Manipulation in Interpellation of Iraqi Parliamentary Discourse

Manipulación de la interpelación del discurso parlamentario iraquí

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the language of parliamentary discourse and in particular interpellations. These interpellations are forwarded by an MP- usually affiliated to an opposition party- to the speaker, who in turn decides on the adequacy and sufficiency of the evidences provided to justify an interpellation. The interpellator then presents his argument, and in the same session the Minister is invited to answer to the allegations. It focuses on the discourse of both MPs and Ministers looking at the strategies employed by both parties to persuade and convince those who are listening to the proceedings.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, genre analysis, move structure, parliamentary discourse.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es analizar el lenguaje del discurso parlamentario y, en particular, las interpelaciones. Estas interpelaciones son enviadas por un parlamentario, generalmente afiliado a un partido de oposición, al orador, quien a su vez decide la idoneidad y suficiencia de las evidencias proporcionadas para justificar una interpelación. El interpelador luego presenta su argumento, y en la misma sesión se invita al Ministro a responder a las acusaciones. Se centra en el discurso de los parlamentarios y los ministros, examinando las estrategias empleadas por ambas partes para persuadir y convencer a quienes escuchan los procedimientos.

Palabras clave: Análisis crítico del discurso, análisis de género, discurso parlamentario, estructura de movimiento.

INTRODUCTION

The language of politics has been extensively studied by researchers interested in the various areas of legislation, election campaigns, public speeches, political forums… etc. Parliamentary discourse- being a sub-genre of political discourse- also had a good share of linguists' interests and has been the focus of a number of studies. (Van Dijk 1999, Chilton 2004)

However, studying the linguistic features of parliament in the Iraqi context has been rather scarce. The current paper attempts to throw some light on the feature that characterizes the language of parliamentary discourse.

The activities of most parliaments in general and the Iraqi parliament in particular are divided into two major areas: Legislation and Monitoring. The former includes discussions of draft bills and the latter consists of those activities related to the following up the implementation of specific laws, agreements, or pledges of the government or its representatives. This is done in the form of questions, petitions or interpellations.

Accordingly, there are two lies of conflict going under the Iraqi Dome: the first is among the different members of parliament (henceforth MP) with their different affiliations; the second is between the opposition parties' representatives on the one hand and the government representatives on the other. It is one of the noticeable practices that each MP creates 'a positive presentation' of himself, his party and his social group. Meanwhile, the MP implicitly or explicitly displays 'a negative presentation of the other' whether it includes other MPs, other political parties or opposing government representatives.

Interpellations, as one form of Monitoring, are considered to be one of the most powerful and conflictive forms of democracy in the Iraqi parliament. this is due to the fact that they are forwarded by an MP- usually affiliated to an opposition party – accusing a minister of nonfeasance, mal use of authority and power…etc. and demanding an immediate explanation.

Purpose of the Study

This is an ongoing study that aims to investigate the linguistic features that characterize interaction and conflict among the various participants in interpellation in Iraqi parliamentary discourse. The current paper, however, primarily focuses on the following:
1- The overall discourse organization of openings and closings of interpellations.
2- Logical fallacies employed by MPS and Ministers/ Government representatives.
3- The differences- if any- between Mps and Ministers answers/ comments.

Data collection

The corpus of the study is the written accounts of all the interpellations of one parliamentary round, which takes of the most important interpellations. Those are approximately ten, each taking fragments of the session. The data also includes the Ministers' answers and the Mp's comments following. The interpellations under examination are selective from the same round to unify the socio-political context of the interactions, (2018-2019).

Theoretical Constructs

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates how power relations and ideologies are manifested linguistically in a variety of discourse events, ranging from education, media and politics exploring the social political factors. As such the present analysis draws on the principles of CDA to explore the overall organization of interpellation in the Iraqi

Parliament as well as the rhetorical devices employed by both the Mps and ministers.

Van Dijk (2000a, p.100) points out that "parliamentary debates not only embody meaning and not only have multiple forms, but also forms of social and political interaction." The parliamentary debates, in particular, are different from any institutionalized discourse in at least two aspects. The first aspect is the prerequisite of

disagreement and confrontation until a decision is made; the second one is the presence of a multiple audience – either the other MPs or the TV viewers. MPs are expected "to deal with overt confrontation and strong emotional bias as preferred forms of interaction" (Illie 2000b, p.242).

