

Interactional Pattern of Discursive Hegemony

Ming Liu¹

¹ The Department of Foreign Languages, Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang, China

Correspondence: Ming Liu, The Department of Foreign Languages, Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang, China. Tel: 86-159-7901-1829. E-mail: jxnulm@126.com

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss pattern of discursive hegemony from the perspective of the enactment of social roles and relations. Social relationship between interlocutors forming out of social activities is linguistically realized at the lexicogrammatical level, and has effect on the formation of hegemony in discourse. The paper is to tackle persuasion, one form of discursive hegemony, by using the relevant grammatical theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, such as tenor of discourse, modality, and appraisal theory. And then the paper attempts to delve into non-semiotic motivation of hegemonic language with the help of the concept “identification” put forward by Fairclough. Finally, the interactional pattern will be also used to analyze the interpersonal elements of the discourse (Blair’s Speech at the Foreign Office Conference) for the purpose of demystifying the discursive persuasion inexplicitly implied in piles of political speeches.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, discursive hegemony, persuasion, function

1. Introduction

Hegemony is not a privileged category belonging to the cultural study (Gramsci, 1971) and social science (Foucault, 1971; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2001), and it has also been explored in CDA, whose task is to demystify naturalized discourse and show that grammatical and semantic forms have close connections with ideology and hegemony. For the reason that hegemony in contemporary societies inhabits in language, it is of necessity to investigate discursive hegemony from the perspective of text or discourse with the help of linguistic theory, and what’s more SFL regards a discourse as a particular form of social interaction for it is embedded in a context of situation. To put it in a nutshell, CDA is fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque relationships of dominance, discrimination as well as hegemony manifested in language and SFL views language as social semiotic. Both of them are of great help to explore hegemony and will be used to construct an initial theoretical framework.

2. Discursive Hegemony as Persuasion

In the period of class struggle, hegemony mainly refers to a capacity to employ material force or other sanctions; that is, it refers to a particular way of conceptualizing power in political practice by which the social formation is redistributed among social institutions or ISAs. However hegemony in the contemporary society involves more than the simple exercise of force and may be described as the process in which the dominant persuade the dominated to accept their norms and ideologies. Persuasion, being a main form of hegemony, has lots of linguistic means to get realized in concrete texts. The way of how to construe persuasion in language will be unfolded within the theory of interpersonal function, which is associated with tenor of discourse at the level of the configuration of semantic resources, and has two concrete grammatical resources: modality and appraisal. Moreover, the final subsection will use the concept “identification” to interpersonally discuss the relationship between identities and persuasion in the contemporary political society.

2.1 Tenor of Discourse

In discourse practice, the position of interlocutor in a given society has a great constrain on what s/he wants to speak or write, and how s/he intends to express. In some sense it controls semiotic practice; that is the choice of language patterns which partly relies on the identity of interlocutor in a certain context of situation. And the position interweaves such parameters as formality, technicality, personality and so on. Those social elements work upon the effectiveness of communication, which means speaker swimmingly conveys his/her information and intends to influence hearer’s attitude and belief by means of language. Meanwhile, language is a barometer

of social relationships, by which people can quickly judge whether the relationship between interactants is familiar or remote, is dominant or subservient. Thus, it is proper to state that language opens a window through which social role relationships can be seen clearly.

Within the theoretical framework of SFL, tenor of discourse as one variable of register is specifically put forward to construct a configuration of interpersonal function which is instantiated as particular text. Unlike the field of discourse that determines the content of what is said (representation), the tenor of discourse has a major influence on the way of how interactants communicate with each other. In a broad way, the tenor of discourse is concerned with the social relationships of interactants in society, such as the relationship between professor and student, doctor and patient, customer and salesperson, politician and citizen. Halliday explains it as follows: Tenor refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind of another, both the types of speech roles they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved (cited in Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 12). The tenor of discourse is concerned with the role relations among interactants. And it also touches upon the inherent nature of interactant (the social position of interactant which more or less depends on social structure). In addition, the tenor of discourse should draw on time scale to consider the progression of social relationships, which has been studied in the name of “contact” in Poynton (1985). He suggests that tenor can be broken down into three different dimensions: power, contact, and affective involvement, which has been developed in Martin (1992). Martin argues that “status and contact are closely related to Brown and Gilman’s (1960) concepts of power and solidarity respectively” (ibid, p. 523). Based on their models of tenor, a three-dimensional model of tenor is described in Figure 1 in order to adapt to the current discussion on discursive hegemony.

