, party manifestos and political speeches of Labour leaders and politicians are considered by Fairclough as highlighting how language is particularly salient in being constitutive of and constituted by

these versions of the social world. It is this part of Fairclough's analysis – and thus not his analyses of how discourse genres construct and reconstitute a particular style of governance and leadership (cf. Fairclough 2000a: 95-140) – that forms the focus of this article's assessment.

3. Discourse Producers as Ideological Agents

Fairclough's concern with New Labour's language is not merely because of its particular or relative importance in New Labour's social practice. Instead, he is concerned about the consequences of that salience, as it results in the postulation and acceptance of a version of the social world he deems problematic and hazardous,

My interest in the politics and language of New Labour starts from my view that it is profoundly dangerous for my fellow human beings for this new form of capitalism to develop unchecked, both because it dramatically increases inequality (and therefore injustice and suffering) and because it threatens to make life on earth unsustainable. (Fairclough 2000a: 15)

An involvement with the topic under investigation is in line with the generic principle of critical language enquiry. Yet, Fairclough's normative stance in relation to New Labour seems to move beyond analytical suspicion. His starting position is that New Labour's discourse is inevitably to attempt a problematic kind of normalisation. This is to be principally understood through his position in the academic response to New Labour. Fairclough is not a mere critical language analyst; his concerns about New Labour are also part of the broader 'academic charge' that New Labour abandoned Labour values and principles (cf. Hall 1998; Hall 2005; Callinicos 2001). The duality of Fairclough's academic identity becomes particularly manifest in his call for 'co-ordinated action against neo-liberalism on the part of critical language researchers' (Fairclough 2000c: 147) and his appeal for exposing the discourse of those social agents who play a key part in the construction and reproduction of the view that 'all must bow to the logic of the global economy' (Fairclough 2000c: 147).

These two dimensions of Fairclough's scholarship also evidently converge and overlap in *New Labour, New Language?*. Fairclough *a priori* denounces any politics that accepts 'international economic liberalism ... as an inevitable and unquestionable fact of life upon which politics and government are to be premised' (Fairclough 2000a: 15) and which claims that the means to stimulate enterprise and global competition can simultaneously safeguard fairness and social justice (Fairclough 2000a, 2002). He then explores New Labour's language for how it must therefore bear the traces of juggling between having an inherently neo-liberal and (global) capitalist commitment and not wanting to lose traditional Labour support. This makes New Labour relevant as a neo-liberal agent that 'seeks to achieve rhetorically what it cannot achieve in reality – a reconciliation of neo-liberal 'enterprise' with 'social justice'' (Fairclough 2000a: 16).

4. Discourse Production as Inherently Motivated

New Labour would rhetorically achieve this reconciliation by working up what is a highly *interested* and distorted version of the social world – of the global changes, the role of government and nature of politics in it – as factual and *disinterested*. This view of language as being ideologically committed but concurrently presented as uncommitted can be seen to draw heavily on how prominent critical linguists, Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress (1988), have theorised the issues of modality and interest in the production of the sign.

Central to their theorising is a social semiotic approach to social power, which challenges the Saussurean notion of the fixed and relatively arbitrary nature of how signifiers and signified together constitute the sign. Hodge and Kress (1988), being explicitly inspired by Vološinov (1973), argue for the instable relationship between signifier and signified and for the ‘non-arbitrary’ and motivated composition of the sign. A social semiotic approach sees social power as the effect of being ‘sanctioned with modality’, as being granted with controlling ‘what version of reality will be selected out as the valid version in [a] semiotic process’ (Hodge and Kress 1988: 45). That authority is the product of a broad consensus that the relationship between signifier and signified is transparent, that, for example, New Labour’s typical referring to ‘sweeping and irreversible global change’ describes the social worlds as it is.