Accordingly, this study draws on the relevant linguistic features that characterize the interaction and conflict between *us* and *them*, *self* and *the other* in Iraqi parliamentary interpellations. According to Van Dijk (1998a, p.4) " the polarization of Us and Them that characterizes shared social representations and their underlying ideologies is thus expressed and reproduced at all levels of text and talk,e.g. in contrastive topics, local meanings, metaphor and hyperbole, and the variable formulations in text schemata, syntactic firms, lexicalization…." Evidently, powerful groups tend to provide a positive favorable portrayal of themselves while presenting the other groups negatively either implicitly or explicitly as Van Dijk (1999) puts it "…..there is a large set of social and political actions MPs may engage in, both locally and globally, when speaking in Parliament. Most relevant for our analysis are those acts that presuppose positions of power (threats, warnings) or related social relations and the management of opinions of recipients about the outgroups (accusations, defamation, derogation)."

Illie (2000b, p.236) also strongly believes that "to a large extent, the Mps interaction in Parliament is a competition for power and leadership roles". This is in agreement with Van Dijk (1998a) who looks at power in terms of control of both mind and content stressing that those who can exercise more control over the minds and actions of others are more powerful. Those who have more access to the media or public talk, for instance, are thought to be more powerful than those who do not.

In addition, analysis of the overall organization of the discourse is carried out within the theoretical framework of Genre Analysis developed by Swales (1990), who noted that there is a regular pattern of 'moves' and 'steps' that appear in a certain order characterizing the overall organization of certain domains of professional and occupational activities. "Moves" and "steps" are defined as follows: A 'move' is a unite that relates both to the writer's purpose and to the content that s/he wishes to communicate. A 'steps' is a lower level text unit than the move that provides a detailed perspective on the options open to the writer in sitting out the moves in the introduction. (dubley-evans & ST.joun 1998, p.89)."

Bhatia (1993, p.29) states that "writers seem to be fairly consistent in the way they organize their overall message in a particular genre, and analysis of structural organization of the genre reveals ways of communicating intention in specific areas of inquiry".

In addition to Swales' Move Structure Model, some of the rhetorical devices used by both the MPs and Ministers are analyzed to show they are used as means of persuasion. According to Charteris-Black (2005, p.10), "persuasion either seeks to confirm or challenge existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviors- persuasion is never devoid intention." To intentionally use various linguistic structures for rhetorical purposes is "a most common and legitimate everyday implementation of linguistic means" (Sornig, 1989, p.95). The rhetorical features discussed in this study are three- part list, parallelism, hyperbole and the number game.

Overall Organization of Interpellations

It has been noted that interpellations in the Iraqi context of Parliament are organized around a number of 'moves' some of which are obligatory, whereas others are optional:

MPs Opening Moves
1: Naming Allah
1.1: Quara'nic Verses (optional)
2: Terms of Address
3: Emphasizing the Importance of the Interpellation.
3.1. Reference to the MPs positive self-image (optional)
4: Documentation/ Evidentiality
5: Presentation of the Interpellation (Body)

M. Naming Allah

Strating by naming Allah charactreizes a number of oral genres in the Islamic world: political speeches, inaugurations and some official ceremonies as well as written official documents. It is the belief in the Arab Islamic culture that starting by naming Allah at the beginning of an activity provides blessings and success.

In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful.

This is sometimes followed by verse from Quran.

M. Qura'nic Verses

Resorting to Quran is thought to be a persuasive strategy that can help attract the attention of the audience. The selection is usually highly significant as the MP focuses on those verses that describe the traits of good people and the rewards that await them in life and in heaven. This is contrasted to the bad people and the punishment that will be inflicted upon them. Members here are hence divided into two groups: good referring to the Self and bad referring to the others.

In most of the sessions, they choose sourat 'Ya Sin' because there are words in this soura such as "heedless", people who "do not believe" and they "cannot see" which give negative attributes to the other group. Such traits are targeted against the interpellated minister who is accused of nonfeasance, acting in accordance with his own interests regardless of the Iraqis' welfare, and hence he is unfair to the people. Therefore, he and his group are reminded of God's punishment.

