

THE EXIGENCE IRAQ WAR IN TONY BLAIR'S SPEECH TO THE LABOUR PARTY: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims at analyzing the Iraq War exigence in the speech of Tony Blair at the Annual Labour Party Conference 2003, after the allies' failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, as well as to discuss the way Blair dealt with that to try to persuade his audience he was right in going to war. The analysis is performed through the Transitivity system of the Systemic Functional Grammar of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). The analysis of the processes used reveals that Blair was not able to produce a plausible explanation for his decision to attack Iraq.

KEYWORDS: Exigence; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Critical Discourse Analysis; transitivity.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a exigência Guerra do Iraque na fala de Tony Blair à Conferência Anual 2003 do Labour Party, após armas de destruição em massa não serem encontradas no Iraque pelos aliados, bem como discutir o modo como Blair lidou com o tema ao tentar persuadir sua audiência de que estava correto em ir à guerra. A análise ocorre por meio do sistema de Transitividade da Gramática Sistêmico-Funcional de Halliday e Matthiessen (2004). A análise dos processos usados por Blair revela que ele não conseguiu produzir uma explicação plausível sobre a decisão de atacar o Iraque.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Exigência; Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional; Análise Crítica do Discurso; transitividade.*

0. Introduction

Political relations have always occurred and evolved during the centuries and are present in all cultures of our times through the most diversified types of expressions. One of these types of expressions is political speech.

Political speeches are used by politicians to argue, to reason, to sustain their ideas, to continue in power, to oppress people and nations, to establish and perpetuate ideas, and or to defend people in their needs, to promote civil rights, and peace.

One aspect of political speeches is that their main mark is persuasion, that is, they aim at convincing somebody of something

(FAIRCLOUGH, 2000). When political speeches are analyzed, this characteristic (persuasion) can be discovered and explained, promoting awareness for both the analyst and for those who become interested in the subject.

Thus, the scope of this paper is to analyze the Iraq War issue in Tony Blair's speech, given on September 30, 2003, in the city of Bournemouth, England, at the annual Labour Party conference, and to reveal the way he dealt with that in order to try to persuade his audience. The results I present here are part the content of my master degree thesis, defended in March, 2007.

In this paper, the Iraq War in Blair's speech is discussed as an exigence he had to deal with. Exigence, here, is the rhetorical conception developed by Bitzer (1968), better explained in the Review of Literature.

The part of the speech representing the Iraq War exigence is a piece of text encompassing 236 words and 42 processes (that can be checked in the Annexes), in which Blair presents his considerations to his audience regarding the unfolding of the war.

The analysis of the exigence Iraq War is carried out taking into account the system of Transitivity (with its six types of processes) of Halliday and Matthiessen's Functional Grammar (2004), also known as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). By analyzing the processes chosen by Blair in the exigence, his political intentions can be better understood, because the processes help to reveal the meanings constructed by the speaker or writer (HALLIDAY and MATTHIESSEN, 2004).

In order to have the understanding of Blair's political intentions and persuasion, I reckon with notions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Noam Fairclough and other authors, especially the notion stated by Fairclough (2000:84) that "a political discourse is also working to persuade people [...] as soon as political discourse goes public, it is rhetorically constructed, part of political performance". Thus, in this article, the ideas of CDA are sources through which I conduct my interpretations about the Iraq War exigence.

This being so, besides the Introduction, this paper is divided into four parts: Review of literature, in which I present the theoretical basis for the study; Historical contextualization of the speech, where I depict the political situation the Prime Minister, the government, and the country were living in the moment of the speech; Discussion, where I present the processes chosen by Blair in the exigence Iraq War, and analyze them regarding Blair's persuasive intentions within the political context he was living; still, concerning the processes, I analyze only the three main important types of them out of the five types I have found in the exigence; the three ones are the material, relational, and mental processes; I analyze only these three types, because they are the ones that clearly reveal how Blair dealt with the issue. And the last part is Final remarks, where I come out with some

conclusions about Blair's transitivity choice in the exigence and his intentions in using the processes the way he did.