Hodge and Kress’ argument about modality therefore develops a social semiotic theory of ‘truth’. It sees the factuality and validity of the signifier as to be achieved discursively. How critical linguists account for social power by focusing on the sanctioning of modality is similar to Fairclough’s accounting for shifts in social power and for social change by focusing on how institutions or (ideological) agents colonise and consolidate the production and consumption of discourse. The emphasis in both accounts is on accepting and supporting the way in which an agent makes sense of the social world. That support is translated into a broad agreement that the descriptions of the social world are representing that social world as it is.

The consequent question is how social agents and institutions, or authors of discourses, can secure and consolidate an apparently transparent relationship between signifier and signified. Critical linguists pose this question to account for existing structures of social power, whilst Fairclough’s focus is on accounting for shifts in social power. Both argue that the workings of ideology are vital, as it has the capacity to background the question of whose interests are served by a specific portrayal of the social world. This is enabled by those linguistic *transformative* practices that attend to issues of agency, responsibility and interests (cf. Fowler *et al.* 1979; Kress and Hodge 1993; Fairclough 1989, 1992a, 2000a). Language, then, is a ‘social semiotic’ (Halliday 1978), capable of constructing particular social realities and of negotiating social order and social relationships within it.

5. Assessing the Veracity of Rhetoric

What de Saussure argued to be a fundamentally arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified is thus in fact a highly motivated one; not by

resemblance to its referent but by the interests of either the discourse producers (e.g. New Labour) or key beneficiaries (e.g. multinationals, middle classes) in a particular version of the social world. Linguistic transformative practices and language as a general social semiotic allow for particular representations of the social world in which problematic agency, responsibility and interests can be managed. Thereby, the relationship between signifier and signified appears transparent, whilst it is in fact opaque or full of 'ideological constitution and intention' (Kress 1993: 90). This analytical suspicion of practices of discourse production has important consequences for what constitutes the perceived task but also the object for critical discourse analysts: they have a unique ability to recognise the social production of signs as inherently motivated and thereby suspicious (Kress 1993). Although CDA pursues an emancipatory project of critical language awareness, it is principally the analyst who spearheads such a project in providing a rare opportunity to see through practices of discourse production, avoiding inevitably drowning in them. This ability is captured in Simon Hoggart's description on the back cover of Fairclough's *New Labour, new language*,

To those of us who find ourselves carried along helplessly in Tony Blair's rhetorical stream of consciousness, Norman Fairclough offers a life-saving branch to which we can cling, while we work out where we are and where we are being swept.

A first example of Fairclough's treatment of New Labour's discourse is a section of a 1998 New Labour White Paper, entitled 'Building the knowledge-driven economy'¹ (Fairclough 2000a: 23). The features Fairclough focuses on are underlined:

In the increasingly global economy of today, we cannot compete in the old way. Capital is mobile, technology can migrate quickly and goods can be made in low cost countries and shipped to developed markets. British business must compete by exploiting capabilities which its competitors cannot easily match or imitate ... knowledge, skills and creativity.

Fairclough focuses on the grammatical and linguistic category of 'processes', the representation of actions. In relation to the representation of these underlined actions – the migration of technology, the production and shipping of goods – he questions why the White paper does not say instead that 'the multinational corporations can quickly move capital and technology from place to place, and they can make goods in low cost countries and ship them to developed markets' (Fairclough 2000a: 24)? The absence of multinational organisations as a key social actor in these processes constructs these multinationals as 'the ghost in the machine' (Fairclough 2000a: 23). Fairclough argues that the effect of this backgrounding is that the global economy is presented as an undeniable feature of our lives that cannot be challenged or reversed.

Even though Fairclough acknowledges that New Labour might in fact conceive of the global economy in this way, such a vague version of who is responsible for the global economy is also convenient for New Labour, allowing the party to 'have it both ways' (Fairclough 2000a: 24). If New Labour was to make the role of the multinationals more explicit and in line with their actuality by

bringing it grammatically to the fore, the electorate would see through their ‘destructive, self-interested activities’ (Fairclough 2000a: 24). This would make it hard for New Labour, particularly among its leftist supporters, to create support for a new politics that prides sets out to take on the consequences of this global economy.