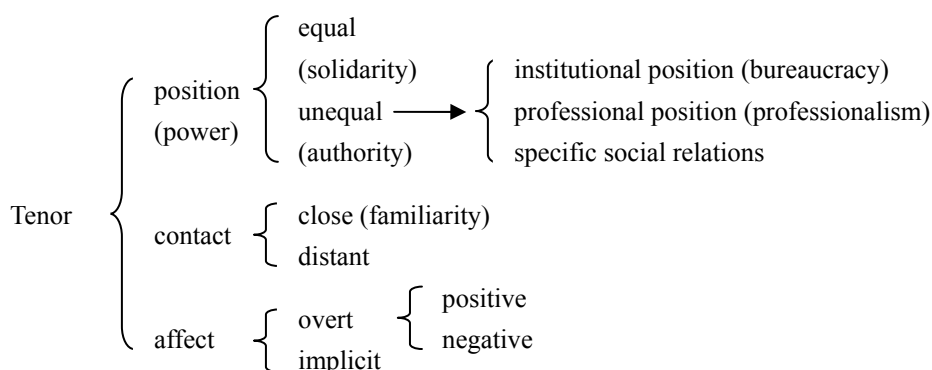


Figure 1. A three-dimensional model of tenor

Power is mainly concerned with the relation among interlocutors who occupy different social positions in a particular socio-cultural society. The power relation can be interpreted in terms of equal and unequal position, which has great effect on the choices of language. Equal position endows speakers with the same access to language resources whereas unequal position puts speakers in the state of being linguistically constrained. The powerful position taken by speaker may be emphasized by a very formal physical environment, tone of voice, lexical choice, and so forth. For example, an official discourse of the president who addresses the nation or congress may extremely manifest a strong position with regard to a variety of discursive or non-discursive ways. Social roles or positions have implications for who are an insiders and who are not to social practices. Interlocutor as an insider has much more access to social resources particularly provided by social institution. In a broader sense, language is one of social resources which vary from person to person. The dominant tend to have much more opportunities to make use of institutional or professional power to persuade the dominated to accept their norms and conventions. It is customary that in a family situation, a child always obeys his/her parent’s suggestion if they speak language with negotiated tone. In the contemporary society, people are inclined to use modalized language to interact with others in order to achieve intended effect on other’s behavior and emotion. Nowadays the social action is prevalent in every walk of life. This study regards it as a product of social change and a new type of hegemony in modernized world, which is packaged into the concept “persuasion”. Wrong (1979) once gave a detailed definition of persuasion as follows: Where A presents arguments, appeals or exhortations to B, and B, after independently evaluating their content in light of his own values and goals, accept A’s communication as the basis of his own behaviour, A has successfully persuaded

B. ..., B is free to present A with counter arguments of his own and thus to reverse the roles of persuader and persuaded, ... (Wrong, 1979, p. 32).

In the theoretical sense, persuasion as one form of hegemony is equally distributed among social interactants because the dominated have free choices to present their own viewpoints and accept the arguments of the dominant. However, persuasion, in fact, is not equal because of its variation from person to person. Following the approach we used to discuss tenor, we can construct a coordinate figure of hegemony (see Figure 2), in which persuasion is positive correlation with tenor. The tenor of discourse mainly has three variables which are respectively classified into two polar (positive polar and negative one). Power that is attained in the equal situation is labeled with $power_1$; close contact with $contact_1$, and effect that is activated by overt expressions (whether positive or not) is designated as $effect_1$.