1. Review of literature

Exigence is a term of rhetoric defined by Bitzer (1968:62) as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be". And according to the GLOSSARY (2003), exigence is "[a] rhetorical call to action; a situation that compels someone to speak out". The subject Iraq War can be classified as an imperfection, an obstacle, an issue, in sum, an exigence waiting to be dealt with, something that Blair could not miss in his speech, something that he had to attack, to respond to, in that he knew his audience wanted to hear explanations about it.

CDA, that has Fairclough (1992, 1995, 1989, 2000, 2003, and 2006) as one of its main proponents, studies language and its connection with ideology and power. It is also engaged with justice issues, and consequently deals with oppression of poor people, minorities, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences (FAIRCLOUGH, 1989, 1992, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2006; VAN DIJK, 1986; COFFIN, 2001; BURNS 2001; HEBERLE, 1997; MEURER, 2005). Terms and ideas as authorization, legitimization, and persuasion are used in the article based on the notions of CDA.

In its turn, the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) sees language as a set of systems occurring through three broad areas of meaning called ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. For the purpose of this paper, I will deal specifically with the ideational metafunction, which encompasses the system of transitivity.

The ideational metafunction relates to human experience transformed into meaning (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). It deals with reality representations brought out by the transitivity system and its six processes along with "their participants and the circumstances in which they unfold" (PRAXEDES FILHO, 2004:216), building "a picture of the world" (COFFIN:95).

Transitivity is a system of grammatical choice through which ideas, beliefs, suppositions and intentions are manifested, defined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:170) as the system that "construes the world of experience into a manageable set of PROCESS TYPES [verb types]", and "reality is made up of PROCESSES" (HALLIDAY, 1994:106). Transitivity expresses "what is going on – the content of what is talked about" (PAINTER, 2001:177).

The six types of processes composing Transitivity, according to Halliday (1994), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), are material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioural, and existential processes, and for each process type, there may be more than one participant playing a functional role in the clause.

2. Historical contextualization of the speech

Blair's speech lasted 55 minutes, and several issues (exigences), thirty of them, in my understanding, were discussed by him, such as education, health, transportation, pension, and the Iraq War, among others. Maybe, The Iraq War was the most expected one, because Blair's audience demanded a plausible explanation about it, since the allies invaded Iraq without a tangible proof of existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The time when Blair gave his speech and spoke about the Iraq War, seven months after the Iraq invasion, was a time of controversy, which was marked by a discredited government, forcing a war over Iraq based on arguments that Iraq was producing WMD, which was not confirmed by UN inspectors, proving to be a fabrication of Bush's and Blair's government intelligences. At that time, Blair was under suspicion on account of his arguments that Saddam could use his weapons in forty-five minutes.

Still, Blair was facing an audience that had fresh in mind the turmoil that the party, the government, and the country had recently lived through the suicide of Dr. David Kelly (a scientist and the government weapons adviser and inspector) who was accused of leaking some information to the BBC that the results of the governmental intelligence about WMD in Iraq was a farce that Blair was aware of and that Blair, to get approval to go to war, decided to use. Dr David Kelly, under such pressure, severed his wrists (SMITH, 2005; COLLINS, 2005). The case was surrounded by suspicion of murder, which later was discarded.

The time and circumstances in which Blair gave his speech are defined in the words of the journalist Happold (2003, para. 5) of the *Guardian* as a "difficult time for the government, with the party divided over reform of the public sector and the war in Iraq and the opinion polls showing support beginning to slide for Labour."

Within the demands of his speech was a plausible explanation for going into war with Iraq, as we can see in the words of David Clark, one day after the speech, (cited by WATT, 2003), when he said: "This was dishonest. He should acknowledge mistakes, but he won't because he is in denial [...] I think it would have been much better for him if he had acknowledged the gap between the case he set out for war and the evidence."