A second example is Fairclough’s analysis of a section of Tony Blair’s 1998 pamphlet ‘The Third Way’² (Fairclough 2000a: 44). Again, the foci of Fairclough’s analysis are underlined. The italics are Fairclough’s own:

My vision for the 21st century is of a popular politics reconciling themes which in the past have wrongly been regarded as antagonistic – patriotism *and* internationalism; right *and* responsibilities; the promotion of enterprise *and* the attack on poverty and discrimination ... In New Labour’s first year of government we have started to put the Third Way into practice. Cutting corporation tax to help business *and* introducing a minimum wage to help the lowest paid. Financial independence for the Bank of England *and* the biggest ever programme to tackle structural unemployment. New investment and reform in our schools to give your people the skills they need *and* cracking down hard on juvenile crime to create secure communities ...

The focus is on how these ‘ands’ bring together different themes. New Labour would use such constructions often and in combination with each other, thereby creating a ‘not only, but also’ logic (Fairclough 2000a: 44). This is of course symptomatic of New Labour’s politics of reconciliation and Fairclough argues that this is a typical feature of New Labour’s ‘Third Way rhetoric’. This characteristic generates discursive effects that make it a feature subject to Fairclough’s suspicion of being a motivated choice.

The combinations are surprising to an audience because New Labour makes them initially relevant as each other’s mutually exclusive opposites and then goes on to negate that opposition. Moreover, because they are often presented, as they are here, through an overload of examples, they infer and persuade the public that paired-up themes are part of the same kinds of domains. For example, ‘responsibilities’ becomes vertically aligned with ‘attacking poverty and discrimination’, implying that they are both part of the more ‘social-ist’ dimension to New Labour’s politics, now to be reconciled with more liberal themes that are typically presented before the ‘and’.

Fairclough (2000a: 45) treats these combinations with suspicion as ‘it is one thing to say that there may be ways of reconciling (...); it is quite another to say that the two ‘themes’ can be no longer in conflict’. In addition, they would create a sense of vertical similarity between themes that are not similar, as for example ‘responsibilities’ in fact articulates a (neo-)liberal theme that has already colonised the sphere of social justice. The kind of ‘obscuring’ (Fairclough 2000: 45) that is enabled by these combinations would allow New Labour to present its politics as not privileging any ideological tenet. Thereby, very similar to what we have seen in the example above, it enables New Labour to keep its different constituencies – its new middle-class electorate and its traditional supporters – on board (cf. Fairclough 2000a: 25).

Fairclough thus considers transformative practices and rhetorical devices in New Labour’s language as able to discursively *accomplish* both the inevitability of the global economy and change as well as the consequent

necessity to respond to the effects rather than challenge the origins of these processes. He also regards them as capable of achieving the equivalence between unrelated themes or spheres of social life. These discursive practices are thereby capable of *achieving* the ‘uninterestedness’ of New Labour. They enable New Labour to conceal its true political commitment of systematically favouring neo-liberal over socialist principles, of having fully embraced the global economy and the interests of its key initiators, and of breaching a key Labour principle by leaving structurally unchallenged the role of problematic actors in processes of global change.

6. Rethinking Rhetorical Sophistication

The verbs *accomplishing* and *achieving* are important here. They imply that the factuality of New Labour’s representations is ‘awarded’ to New Labour and that there is consensus over the fact that, for example, ‘sweeping’ global change has no agency and that it necessitates political attending to its effects. In other words, New Labour has been granted the modality to describe the social world – both in terms of the ‘external’ world and of its own politics – as it is.