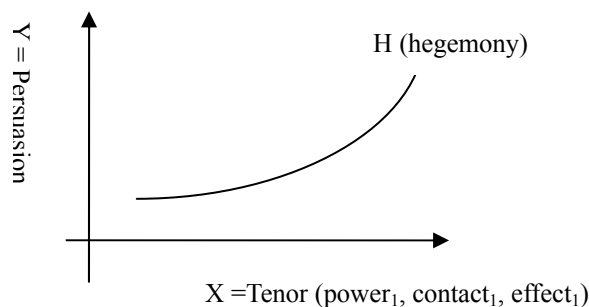


Figure 2. A coordinate figure of hegemony in terms of tenor

The variables of tenor offer us three effective parameters for exploring persuasion through which the dominant appear to negotiate with the subservient. In a way, the dominant in the modern society are inclined to employ persuasion rather than physical force to perform their influences and sustain their own power and value. According to Fairclough (1992, 1995), the social phenomenon is called “democratization of discourse”, an important type of social change in the contemporary society. At the level of language, the democratization of discourse involves the reduction of overt markers of power asymmetry between interactants having different social positions in terms of bureaucracy and professionalism, such as professors and students, parents and children, managers and workers, and politicians and citizens.

The discursive change of interaction between the dominant and the dominated is undergoing at the language level; that is the interpersonal function which mediates between tenor of discourse and the lexicogrammatical systems such as modality and appraisal. The following subsection will discuss the two semantic categories in order to explore the persuasion as one form of hegemony in a much more concrete linguistic way.

2.2 Modality and Appraisal

In Hallidayan model, modality is treated as a finite element in the mood structure expressing the speaker’s attitude and judgment. According to Halliday (1994/2000), the finite element is inherently either positive or negative. But there are intermediate degrees that fall in between the positive and negative pole, which are referred to as modality. Modality is also one of important resources for construing interpersonal meanings. Halliday (1994/2000) has established a systemic network for modality, which contains such several categories as types of modality (modalization and modulation), orientations in modality (subjective and objective; explicit and implicit), values of modality (high, median and low) and polarity (positive and negative). Fowler as a main representative of linguistic criticism, under the influence of Hallidayan model, once used the modality grammar to describe implicit ideology which is implied in literature works.

Modality is an important grammatical parameter in terms of constructing identities of interlocutors. According to Fairclough, modality is crucial “in the texturing of identities” (2003, p. 166), including personal identity and social identity, both of which will be discussed in the following subsection. In a particular text, the dominant will successfully perform their intended acts if they use language with modal markers such as modal verbs (may, could, should, will, must), modal adverbs (probably, possibly, definitely) and so forth. For instance, a British “intelligence assessment”, which has been quoted in an article printed in the Independent (19 November 1997) headlined Britain warns of Saddam’s timebomb, appears more persuasive and authoritative by using modal lexicon. The “intelligence assessment” quoted from a secondary source (Richardson, 2007) states: Provided it still has key components—and that is unclear—Iraq could within a few months build, with little risk of detection,

missiles capable of hitting Israel and key targets in Saudi Arabia (cited in Richardson, 2007, p. 61).

From the assessment, it is easier to infer that Iraq has the capability to produce missiles if it possesses important components. Whether Iraq possesses key components or not is unclear, which shows the writer was unsure that the capability had been weaponised. At the information level, the assessment does not state very much. However, it conveys inferential meaning—great measures should be taken to punish the violent actions for the safety of Israel and Saudi Arabia—which has certain effects on citizens nevertheless. In order to persuade the public that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons (CBW), that Saddam has continued to produce them, that he has existing and active military plans for the use of CBW, the Bush and Blair administrations, including the intelligence agencies of the US and UK, use modal markers more frequently. The lower degree of commitment expressed by those modal markers is capable of shaping our understanding of a social event which may be not happen in real world. A typical case in point is that many people, before and even after the war on Iraq, regard it as a just and fair war. The sort of influence is partly resulted from the propagandistic technique used by the authorities. Of course, there are few people suspecting the claim that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In some way, the authorities successfully mislead the public in the case of starting a war, though it proves that Iraq has no WMD in the Hutton Inquiry. Apart from the fact those modal markers are used to get certain intended act by the dominant, evaluative lexicon is another important linguistic resource or propagandistic technique to successfully perform the persuasion of the dominant and make their values more acceptable and legitimate.