In another article, *A Triumph of style over substance*, Clark (2003) wrote for the *Guardian* that

the most eagerly awaited part of his speech was the section justifying his decision to join the US in the invasion of Iraq. There was nothing in what the prime minister said to suggest that he is capable of being any more honest in facing up the consequences of what has

happened than he proved to be in making the case for war in the first place.

Thus, the circumstances involving the actions concerning the Iraq war were difficult ones, demanding prolific arguments, arguments that Blair tried to put up in a persuasive way as the following discussion on the chosen processes demonstrates.

3. Discussion

In the whole speech, there can be found thirty exigences, as I have said before, and material processes predominate in almost all of the exigences. Material processes do not prevail in six exigences, and among them is the Iraq War. In the Iraq War exigence, material processes occur 13 times, against 13 mental, 10 relational, 05 verbal, 01 behavioral, and none existential process. The fact that they do not prevail in such an important issue is interesting, a situation I intend to shed light on.

Still, for the following discussion, it is important to have in mind that *I* and *we* are the most recurrent participants I encountered in all material clauses of the whole speech, both referring positively to Blair, his government and the country, demonstrating that he wanted to bring forth a speech where these participants were seen as doers. However, specifically, in the Iraq War exigence, he was not able to materialize things in his favor, but he negatively transferred them to his war enemies, remaining to him to put himself and his government in the sphere of uncertainty with the use of equal thirteen mental processes, nine of them referring to Blair.

My discussion on the processes will be concentrated on the material, mental, and relational processes, because, I understand, they clearly show how Blair dealt with the issue, and they also show which his political intentions were, when dealing with the exigence.

Following, I present the clauses and the processes I encountered in the Iraq War exigence and discuss them.

3.1 Material Clauses Discussion

The main participant in each clause appears underlined and the process is in bold. The clauses are also numbered to facilitate references in the analysis.

- 01-** I ask just one thing: [you] **attack** my decision but at least understand why I took it and
02- about it consistently, [Saddam's regime] **concealing** it for years even under the noses
03- chaos. It is fanaticism **defeating** reason. Suppose the terrorists repeated September 11
04- wickedness. So what do I **do**? Say "I've got the intelligence, but I've a hunch its wrong?
05- intelligence but I've a hunch its wrong?" [I] **Leave** Saddam in place but now with the
06- but used such weapons[Saddam's regime] **gassing** thousands of his own people. And
07- And I see the terrorism and the trade in WMD **growing**. And I look at Saddam's country
08- expect, at least not on 1 May 1997. Iraq **has divided** the international community. It ha

09- ded the international community. It [Iraq] **has divided** the party, the country, families,
10- ical fact. That Saddam's regime **has** not just **developed** but used such weapons gassing
11- not just developed but [Saddam's regime has] **used** such weapons gassing thousands
12- foundly believe the action we took was wrong. I do not at all disrespect anyone who dis
13-at of the 21st century is not countries waging conventional war. I believe that in today's

Material processes convey actions performed by participants called Actors, the doers of the actions (HALLIDAY and MATTHIESSEN, 2004). But, in this case, Blair and or his government, out of the thirteen material clauses, appear as doers three times only (lines, 04, 05, and 12 – 23%), revealing that on account of the results of the war, he did not have basis for portraying himself and his government as doers (what does not happen in the great majority of the exigencies in the whole speech). The other ten clauses (77%) are related to the participants *you, Saddam's regime, fanaticism, terrorism, terrorism and trade in WMD, Iraq, and countries. Saddam's regime* is the most recurrent of them, appearing four (04) times (lines 02, 06, 10, and 11).