However, what arises from Fairclough’s analysis is that because ideological agents have interests, and especially because they have a *rhetorical* capacity to make careful lexical and grammatical choices in backgrounding those interests, their representations have such an intrinsic ability to pre-empt their ‘exposure’ that sanctioning modality is inevitable. The authority to validly represent the social world, then, is not something that is sanctioned to New Labour through consent and accomplishment, but acquired by New Labour through ‘rhetorical coercion’.

Instead of elaborating on what characterises the form and orientation of rhetoric, Fairclough implies that rhetoric is characteristic for how it accommodates two requirements: the discourse producer having problematic extra-discursive interests and the discourse producer having a sophisticated understanding of how linguistic and grammatical selection can pre-empt the exposure of those interests. Because none of the descriptions and accounts of New Labour can be brought back to its extra-discursive political agenda and commitment, New Labour is able to normalise its view of social life and governance. And here lies the crux: Fairclough is in the privileged position that he *can* expose.

This, of course, highlights an issue in Fairclough’s work that has been subject to a much wider and ongoing debate between different streams of discourse-analytical endeavour over the role of the analyst and the status of analytical frameworks, a discussion I referred to earlier. In addition, Fairclough’s assessment of New Labour’s discourse production as inherently rhetorical stems from a problem that Jonathan Potter identifies in relation to a social semiotic theorisation of factuality and veracity, which he argues is ultimately ‘moral and normative’, treating some representations of events as ‘more real and more honest’ than others (Potter 1996: 226). Yet, there is a more pressing reason to propose an exploration of how pre-empting contestation could constitute a *concern* of New Labour’s discourse rather than its *cause* (cf.

Locke and Edwards 2003: 239): Fairclough's view of rhetoric is conditional. For example, if we were to argue that extra-discursive interest might not be potent or that witnessing the certification of the validity or factuality of descriptions might not necessarily illustrate practices of concealment, then discourse immediately loses its rhetorical nature and potential. In addition, New Labour's language would be unable to attend to the struggle over the most appropriate and valid signifiers to describe the social world, including itself. However, the New Labour 'project' was/is notoriously controversial: despite a major increase in party membership after Blair becoming party leader, there were even more people – inside and outside the party – openly distancing themselves from the new political course.

Therefore, even without assuming the extra-discursive interests of New Labour, its language might actually bear traces of practices that attend to certifying the validity of its claims. The kinds of devices and practices Fairclough identifies as pervasive in New Labour's language – summing up-lists, an abundance of examples, the use of metaphorical language, the presentation of processes as entities – could equally be as orienting to the factuality of New Labour's claims about the social world and about its own politics. Rather than necessarily highlighting practices of concealment, it could illustrate that the defining of New Labour is made relevant by discourse producers themselves as taking place in a context where New Labour's accounts and descriptions might be subject to heavy contestation.

7. From Concealing to Acknowledging

This rethinking shifts the focus of pre-emptive discursive from concealing to acknowledging the contentious context in which discourse is produced. Such rethinking still regards discourse as rhetorical. Descriptions or accounts can say something about New Labour, but also about the appropriateness or validity of those descriptions and, thereby, about the validity of competing versions. Discourse, in addition, can still attend to the (ideological) struggle over the most appropriate signifier. The key difference is that the sanctioning of modality is not guaranteed by the force of rhetoric, but might be attempted when New Labour's discourse is 'resilient against rhetorical onslaught' (Edwards and Potter 1992: 152); when it consistently warrants that a potential problematic investment in descriptions of both the social world and itself is not an issue. This means that there is much more discursive work and effort to be carried out by the discourse producer. It also entails a view of rhetoric as able to anticipate and manage projected discursive stake imputations rather than conceal actual extra-discursive interests. The key consequence of this conceptualisation is that rhetoric is characteristic for the shape and orientation of language; not – in the Faircloughian sense of the term – for its presupposing of problematic interests.

