

# Exclusion Of Social Actors In Hassan Rouhani's International Speech (Theo Van Leeuwen's Critical Discourse Analysis)

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**Abstract**— Applying van Leeuwen's critical discourse analysis, the objective of the present study was to critically account for the use of linguistics features in excluding social actors involved in Hassan Rouhani's international speech delivered in front of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Data sourced from one of Israel official websites ([www.timesofisrael.com](http://www.timesofisrael.com)). The relevant use of the language was noted and identified based on the objective of the study. Data were then analysed through van Leeuwen's framework 'Social Actor Analysis' which was developed using paraphrase technique where the sentences were structurally altered while maintaining their meaning to explain how social actors in the discourse were excluded. In the next stage, the results of the analysis were then presented descriptively. As the result revealed, Rouhani's linguistic choices underscored the use of passivation, nominalization, and infinitive clause to exclude certain social actors in his speech. Building upon the fact that this analysis sheds light on the exclusion of social actors, it can be concluded that the use of passivation and infinitive clause can be considered as Rouhani's attempt to indirectly present the actors involved without mentioning them in the construction of the sentence, whereas the use of nominalization aims to shift the focus of the audience from the social actors to the social actions.

**Keywords**— critical discourse analysis, exclusion, infinitive clause, nominalization, passivation, social actor, speech

## 1 Introduction

Language, in the present context, is no longer merely seen as a means of communication. More than that, language in modern society can be understood as a sophisticated tool that can be used by certain social groups to spread and fight their respective ideologies. This is in line with what <sup>[1]</sup> states that the use of power, in modern society, is an increasing achievement through ideology, and more specifically through language ideology. However, aside from being a tool for spreading ideology, language can also be seen as a representation of one's social attitudes and actions in interacting with others. In this context, language is used to produce certain goals, or in other words, to produce certain discourses. Today, the use of language to

produce certain discourses has been widely practiced in various forms of verbal communication. One that is quite popular and interesting to be examined in the framework of critical discourse analysis is speech. <sup>[2]</sup> Speech is the expression of thoughts in the form of words addressed to people in public or can also be interpreted as a discourse prepared to be spoken in front of the audience. Furthermore, speech is divided into three types, namely ordinary speech such as daily conversations, ritual speech as it is often delivered in traditional or religious ceremonies, and political speech. The latter is most often used as a mean to represent the attitudes and social actions of a discourse maker. Therefore, language, in relation to politics, especially the language used in a speech, is never in a neutral position. There are always interests that pose a serious threat and are determinants of the neutrality.

One real example of the use of language in a political context is a speech delivered by the President of Iran, Hasan Rouhani, before the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2013. This speech needs to be studied for two important reasons. Firstly, it was Rouhani's first international speech as the new president of Iran replacing the previous president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Therefore, the whole world awaits this speech to find out how Rouhani positioned Iran on the sensitive issues of the world at that time, whether it remained the same as its predecessor or Iran would be more moderate. Secondly, it was Iran's response to the rejection of allied countries, especially Israel, to Iran's nuclear program that was being developed, and other issues such as violence and crisis that hit Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. To find out how social actors are represented in this kind of discourse, critical discourse analysis is necessary. However, the use of critical discourse analysis to reveal the representation of social actors, either in exclusion or inclusion, in a discourse is rarely conducted. <sup>[3]</sup> Various levels of discourse analysis on representation of social groups. He used a three-level analytical framework in textually analyzing the representation of social groups into social actors, social actions and argumentation. Moreover, <sup>[4]</sup> specifically talked about the absence of themes and participants by groups who were regarded directly involved in a Revolution, either as actors, the *retornados*, and *retornados-emigrantes* contained in Portuguese President Cavaco Silva's speech in the official opening of the 40th anniversary of the military coup of 25 April 1974. His examination proved that significant voices of the Revolution were silenced in the official commemoration of 2014. Another similar study has also been conducted by <sup>[5]</sup> who focused his analysis on the Pibdian identity within teacher education programs in Brazil which was constructed through 'differentiation', 'normalization', and an 'affinity identity'. <sup>[6]</sup> and <sup>[7]</sup> also investigated the representation of social actors in textbooks. Nevertheless, they focused their discussion on gender. <sup>[6]</sup> investigated the linguistic representation of male and female social actors in the Four Corners 4 textbook using van Leeuwen's framework to determine the gender-based representation of social actors in the textbook while <sup>[7]</sup> examined the representations of male and female social actors in selected Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks that indicated the presence of an exclusion to non-heterosexual gender which could obscure the existence of such gender identities. From all of the studies mentioned previously, it appears that there has been no research specifically investigating the exclusion of social actors in a discourse using <sup>[8]</sup> van Leeuwen's critical discourse analysis. Thus, the objective of the present study was to critically account for the use of linguistic features in excluding social actors involved in Hassan Rouhani's international speech. To achieve this objective, the author uses the theory of critical discourse analysis which takes into account the context in which the discourse is built <sup>[9]</sup>, since critical discourse analysis is essentially analyzing the three dimensions of the discourse in an integral way that cannot be separated from one another, starting from the textual dimension, the practice of discourse, to the dimension of sociocultural practices<sup>[10]</sup>.

## 2 Methods

The data analysis method used in this study was based on the representation of social actors which was adapted from the critical discourse analysis of [8]van Leeuwen (2008) model, namely the exclusion and the inclusion of social actors (participants) in the discourse. Data sourced from one of Israel official websites ([www.timesofisrael.com](http://www.timesofisrael.com)). The relevant use of the language was noted and identified based on the objective of the study. Data were then analysed through [8]van Leeuwen's framework 'Social Actor Analysis' which was developed using paraphrase technique where the sentences were structurally altered while maintaining their meaning to explain how social actors in the discourse were excluded. In the next stage, the results of the analysis were then presented descriptively.