Thus, the performer of tangible actions, in these material clauses, is not Blair (and his government), but what and who he was combating in going to war. In my point of view, he decided to do this – to use negative concrete actions regarding what would have led him to war – to strategically try to convince his audience that he was right, since his arguments were unsubstantial. Putting his enemies as doers was a way of changing the focus from the real matter: his mistake in going to war without real evidence for it. This entire situation reveals his fragility in that he did not have what to say to put himself as a doer, since no WMD was found in Iraq.

Blair had defended that he had done the right thing in going to war, but despite this, he did not treat the subject war in his speech with the deserved certainty. The conviction of doing the right thing could be expressed by the use of more material processes (and fewer mental ones as we are going to see) referring to him, to his government, and or to Britain as doers than he used, since material processes are processes of conviction, representing real actions, revealing tangible deeds (HALLIDAY and MATTHIESSEN, 2004; EGGINS, 1994).

In clause 01, the process *attack* shows the difficult situation Blair was in; one of the meanings of the verb *attack* can be *to criticize strongly or in a hostile manner* (www.thefreedictionary.com). It seems he was feeling hostilized or, on the other hand, he was using this kind of utterance to pass on an image of a politician open to criticism. Yet, in order to try to impact his audience, he uses processes as *defeating* (03), *gassing* (06) (whose actors are enemies), processes that portray sad images of people being annihilated, massacred. These images, I understand, are a strong appeal to sensitize the audience, to authorize allies' actions (see Fairclough, 2003 about authorization).

In clause 02, where implicitly *Saddam's regime* is the Actor, the process used is *concealing* (which means hiding, camouflaging). In discussing the deceiver character of Saddam, Blair deviates his speech from what he really had to approach. In clause 04, Blair is the Actor in a question that rhetorically he uses to affirm he had to act in face of the information he argued he had received.

In clause 07, the process *growing* (a verb used for body development) is used with the participant *terrorism and the trade in WMD*, creating a metaphor of an organism in development, becoming strong in body and mind. In clauses 08 and 09, Iraq is stated with certainty as the motive of both the international and the party's fracture. The participant *Iraq* in these clauses is also a metaphor. Iraq here means the Iraq government, that is, Saddam and his partners. There is something interesting in these clauses: they suggest that for Blair it was not the war in Iraq that divided opinions but the entity Iraq itself. Iraq is the Actor responsible for the division of the Goal *international community* (clause 08) and *the party, the country, families* (clause 09); it is a way of transferring the responsibility to Iraq.

In clauses 10 and 11, both processes *has developed* and *used* also denote certainty, but about past events (for instance, they could well be applied to Saddam massacring the Kurds with chemical weapons in 1988 in Halabj village when almost 5,000 lives perished), and not about the present, since international inspectors did not find any WMD (THE HALABJA, 2006). In fact, it should be more appropriate to say that the division in the party, country and families, attributed to Iraq, was caused by the allies' decision of going to war without real motives, something he could not admit. After trying to create a negative image concerning Iraq, in an attempt to justify his decisions, he evoked collectivity in clause 12 and, to some extent, shared the responsibility of the war to other members of the government.

In clause 13, which is the Attribute of a relational clause, Blair states the Goal *conventional war* as a solution to *countries* (the Actor) to defeat terrorism.

3.2 Mental Clauses Discussion

Thirteen are the mental processes encountered in the exigence, the same number as material processes. There are some reasons, which I present ahead, for mental clauses to be as recurrent as material clauses in the exigence.

14- ot countries waging conventional war. I **believe** that in today's interdependent world the
15- party, the country, families, friends. I **know** many people are disappointed, hurt, angry.
16- ny people are disappointed, hurt, angry. I **know** many profoundly believe the action we
17- whole murky trade in WMD. And one thing we know. Not from intelligence. But from hi
18- appointed, hurt, angry. I know many profoundly **believe** the action we took was wrong.