As a starting point for considering 'stake' and interest as a discursive *concern* rather than *cause* for discourse (cf. Locke and Edwards 2003: 239), we can consider the work of rhetorical psychologist Michael Billig and discursive psychologists Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards. Their work can be seen to draw on a Bakhtinian view of discourse as dialogue, in which language only 'means' when speakers, interactionally, construct their social positions in

relation to other social positions (Bakhtin 1981; Vološinov 1973). The role of the analyst, according to Bakhtin, is to reconstruct how the composition of utterance attends to 'others' and what it means in the context of how the speaker is engaged in a dialogue with those representing other positions.

When I attribute this view to Bakhtin, I refer to a collective of ideas that could consist of the contribution of several individual authors, including Vološinov. Interestingly, Hodge and Kress (1988) firmly ground their theorising of the relationship between modality and social power in Vološinov's work to argue for the diachronic nature of the sign. Yet, I would argue that especially Billig's rhetorical approach to social psychology really brings to life Bakhtin's idea of considering the utterance for its dialogical meaning and for its negotiation with other positions. He considers discourse not so much for how it can problematically seek to establish or safeguard the sanctioning of modality, but much more for how discourse bears the active traces of this struggle.

Billig does so by regarding discourse in such 'argumentative contexts' as inherently rhetorical and thereby twofold in orientation (cf. Billig 1991: 181). It is rhetorical as it always seems to take a stance in two-pronged argument (Billig 1996), in which an argument for something is always an argument against something else. Consequently, discourse is intrinsically dual in orientation, as it simultaneously attempts the construction of particular versions of the social world, as well as the deflection of (anticipated) countering versions. What characterises discourse in argumentative contexts, then, is that it has 'content as well as context' (Billig 1991: 20). While a social semiotic theory of truth thus focuses on how discourse can achieve a normalised version of the social world, Billig's 'Bakhtinian scholarship' emphasises the continuous challenges and fragility to such dominant views. It sees the struggle over the most apt signifier as an endless battle, in which both dominant and challenging views are incessantly in negotiation.

Billig's distinction of discourse's content and context can be seen to be further operationalised by discursive psychologists Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter's distinction of discourse's 'action orientation' and 'epistemic orientation' (Edwards and Potter 1992). They consider a central orientation of people's talk and text, in which speakers typically attend to causal attribution, the management or anticipation of suspicious treatment. Participants are seen as potentially 'caught in a dilemma of stake or interest', in which their challenge is 'to produce accounts ... without being undermined as interested' (Edwards and Potter 1992: 158). To manage that dilemma, participants try and warrant the factuality of their accounts.

Consequently, a persistent occurrence of warranting practices is particularly likely to be displayed in those situations where people anticipate that their accounts might be treated by others as being informed by investment or stake in a particular social category. In such situations discourse producers can often be seen to make a special effort to certify the factual and stake-free nature of claims, descriptions, views and opinions that describe events and specify the roles of participants in those events in particular ways.

8. *Pictures of New Labour*

To illustrate this reconsideration of rhetoric, this section *tentatively* explores an extract of Tony Blair's 2006 valedictory party conference speech for those kinds of pictures of New Labour it constructs that bear the traces of engaging in an argument with others over the most appropriate way(s) to define New Labour. That means that the analysis focuses on identifying those accounts, descriptions, claims and views in the extract that are explicitly warranted for their 'disinterestedness', and that are hence able to present New Labour in a particular light.

1. We changed the terms of political debate. This Labour government has been unique.
2. First time ever two full terms, now three. So why and how?

Raising the question (line 2) and presenting it as a legitimate and necessitated one is in itself an important practice of stake management. It implies that any discursive action is inherent to the question being asked:

3. Because we faced out to the people, not in on ourselves. We put the party at the
4. service of the country. Their reality became our reality; their worries our worries. We
5. abandoned the ridiculous self-imposed dilemma between principle and power. We
6. went back to first principles: our values, our real values. Those that are timeless, and
7. separated them from doctrine and dogma that had been ravaged by time. And in doing
8. so, we freed Britain at long last from the reactionary choice that dominated British
9. politics for so long. Between individual prosperity and a caring society. We proved
10. that economic efficiency and social justice are not opposites, but partners in progress.
11. We defied conventional political wisdom, and thereby we changed it.