In another session, the following verses are said:

> In the case of those who say "our Lord is God", and, further "stand straight and steadfast", the angels descend on them (from time to time): "Fear ye not" (they suggest), "Nor grieve! But receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden (of Bliss), the which ye were promised!"(…)"Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to God, works righteousness, and says,' I am of those who bow in Islam"? Nor can goodness and evil be equal. (Sura LXI: 30-40)

In the former verses, the focus is on the punishment of the other group, which is negatively viewed, but in the latter, the reward that awaits the good people is emphasized. The MP implicitly includes himself with this group. In these verses, those who are close to God, straight and accomplish good deeds are promised serenity in life and in Heaven. Based on the truth-value of the preceding Qur'anic verses, the attendees can be more easily persuaded to believe and accept the arguments put forward by the MP.

Emphasizing the Importance of the Interpellation

Each MP is keen on presenting his interpellation effectively and, at the same time, maintaining his positive self-image right from the very beginning. Analyzing a number of the openings of interpellations shows that the major point an opening cannot do without and which the MP is careful to emphasize is the importance of his interpellation. This is sometimes done by reference to the number of those affected by the problem under question.

The following are examples taking from different sessions:

1- This interpellation is about one of the major public utilities that concerns all the Iraqi people….

2- The unemployment interpellation is important for all the Iraqi families; at least one in family is searching for a job.

Sometimes, the amount of people interested in the issue discussed or the number of questions addressed to the government about the problem is a proof of the interpellation's importance.

3- I have to give my colleagues a chance to present their petitions and questions concerning environment on this day which all Iraq is waiting for.

4- My interpellation is accompanied by 60 petitions and questions, which outnumbers one tenth of all MPs.

At other times, the interpellation is thought to be even important world wide. Reference is made to people and organizations all over the world who are interested in the issue under discussion.

5- The international Economic and social Council is extremely interested in this case.

Aggravating –if not exaggerating the importance of an interpellation could be done through hyperbole:

6- Today we are facing one of the most important and most dangerous cases.

Using such strong figurative language in the openings arouses the audience's interest and attracts their attention let alone their feelings to listen and react. Making sure the attendees are carefully listening is the first step towards their persuasion and hence their actions.

Reference to the MP's positive self-image

Mps are also very keen on mentioning their good intentions as well as their keenness on the welfare of the country, hence adding to their positive self-image. For example:

7- We have to emphasize, whether opposition or majority, that we are with the serious and honest investor.

8- Mr. President the truth is, while presenting my interpellation, I am only looking for the welfare of this great nation and these great people.

Documentation / Evidentiality

To strengthen their positive portrayal of themselves, almost all Mps mention their possession of documents and hard evidence proving that the accusations they level are solidly grounded and have to be taken seriously. The more there are documents, the greater the confidence.

9- I am in possession of a lot and a lot of files, and much more about other companies.

10- We will prove every single word with documents.

11- While I'm talking I have in my possession documents to validate every word I'm saying in the interpellation.

In some cases, it is not only the quantity of the evidence that matters, the quality of the documents is much more important. Therefore, the source is highlighted in the opening. This refers back to the idea of evidentiality. Closely related to the documentation is how the MPs derive their information,what types of media they resort to, what kind of books or newspapers they read and what sort of references they quote.

12- May I have your attention fellow members?, I will present documents. I will not utter a word without a document from the central Bank report.

13- I would like to confirm that I am not speaking out of thin air. I have more than 20- documents all taken from the central Auditing Organization (CAO) reports. These are evidences that I did not

make up. They are issued by a respectable government organization which is highly appreciated by the Iraqi people.

It is probable that the MP feels that knowledge provides esteem, prestige and above all power. Therefore, the type of books MPs read, the sources they refer to and the references they consult form a great deal of the positive picture the MPs draw for themselves in front of their audience. It is doubted that the attendees are actually even listening to the lengthy bibliography. This tactic is believed to add credibility to the Mp: he is knowledgeable and well educated; it is a strategy utilized for persuasive purpose.

Summation of the demands and requests of the interpellation
After providing evidence for the minister's accusations, the interpellator has to close his/her speech by a summary of what he thinks should be done to overcome such problems.
14- We demand that there would be development, that there would be social justice and that there would be effective supervision; we do not want any negativity…….
Notice the parallel structure: the demands are listed in a 3- part list, a rhetorical strategy that is thought to impress the hearers and that gives a sense of completeness and comprehensiveness to the solutions proposed.
15- I do not want to discuss what I mentioned before, but I would like to summarize my demands: First, upholding the law as was mentioned in the constitution….. Second,.. The Minister should be held accountable for all hid deeds. We should question him…

A direct attack is leveled at the minister accusing of mal use of authority. Such clearly substantiated negative other presentation entitles the MP the right to go as far as demanding the minister to quit.
Sometimes, the demands are in the form of questions that need answers from the minister.
16- I want the Minister to tell us who is responsible for the closure of the factory.