Evaluative lexicon may be regarded as deontic modality, by which linguistic items mark the speaker's attitude to social events and signal the speaker's judgments about how people should behave in the world. Evaluative lexicon interweaves speaker's social belief system and has been systemically explored by Martin in the name of appraisal. Appraisal is another key interpersonal resource for enacting interpersonal assessments. A general definition of appraisal is given by Martin and Rose in the following lines: Appraisal is concerned with evaluation: the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 22). Appraisal includes aspects of the grammar which have been grouped variously under such the main headings as modality, evidentiality, stance, and attitude. Appraisal is concerned with investigating the discourse semantics (alongside modality), especially lexicogrammar of language with regard to the language of evaluation, attitude, and speaker's position. In a specific way, appraisal attempts to provide a good explanation of how language construes the interpersonal relationships of solidarity and power. Appraisal is mainly realized by lexicon whose meanings are frequently changed or re-located in contemporary society. Additionally, particular lexicon is stuck to affective meanings influenced partly by social positions of speakers. Thus it is inevitable to not only investigate appraisal meanings in the linguistic context, but also under the socio-cultural background and positions of the interlocutors or interactants. For instance, the expressions, such as "I believe that", "perhaps", and "it seems that", have been used to show a sort of certainty or uncertainty to truth values. The attitude toward truth values is mainly restricted by the positions of interactants who are confronted with many choices to express their ideas in a particular language.

In the Bush's speech of 20 September Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, there are many evaluative nouns such as freedom, justice, grief, anger, fear, terror, atrocity and so forth, which can generally be classified into two groups: us and them. In Bush's words (2001), either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. The enemy (them) is often represented by negatively evaluative nouns such as enemy of freedom, terrorist, traitor, regime and so on. Those nouns functioning as the participants in clauses often go with verbal groups with negatively evaluative verb such as kill, repress, brutalize, murder, overthrow, disrupt and so on. In addition, those negative verbs is followed by positively evaluative nouns such as freedom, justice, our country, all Americans, Afghanistan's people, Christians and Jews, civilians and so on. It is obvious that the speech functions the role of persuading the public that it is necessary to go to war; in other words, the speech prepares for an ongoing war.

The choice in the system of appraisal reflects and reinforces "the ideological values of the culture" (Thompson, 1996/2000, p. 65). People choose appropriate linguistic items that they hope will most effectively communicate their information and achieve their desired results, which is no exception to President Bush.

2.3 Discursive Hegemony and Identification

Identity has been studied as a kernel topic in a wide variety of academic fields—especially in culture study, mass communication, and political science. Preston concludes that social scientists typically approach the notion of identity in four ways: first, states and ideologies (looking at power, citizenship and legitimation); secondly,

society and social reproduction (looking at relationships, structures and learning); thirdly, culture and tradition (looking at practices, ideas and involvement); and finally, market and consumption (looking at choice, competition and lifestyle) (cf. Preston, 1997, p. 18ff). In this paper, we will adopt the first approach to identities and use CDA's theories to discuss identity, in the strict sense of the word-identification, which refers to "how people identify themselves and are identified by others" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 159).

To understand the meaning of identity, it is necessary to discuss social and personal identities. Social identities are the identities attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to situate them in social space, which means that people's identities judged by other people are situated in social world. In other words, social identities are closely relevant to social position possessed by interactants of communication. They are grounded typically in established social roles, such as professor and president, or in broader and more inclusive social categories, such as gender categories or ethnic and national categories. The latter (national identities) being a specific form of social identities are discursively produced and reproduced by means of language and other semiotic systems. It can be obviously seen in a series of Bush's speeches after 11 September, in which President Bush frequently used words such as freedom, democracy, our nation, our country, all Americans, peace and security to unitarily construct a uniform American in order to make preparations for the ongoing war and validate military actions to be taken. Bush addresses as a president and makes it clear in his speech of 11 September that it is the nation that has been attacked, not just those in the World Trade Centre, which is helpful to kindle the public and hold them together. According to Martin (2004), this is the process of "getting aligned". We also regard it as persuasion, a kind of hegemonic form, which means that power holders attempt to inculcate their ideas and beliefs in the counterparts' minds. In this sense, the concept "nation" exists in the minds of the power holders or limited political groups, whose interpretation and representation can become influential ideas and set the ground and rational for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Those influential ideas and convictions are communicated and disseminated, by politicians, intellectuals and media, through discourses with plenty of grammatical categories such as modality, appraisal. For instance, the difference between subjective modality and objective modality is of great help to uncover the implied social meanings of certain statements, which has been remarked by Fairclough as follows: The power of making statements on behalf of others, or indeed on behalf of "all of us" is a power which has an uneven social distribution, and is important for identification (Fairclough, 2003, p. 171). Identification plays emphasis upon the process of identifying, how the dominant show their identities of the social structure can be identified by the dominated, and the vice versa. Apart from associating it with social identities, identification can be regarded as: "bringing what Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) calls the "habitus" of the persons involved in the event into consideration in text analysis, i.e. their embodied dispositions to see and act in certain ways based upon socialization and experience, which is partly dispositions to talk and write in certain ways" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 29).