I want to focus on how the categorisation of actions, attributed to the active 'we' agency, sets up a framework for comparison. The first reason Blair presents, 'Because we faced ... in on ourselves' (line 3), constitutes a blueprint for this. Blair recreates the effect of such a formula by including verbal actions and clauses that presuppose binary opposition: abandoning (versus sticking to), going back (versus moving away from) and separating (versus keeping together). Consequently, the framework against which the account is

presented is one dominated by the binary opposites of abandoning, going back and separating.

Using opposing verbs constructs a framework for comparison that makes available important inferences on the nature of the old framework. It is a framework in which the party faced in on itself (line 3); put the country at its service (lines 3-4); stuck to a 'ridiculous self-imposed dilemma between principle and power' (lines 4-5), and in which it had moved away from its real values (line 6) because it could not make a distinction between values and 'doctrine and dogma ... ravaged by time' (line 7). These categorisations work up the elements of the old framework as typically problematic.

Presenting an account as embedded within an adjacency pair enables attendance to the epistemic orientation of Blair's claims. However, there are two other practices that similarly build up Blair's account as disinterested. First, the only agency specified is the post-1994 Labour Party. The agent in the old framework is never made explicit. In addition to the occurrence of this 'no-names' practice, the behaviour of an agent is severely challenged without an explicit accusation being made. Blair does that by presenting the British political landscape as impacting upon *all* party politics. It is a landscape characterised by 'reactionary choice' (line 8) and by working within what, at the time, passed for 'conventional political wisdom' (line 11). Consequently, what 'old' Labour did was problematic, but not self-initiated. It thus was defying (line 11) the root causes of Old Labour's *behaviour*, as merely 'articulating' the way things were done, rather than flouting Old Labour altogether, that is presented as the key difference between the old and new way of doing things:

12. And around that we built a new political coalition. The USP of New Labour is
13. aspiration and compassion reconciled. We reach out, not just to those in poverty or
14. need, but those who are doing well but want to do better. Those on their way up,
15. ambitious for themselves and their families. These are our people too. Not to be
16. tolerated for electoral reasons but embraced out of political conviction. The core vote
17. of this party today is not the heartlands, the inner city, not any sectional interest or
18. lobby; our core vote is the country [audience applauds]. And it was they who made us
19. change.

Important is the implied chronology in Blair's account: it principally was defiance of what caused problems that resulted in the establishment of 'a new political coalition' (line 12). The way to overcome dogma and doctrine, as indicative of the effects of those root causes, is approaching politics as a

coalition, as a partnership. Branding that new approach as a ‘unique selling point’, in which ‘aspiration and compassion [are] reconciled’ (line 13), specifies the new approach, but also, retrospectively, what that dogma and doctrine entailed: approaching politics in terms of either aspiration or compassion.

In addition, Blair’s elaboration (lines 15-18) on his explicit countering of accusations made against New Labour (lines 15-16) packages accusations against those who *did* ‘filter’ on party eligibility. Blair equates such filtering with thinking in terms of the traditional Labour ‘heartlands’ (line 17), but also with thinking in terms of ‘sectional interest[s] or lobby’ (lines 17-18). However, these classifications have different connotations. Sectional interests and lobbies imply more than merely catering for a certain segment; they imply having disproportionate power. Making different issues relevant as part of the same category entails that any practice or filtering or selection is disturbing. Blair thus draws upon the refutation of an accusation against New Labour to problematise the practices New Labour is accused of. We could argue that this is an implicit ‘sneer’ at Old Labour’s dependency on trade unions. Yet, it is the explicit ‘distancing’ from sneering that warrants the veracity of Blair’s claim that the new additions to the traditional core vote are not being ‘tolerated for [mere] electoral reasons’ (lines 15-16). Consequently, an extra component is added to the chronology of New Labour’s establishment: it is the rejection of the implications of reactionary choice (electoral sectioning) that ultimately led to the defiance of that political wisdom (lines 18-19). We have seen how Blair has set out the implications of defying political wisdom as new rules and as new norms. Blair then goes on to extend this normative framework:

20. The beliefs of the Labour Party of two-thousand-and-six should be recognisable to the
21. members of nineteen-o-six. And they are: strong employment, strong public services,
22. tackling poverty, international solidarity. But the policies shouldn’t and the trouble
23. was, for a long time they were. In the nineteen-sixties, re-reading the Cabinet debates
24. of ‘In Place of Strife’, everyone was telling Harold Wilson not to push it: it was
25. divisive, - unnecessary, - alienated core support. And in the end he gave up. But so
26. did the public on Labour. Even in nineteen-seventy-four, the Labour government had
27. spent two years re-nationalising ship-building and the public spent two years
28. wondering why. In the nineteen-eighties council house sales had first been suggested
29. by Labour people. It was shelved: too difficult, too divisive. And we lost a
30. generation of aspiring working-class people on the back of it.

A new norm or rule is introduced: ‘The beliefs of ... the policies shouldn’t’ (lines 20-22). That rule is not so much randomly initiated by Blair as it is motivated by the necessity to reject how things used to be done. But whereas the veracity of that necessity was earlier certified through outlining the typical problems associated with electoral sectioning, Blair now includes an explicit account of problematic moments in Old Labour’s history. This raises the question how Blair can make such an explicit accusation whilst avoiding that the attribution can be ascribed to a coloured or interested reconstruction of Old Labour?

He does that by presenting the account from the focal perspective of someone who has access to the perspectives of both the Labour party and the British public. That access is warranted by Blair explicitly grounding his reconstruction of the reception of Harold Wilson’s white paper³ in official documentation on Cabinet debating this proposal (line 24). It serves as a blueprint for Blair’s subsequent account on how other Labour initiatives were perceived by both the Labour Party and the British public. That account includes two other instances in which Old Labour rejected policy proposals that would have been endorsed by the British public. The resulting list works up a trend of Old Labour dismissing certain proposals. It also attends to three other important forms of causal attribution. First, election losses are attributed to the British public rejecting Old Labour’s dismissal of proposals. Second, given the established rule that the Labour Party should consider Britain as its core vote, the dismissed proposals should not have been rejected. Third, it implies that there was considerable overlap between what New Labour proposes and what ideas were rejected within Old Labour.

The factual list attributes the implications of policies not being attuned to contextual dynamics to the party’s alienation from the British people, and to dogmatic party conventions. This certifies the factuality of Blair’s suggestion that stationary policies do not constitute legitimate grounds to claim a relationship of consistency and overlap between the Labour Party in 1906 and the Labour Party in 2006. In the final sequence of this section, Blair elaborates on what does constitute such legitimate grounds:

31. In the nineteen-eighties, we should have been the party transforming Britain. But we
32. weren’t. And the lesson is always the same. Values unrelated to modern reality are
33. not just electorally hopeless; the values themselves become devalued. They’ve had no
34. purchase on the real world. We won in the end, not because we surrendered our
35. values, but because we finally had the courage to be true to them [audience applauds].
36. And our courage then in changing gave the British people, the courage to change.
37. That’s how we won.

Blair argues that a universal lesson can account for the implications of Old Labour structurally dismissing that policies should not be principally static: '[v]alues unrelated to ... the real world' (lines 32-34). Presenting this commonsensical theme as 'always the same' (line 32) certifies its applicability to this specific situation. However, there is an apparent inconsistency here. Whereas Blair has challenged the idea of static policies, he is here clearly talking about the importance of flexible values (lines 32-33). But since he does not mean 'beliefs' (he earlier established them as timeless), he must refer to 'policies'. Similarly, the reason why those policies were electorally hopeless was because they did not represent what the British public wanted. However, if the universal lesson applies, then it is values becoming devalued (line 33) and having 'no purchase on the real world' (lines 33-34) that accounts for electoral loss.