At other times, the main points of the interpellation are summarized in a stronger figurative form (using rhetorical questions) since they have been already confirmed by the details mentioned in the body of the interpellation. Additionally, the use of lexical items with negative connotations helps in drawing a negative picture of 'the other'.
17- Do you manufacture steel or do you produce hundreds of unemployed? Are you increasing the number of unemployed people? Or are you increasing the number of factories?

Reiteration of what was mentioned in the opening
Mps tend to repeat what was mentioned in the opening sometimes adding an 'appeal' to it.
18- I beg you to judge this interpellation using your conscious. We have to prevent the crime that is being committed against this country.
19- We've come here to defend this nation and its great people.

This actually seems like a stronger restatement of the overall proposition mentioned earlier in the opening of the same interpellation. The MP then reemphasizes his keenness on the interests of the country, by employing almost the same words he has used in the opening section. This in addition, reinforces positive self-image.
20- I have all the documents and if the President (of the parliament) wants the papers, I'll give them to him. Take all the papers, the papers of corruption.
These MPs are so eager to stress the validity and authenticity of their evidence at the very end before the minister replies and claims that the interpellation is not based on accurate and true data. The last example

combines the reference to documents, in addition to an appeal to the feelings of the attendees. This is taken up in the next move.

Emotional Appeal

The interpellating MP here appears in desperate need for help. He seeks the aid from 'the other'. The other here is the MPs attending because they are the people's representatives, the legislators, the judges and the decision takers.

21- I don't have the authority to withdraw the confidence from the Government, but I'll leave the matter with you, you are the legislators, you are the judges under this Dome. You tell us how we can straighten things up.

The interpellation is simply a message delivered by a messenger who knows well that he alone is powerless unless the other MPs decide to take back him up in his pursuit of the truth and the fight against corruption. Stressing the positive, other presentation is done for persuasion and stimulation purposes.

His final word is a call for unity against corruption; those who unite are the honest and honorable people like himself and his audience excluding the minister. Sometimes the MPs resort to a memorable quote to finalize their argument by asking God's aid against evil represented by 'the other' group to which the minister belongs.

THE MINISTERS' REPLEY

Evaluation

Ministers tend to begin their replies with appreciative words directed towards the speaker, the MPs and the parliament in general. The minister is implicitly working on the positive portrayal of himself. He is careful to clarify the inaccurate facts mentioned in the interpellation "not for the purpose of providing his innocence from all the accusations leveled by the opposition, but out of his concern and interest in the citizens' welfare".

22- Allow me to sincerely thank my colleague, Mr……for giving the government a chance to correct the information he provided….

Tables are turned. The repley is a chance to correct the false information provided by the MP in his own interpellation as if the MP has brought it upon himself.

23- It is a good chance to tackle an issue we seldom deal with. Hereby I thank those who first presented questions.

It is clear from the examples above that the ministers want "to plead innocent" from the very beginning. They are glad to be interpellated since it is a chance to clarify, demystify and correct the allegations of the interpellating MPs.

Sometimes the minister appreciates the MP's good feelings or sincere concern about important issues. Therefore, thanking and praising move is not meant for positive self-presentation, but for positive other presentation as a persuasive technique.

24- Actually, before I begin- Mr. President- I'd like to thank the MPs for their noble feelings towards me. And I like to say that these feelings are mutual and even more.

It is evident that such repetitive strategy of praising the supposed 'other' empowers the minister's reply and enables him to win the other on his side so that they finally melt. Self and other becomes one thing.

25- Of course, we all agree and no one can argue about what we are dealing with today.

Evidentiality

Similar to MPs, Ministers also resort to 'evidence' to prove their points. However, they never emphasize their possession of documents. Instead, it is more like a promise to provide the 'proof of innocence'. Such attitude gives the impression that a Minister is naturally trusted, but an MP has to struggle to be believed.

26- This is the truth and I will prove it in detail

27- What's important, Mr. Speaker, to be able to tackle the whole issue is that I will refer first to the Assembly's interior by law…..