Therefore, personal identities are indispensable factors while identifying the process of getting aligned in language. The main reason is that "language is the medium through which a human being becomes a personality, in consequence of his membership of society and his occupancy of social roles" (Halliday, 1978, p. 15). Language not only acts as a mirror able to reflect an independent object world, but is better understood as a tool that we use to achieve our purposes. Language makes us distinct from others. As such, language can be thought of as a resource which characterizes us and then it is proper to say that language is imbued with personal features including stress, special voice, and speech timbre. Thus personal characteristic imbedded in particular discourse has more or less effect on others. What has been addressed by a charming person grasping propagandistic language skills tends to be accepted by the addressees, and thereby is more pervasive than the statement with lower personal features.

Social identities and personal identities (also called personalities) form a dialectical relationship. In a broad sense, social identities are combination of social roles and personal identities. People are social agents who can actively construct their own identities. But at the same time, as we mentioned in section 2.1, social roles or positions have implications for who are insiders and who are not to social practices, and are determined by social institutions or structures which are historically preexist before human beings as individuals. Social roles can be generally classified into two types, both of which are strongly related to persuasion as depicted in Figure 3.

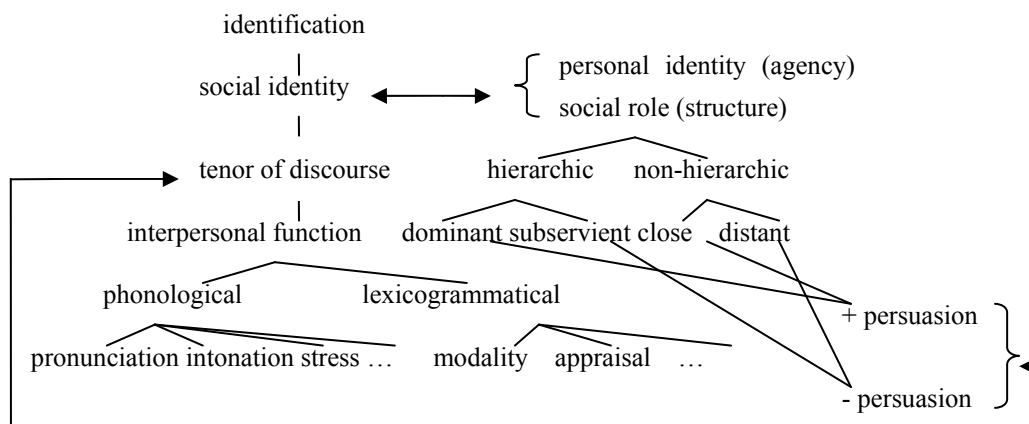


Figure 3. Identification and persuasion

In SFL, identities have been analyzed in numerous ways, one of which is through the exploration of tenor and its interconnections with the interpersonal metafunction of language realized by phonological and lexicogrammatical systems (pronunciation, intonation, stress, modality, appraisal), which won't be dealt with because it has been detailedly discussed in the previous sections.

3. A Case Study

In this section, we will briefly analyze a speech made by Prime Minister Tony Blair in order to linguistically uncover persuasion (one form of discursive hegemony) embedded in the particular text. In the course of the analysis, the two main grammatical tools—modality and appraisal—within the three-dimensional model of tenor established in section 2.1 will be employed to demystify those implicit non-discursive elements in the political text.