This means that, in order to make the universal lesson 'fit', a few things have to be adapted. It implies that policies come to be equated with values, and that not doing what the public wants becomes associated with not relating to modern society and with devaluing party values. This 'fitting' process holds important implications for the actual accusation made at Old Labour: its electoral losses become attributed to the party having devalued Labour values. In accordance with this logic, New Labour's electoral successes entail a revaluation of Labour's values (lines 34-35).

The section was occasioned by the invited question on what New Labour *must* have done differently to become an electoral success. That occasioning constitutes an important epistemic orientation to the sort of historical account Blair produces. However, the analysis has identified more instances of warranted causal attribution that can be seen to have bearings upon New Labour.

First, Blair explicitly problematises Old Labour's behaviour without ever holding them responsible for it. Instead, Old Labour's behaviour is firmly framed in a political framework of reactionary choice and conventional political wisdom that affected all politics. It is the defiance of this framework that is constituted as the key thing that sets New Labour apart from Old Labour. Second, the old political framework of triggering reactionary choice and of posing restrictions on the sort of people a political party is to cater for constitutes New Labour's widening of the electorate as a defiance of such politics. Third, the certification of the 'rule' that beliefs – rather than policies – that should be timeless defines New Labour's electoral success as stemming from listening to the British people. It also defines New Labour's policies as not coming 'out of the blue', but as grounded in decades of Labour ideas. Finally, New Labour's ability to listen to the British people is attributed to the party's revaluation of Labour values, in which loyalty to values has become equated with dynamic adapting and devaluation with static consistency.

In sum, the attribution that Blair attempts here – problematising Old Labour and claiming that New Labour is attuned to true Labour values – is characterised by a pervasive orientation to warranting practices: discursive practices that attempt to refute any allegation that it is Blair's investment in his social category that is 'doing the talking'. Hence, Blair's speech acknowledges these discursive consequences, which are not successful by their sheer rhetorical force but by their ability to be 'resilient against rhetorical

onslaught', as the subject of contestation and challenging and as requiring particular 'discursive veracity work'. And this is what hegemonic struggle in the Bakhtinean sense should entail: it should be about the active traces of struggle and of resisting challenge rather than about instances where rhetoric coercively sanctioned modality.

9. Conclusion

The conceptualisation of rhetoric proposed here examines discourses for how it bears the visible traces of an active struggle over the validity and disinterestedness of descriptions. This may appear incompatible with the critical discourse analyst needing to be 'unabashedly normative' (Van Dijk 1993: 253). After all, what about having an analytical suspicion towards ideological agents? And what about being concerned about how political projects contribute to and exacerbate social inequality? Focusing on how discourse producers attempt this sense of resilience against rhetorical onslaught – so, *actively* and *visibly* disabling anyone from reducing their discourse to problematic stake and interest – provides us with a fascinating platform for considering how discourse producers try and make acceptable that some representations are more valid than others. In this sense, it allows us to explore how language constructs particular versions, but particularly how it tries to create *acceptance of that presentation* and how it tries to *settle scores with contesting voices*. Such a consideration does not mean a break with the concern of CDA. If anything, it would allow us to consider, in even more detail, how language and ideology intersect.

Notes

- ¹ Department of Trade and Industry. 1998. Building the knowledge-driven economy. White Paper. London: The Stationery Office.
- ² Tony Blair. 1998. *The Third Way. New politics for the new century*. Fabian Society pamphlet.
- ³ In this 1969 White Paper, Wilson proposed to limit the power of trade unions by obliging them to hold pre-strike ballots.

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