- 19- the noses of the UN Inspectors. And I **see** the terrorism and the trade in WMD growing.
20- And I look at Saddam's country and I **see** its people in torment ground underfoot by his
21- humiliated and him emboldened? You see, I **believe** the security threat of the 21st cent
22- humiliated and him emboldened? **You see**, I believe the security threat of the 21st cent
23- ck my decision but at least [you] **understand** why I took it and why I would take the sa
24- ion but at least understand why I **took** it and why I would take the same decision again.
25- east understand why I took it and why I **would take** the same decision again. Imagine
26- I would take the same decision again. [You] **Imagine** you are PM. And you receive this

The mental processes used by Blair reveal much more what the Iraq War issue meant by him, that is, uncertainty. Out of the thirteen clauses, nine have Blair as participant represented in the pronoun I and we (clauses 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25). The processes used: *believe, know, see, understand* are presented as processes of interpretation, of viewpoint, and do not express real things, certainty by the rhetor.

Clause 26 is an interesting one, Blair's use of an inclusive *you* reveals an attempt to sensitize his audience, trying to make it feel as if it were in the other side of the situation (the audience being the prime minister). It was a way Blair chose to deal with the face-threatening situation he was living (his immediate and non-immediate audience's disapproval of his going into war). For Chilton (2006), the use of inclusive pronouns sometimes has the objective of minimizing face-threatening demands.

As I understand it, mental processes in political speeches tend to reveal participants (Sensors) less convincing than the doers in material clauses, for the reason that mental processes do not express tangible experiences, but are more in the sphere of uncertainty, intention, thinking, and of reasoning. Thus, certainly, as Blair did not have concrete things to affirm about his action in Iraq, but could only present intentions, reasoning and beliefs, he deals with the issue in an inconsistent way, avoiding to talk more directly about it.

3.3 Relational Clauses Discussion

The relational clauses I encountered in the exigence are the following ones:

- 29- fends. I know [that] many people **are** disappointed, hurt, angry. I know may profoundly
30- decision again. Imagine you are PM. And you receive this intelligence. And not just abo
31- believe the security threat of the 21st century **is** not countries waging conventional war.
32- interdependent world the threat is chaos. It [the threat] **is** fanaticism defeating reason.
33- in today's interdependent world the threat **is** chaos. It is fanaticism defeating reason. Su
34- profoundly believe the action we took **was** wrong . I do not at all disrespect anyone who
35- what do I do? Say "I've **got** the intelligence but I've a hunch its wrong?" Leave Saddam
36- what do I do? Say "I've got the intelligence but I've a hunch its wrong?" Leave Saddam
37- democracies [**feeling**] **humiliated** and him emboldened? You see, I believe the security
38- democracies were humiliated and him [Saddam feeling] **emboldened**? You see, I belie

Relational processes establish relations, interchangeability, between the main participant (Carrier and Possessor) and characteristics, attributes, identities (Attribute and Possession). Halliday and Matthiessen say that in a relational clause such elements (characteristics, attributions, identities) "are construed as one element of a relation of being" (2004:213), something existing or factual.

Blair's relational clauses establish a relation with what for him is factual, that is, the Carrier and the Possessor are treated as real and indubitable. This indubitability appears in the processes *are, is, was, have* that construct a relation marked by no modalization, revealing that there is no space for possibilities and probabilities or doubts in those relations.

In clause 29, Blair recognizes the disappointment of part of his audience about his decisions. The participant *many people* does not define who are the ones frustrated. This participant has a connotation of an implied audience, that is, he may be speaking to people who are in the immediate audience, people he knows well and that are really disappointed, but people he does not want to refer to directly.

In clause 30, again the Carrier *you* is a reference to an imaginary audience. This *you* may refer even to his opponents.

In clause 31, he defends his position relating, in a factual way, the participant *the security threat of the 21st century* to the attributive clause *not countries waging conventional war*. He tries to sell the idea that the adequate way for effectively holding threat is through war. This implies that other means would not have stopped Saddam.

In clauses 32 and 33, two Identifiers (*fanaticism, chaos*) used in relation to the Identified *threat* can be understood as an attempt to justify the preemptive attack to Iraq.