At the beginning of the speech, Blair uses a high positive modal operator “*has to*” to express the significance of his argumentation, through which he wants to inform the public or audiences that Britain plays an important role in the world affairs. However Blair employs a range of modal markers with lower degree of commitment to get consent from the public. For instance, the median positive modal verbal operators “*will*” and “*should*” respectively appear eighteen times and nineteen times in the text having less than 2900 words; low positive modal operator “*can*” twenty five times; high positive modal operator “*must*” only three times. Those modal elements mean the Bush’s judgment of the probabilities in terms of what he is saying. His propositions seem like arguable at the first sight for the reason that text is suffused with lots of modal elements. But the real function of those modal operators is to persuade the public into accepting the beliefs and values held by Blair. In contemporary societies, especially political circle, there is a shift in linguistic form, which means that part of the authoritativeness is in the language and specifically in the modality. The lower degree of commitment expressed by those modal markers is capable of shaping our understanding of a social event which may be not happen in real world. For example, when Blair answers the question *what does all this mean* asked by himself, he uses four clauses with the same modal markers “*can*” (e.g., *That threat can come from terrorism, producing a train of events that pits nations against each other. It can come through irresponsible and repressive states gaining access to WMD. It can come through the world splitting into rival poles of power; the US in one corner; anti-US forces in another. It can come from pent-up feelings of injustice and alienation, from the divisions between the world’s richer and its poorer nations* (Blair, 2003)). The use of low positive modal element “*can*” shows that Blair is not certain that the origins of threat come from terrorism, the irresponsible and repressive states, etc. Although the four clauses do not represent the social reality from the aspect of linguistic forms, they convey inferential meaning, that is to say great measures should be taken to punish the violent actions performed by those states or terrorists—which has certain effects on the public. Additionally, the two negative adjectives “*irresponsible and repressive*” are used to modify the noun “*the states*”, which informs the public that irresponsibility and repressiveness are the natures of the states. In order to intensively emphasize the so-called “negative” natures of the states, Blair employs an embedded non-finite clause to post modify the key noun “*states*”, and what’s more it is a material process focusing on the outer action. This particular structure of the clause impresses the public that the states have obtained WMD and the terrorists are always the troublemakers. So it is easier to make people to understand the social event from the binary perspective, in Blair’s words, “the

US in one corner, anti-US forces in another". This categorization may be hegemonic. Opponents and dissidents may be discredited by the usual display of Us/Them polarization. Repeated positive self-representation is obviously seen from the text as well as President Bush's speeches. Positive modal markers interweaving with representation are of great help to emphasize one's own power and moral superiority. Negative other-presentation discredits the opponents by providing details of the "facts" such as the embedded non-finite clause mentioned above, which is more persuasive and is easier to be accepted by the public.

In addition the text uses rhetorical questions six times (e.g., *What are our strengths? What is the nature of the world in which these strengths can be deployed? What does all this mean? The question is: how as a matter of diplomacy do we achieve them? What are the principles of foreign policy that should guide us? Are people trying to get into it or out of it?* (Blair, 2003)). These questions are more like a conversation than a political speech, more interactive or dialogical. Generally speaking, political leaders speak in an authoritative and monological way, which is a general feature of political genre. However Blair changes the specialized language and thus uses language with more interactive features which makes him like a normal person in a civilized society. In a sense, Blair's political identity is anchored in his personal identity. Personal identities are the attributes and meanings attributed to themselves by the interactants and are regarded as personally distinctive. In this political speech individual and national identities are closely interconnected by means of grammatical resources (modality and appraisal) and it makes no sense to ignore such facets of identities. It shows that leader identity in contemporary politics is built up in the midst of a tension between the public figure and the private individual. By the same token, there is a tension of language between the political language and the private language. The boundary between them is not clearly cut.

The discussion on the political speech shows that modern power in contemporary societies is more persuasive rather than coercive (just using physical force) such as the explicit issuing of commands, orders, or threat. Discourse with modalized language is an easier way to get consent from the public and persuade them to act or think according to the beliefs and values held by the dominant, especially the political bloc.

4. Conclusion

This paper constructs the pattern of discursive hegemony from the perspective of the enactment of social roles and relations and has generally tackled persuasion, one form of discursive hegemony, by using the relevant grammatical theory of SFL, such as tenor of discourse, modality, and appraisal theory. Part of the model has also been used to analyze the interpersonal elements of Blair's Speech at the Foreign Office Conference for the purpose of demystifying the discursive persuasion inexplicitly implied in language. The analysis in the study shows that it is practicable to interpret persuasion from the tenor perspective.

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