## 3 Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Passivation

In a text, the selection of passive forms in the production of sentences is intended to eliminate or hide the perpetrators. Consider the following sentences.

S.17. Coercive economic and military policies and practices geared to the maintenance and preservation of old superiorities and dominations have been pursued in a conceptual mindset that negates peace, security, human dignity, and exalted human ideals.

In S.17, it is not mentioned who takes the compelling military policy. However, this sentence leaves a trace that the actors of the construction of this sentence are those who are trying to maintain their superiority and dominance over others.

The same thing applies to the following data.

S.39. Palestine is under occupation; the basic rights of the Palestinians are tragically violated, and they are deprived of the right of return and access to their homes, birthplace and homeland.

In S.39, there are two passivation, namely the verb 'to violate' and the verb 'to deprive'. Passivation in this formula is not only intended to eliminate the perpetrators, but rather HR efforts to highlight the Palestinian people as victims. This is reinforced by the existence of 'tragically' adverbial insertion between to be 'are' and the second verb 'violated' before passivation.

Passivation is also used to present the perpetrators, even though in the sentence construction the actors are not present. Consider the following data.

S.51. For what crimes have they been assassinated?

In S.51, it is not stated who causes the death of the victim. Likewise, when we refer to the sentence before or after it, there is not a single clue about who is the culprit.

The use of passivation as one of Rouhani's strategies in excluding social actors in his speech is intended for several things. Firstly, as shown in S.17, it is one of Rouhani's effort to minimize friction with other parties. However, even though the presence of passivation eliminates the presence of the perpetrators, Rouhani still presents a bad image of the actor who does not appear as a party who denies peace, security and human dignity. Secondly, it is to highlight the subject of the passive voice, which is the Palestinian people, as victims of the verb 'to violate' that is emphasized by the attachment of the adverb 'tragically' (S.39). Thirdly, as

indicated in S.51, it is to inexplicitly present the perpetrators. This can be proven by the use of the passive form of verb 'assassinated' which indicates that the perpetrators caused the deaths.

### 3.2 Nominalization

The second strategy used by [6] in excluding social actors in his speech is nominalization. In general, this strategy is used by changing verbs into noun using the verb + -ing formula. Consider the following data.

S.20. Fanning fear and phobia around the emergence of new actors on the world scene is another.

In S.20, the affix '-ing' is embedded in the verb 'to fan'. This makes the perpetrators who carry out fear and phobia of the emergence of new actors becomes unclear. It will be different when 'to fan' is still treated as a verb in the construction of the sentence 'X fans fear and phobia'. Actors in this construction become important to be presented.

Rouhani also uses this verb + -ing construction to change the audience's point of view from "who does what" to "what happens" and to show the social actors who benefit from a social practice, which in this case are those in the north, and the social actors who are disadvantaged, which in this case are those in the south. Consider the following data.

S.26. The discourse assigning the North the center stage and relegating the South to the periphery has led to the establishment of a monologue at the level of international relations.

In S.26, Rouhani tries to shift the focus of the audience from the actors making the discourse, to the discourse itself and the impact it has. This shift makes the events that are displayed more important than who did them.

In addition to verb + -ing construction, Rouhani also utilizes verb nominalization using other forms of affixes. Consider the following data.

S.27. The creation of illusory identity distinctions and the current prevalent violent forms of xenophobia are the inevitable outcome of such a discourse.

The previous data is a sentence oriented towards the consequences arising from the event being displayed. This is caused by the transition of functions after the actor is eliminated through the verbalization of the verb 'to create' to be the noun 'the creation'. This makes the sentences independent of the actors (creator of the discourse) and more emphasis on results.

Furthermore, [6] also puts a process in the form of a modifier embedded in a head noun. Consider the following data.

S.37. ...Saddam Hussein's imposed war against Iran,

The passive form of the verb 'to impose' becomes the modifier of the head noun 'war'. This makes the phrase 'imposed war' as a process. It does not matter who forces the war, what is clear is the fact that the war is a forced one.

### 3.3 Infinitive Clause

Another form of exclusion of social actors is through an infinitive clause that functions as a grammatical participant. [6] utilizes infinitive clause as one of his strategies to exclude social actors in his speech. This allows the attenuation of actions carried out by any actors not mentioned in the sentence. Consider the following data.

S.95. It is, therefore, an illusion, and extremely unrealistic, to presume that the peaceful nature of the nuclear program of Iran could be ensured through impeding the program via illegitimate pressures.

The infinitive clause 'to presume that the peaceful nature of the nuclear program of Iran could be ensured through impeding the program via illegitimate pressures' functions as an attribute clause. This allows the social actors that [6] refers to as those who "consider Iran's

nuclear program dangerous" to be eliminated. With the emphasis, what comes next is that the "consideration" is not realistic.

## 4 Conclusion

In representing social actors involved in social actions contained in his speech, HR uses an exclusion strategy by utilizing passivation, nominalization, and infinitive clauses. Through passivation, Rouhani tries to avoid dissension with other parties, especially the United States. Besides, He also tries to presents the victims instead of the actors which are inexplicitly presented in his speech. Moreover, nominalization in the form of verb + -ing and verb + -ion are utilized well by [6] to obscure the existence of social actors, to shift the viewpoint of the audience from social actors to social actions, to show social actors who are benefitted and social actors who are harmed by the social actions, and to make the sentence does not depend on the actor (creator of the discourse) but rather emphasizes on the results. Crown it all, the infinitive clause is used by Rouhani to attenuate social actions carried out by actors not mentioned in the sentence.

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