In clause 34, the Carrier *the action we took* relates to the Attribute *wrong*, a reference to what his opponents even within the party believe. This clause, I suggest, is used as an answer to Blair's opponents. In clauses 35 and 36, Blair uses two contrastive ideas to try to defend himself about his decisions and to affirm he had to act in face of the information he received. He is trying to convince his audience that he simply could not despise the information he received from his government intelligence.

In clauses 37 and 38, I see, there is a strategic use of language through legitimization and "*delegitimation*" (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003; CHILTON, 2006:46). In these clauses, democracies are presented as being threatened and Saddam strengthened, if no bellic action were taken. Blair's use of language here can be understood as a way of legitimizing his actions, which would be in defense of democracy and consequently in defense of the values of those who were in front of him, and those who were not, watching or listening to him anywhere. Yet, his language use here would be a way of trying to delegitimize criticisms about his decision to go to war against Iraq.

4. Final Considerations

In the whole speech Blair materialized his deeds positively (so that *we* and *I* are the most recurrent participants in the speech) about education, health, transportation, pension, and so forth, but regarding the Iraq War, the option was strategically to transfer the material actions (in a negative way) to different participants (especially enemies and their resources) because the allies were not able to produce tangible proofs of WMD in Iraq to justify their invasion. His emphasis on enemies as actors is an attempt to disguise his contradiction about the war, and an attempt to legitimize his and the allies' decisions.

Corroborates for the understanding of Blair's uncertainty about his going to war, the fact that he appears as participant in the Iraq War exigence more as a *Senser* than any other type of participant, and also his choice in terms of relational processes demonstrate that he tried to convince his audience that the only way to hold the supposed threat of Saddam's regime was through war.

I sum, all was "rhetorically constructed, part of political performance" (FAIRCLOUGH, 2000:84), nevertheless that did not reach his expected outcome, portraying his fragility with such a controversial issue, as it can be seen in the words of the journalist Freedland (2003): "[o]n the case for war in Iraq, the PM was weak. He repeated the same arguments he had made in February – about the intelligence crossing his desk and the duty of a leader to take the toughest decisions [...]". Here, Freedland interpreted the attempts of Blair in changing the political scenario as inefficient, since, for Freedland, nothing new was presented.

In studying and analyzing this kind of text, we can have a better understanding and interpretation of the relations of power we are involved in as citizens (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, 1995, 1989, 2000, 2003 and 2006), we can better understand the interests of those who govern society, which not always coincide with our community's interests. In becoming aware of these relations, we gain voice, we have what to say, and we can agree or disagree with them, since we become aware interpreters of the reality in progress.

Annexes

The Iraq War Exigence

Iraq has divided the international community. It has divided the party, the country, families, friends. I know many people are disappointed, hurt, angry. I know many profoundly believe the action we took was wrong. I do not at all disrespect anyone who disagrees with me. I ask just one thing: attack my decision but at least

understand why I took it and why I would take the same decision again.

Imagine you are PM. And you receive this intelligence. And not just about Iraq. But about the whole murky trade in WMD. And one thing we know. Not from intelligence. But from historical fact. That Saddam's regime has not just developed but used such weapons gassing thousands of his own people. And has lied about it consistently, concealing it for years even under the noses of the UN Inspectors.

And I see the terrorism and the trade in WMD growing. And I look at Saddam's country and I see its people in torment ground underfoot by his and his sons' brutality and wickedness. So what do I do? Say "I've got the intelligence but I've a hunch its wrong?" Leave Saddam in place but now with the world's democracies humiliated and him emboldened?

You see, I believe the security threat of the 21st century is not countries waging conventional war. I believe that in today's interdependent world the threat is chaos. It is fanaticism defeating reason.

(Part of Tony Blair's speech to the 2003 Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth –

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/sep/30/labourconference.labour2>)

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