28- However, I will prove it form the law and I will answer for every incident the MP has mentioned….and I will clarify what happened exactly about all his allegations….

Therefore, the minister appears to be the one who tells the truth. After all, whatever the MP has said are simply "allegations".

Reiteration of what was mentioned in the opening

Similar to their interpellators, ministers select to reemphasize what they think to be the key issues in their answers.

In the following example, there is repletion of the concession that there is a need for reformation with the aid of the parliament, followed by a disclaimer that there is no need for criticizing those who execute such reformation.

29- This means that there is a need for reformation but there is no need for criticizing and attacking the administration, which executes such reformation.

As a persuasive strategy, the Minister, in the excerpt that follows, makes sure to revisit his major proposition which happens to be the main core of an interpellation; namely not to attack honest people without any hard evidence. The use of documentation and rhetorical question highlight the idea.

30- How can we accuse this honest person? How can we accuse him in his honor and his integrity?

A Pledge

Logically, the interpellating MPs have some negative allegations and specific demands concerning the ministers' performance. Therefore, the ministers have to plead innocent and promise to do their best in serving their country. Via these sincere pledges, the negative image the MP draws of the Minister is altered.

31- We will investigate any company or any person we get to know has mal used their authorities, the company's money or recourses.

32- I am committed in front of you and all the Iraqi people that I'll do my best to defend of our home.

Summing and confirming Key Issues

Summing up key points especially at the end of the reply is another strategy used for persuasion, allowing the Minister to have the final words. The following examples stress the rhetorical power that ministers possess; typical political rhetorical expressions are used like 3- part list, parallel structure and repetition.

33- Therefore, discipline is there…. The legal instrument is there, and the supervision is there.
We do not deny any violations, and we do not defend any violations.
Any violations detected have been already investigated or will be investigated.

Rhetorical Features

It has been noted that both MPs and Ministers resort to a number of strategies in their attempt to arouse the audience and elicit their approval, as three part list, parallel structure, repetition, and number games.

Three Part List

Three part list is thought to be a powerful persuasive tool as the following quotation suggests: "One of the most common means of eliciting approval is the use of what Atkinson calls 'a list of three'. Whatever the nature of the speech act, political speech or casual conversation, the three –part list is embedded in certain cultures as giving a sense of unity and completeness. (Beard, 2000, p.38)"

They are usually stressed and said aloud and hence the "prosodic features of pitch, tempo and rhythm add to their effect." (Beard, 2000, p.38). Such rhetorical strategy is thought to be typical of political discourse. It appears in many forms: a repetition of the same word, or a list of three different words or phrases or even long statements and rhetorical questions in addition to parallel structures.

Generally, it is a rhetorical feature used to keep the image of politicians as eloquent orators. Another function could be related to the persuasive power of such enthusiastic statements. It is noted however, that the MPs resort to the three part lists more often than Ministers; this is believed to be due to the fact that Ministers- being public figures and have the support of the Speaker (as they are from the same governing party) in addition to the support of the government- they do not need to use the power of rhetoric to persuade attendees.

34- We want our youth to work,
We want to eradicate unemployment,
We want to increase our production.

35- Executing such mechanism would help create new job opportunities for the people in selecting, collecting and manufacturing, hence help in solving the unemployment problem, saving energy, and the optimum usage of natural resources.

The favorable presentation of the MP is emphasized due to the positive connotations of the three verbs used in the previous two examples in addition to the repetitive use of the inclusive pronoun "we" that stresses the listeners' identification. On the other hand, the three part list is usually utilized to enumerate the negative attributes of government officials or organizations (the other).

Parallelism

It is the belief that MPs use parallel structures to draw a favorable picture of the 'self', and at the same time, create an unfavorable image of the 'other'. Parallel structure apparently enhances and reinforces the intended message. According to Wales (1989), it is a device common in Rhetoric; its form relies on the repetition of the same structural pattern. "To say that linguistic structures are parallel is to say that they share a common structural frame, and that within this frame, some element or elements differ in form. (Johnstone, 1991, p.33)".

Such structure is one of the common features found in the data both by MPs and Ministers. Following are examples taken from MPs:

36- We have come here today to defend the interests of this country and the
interests of these people.

37- The first thing we're confronted with in every house, in every street, in every
ally. In every office, in every factory is the amount of refuse.

Hyperbole

This strategy is used a lot by politicians generally and MPs particularly. The reason beyond using it extensively is concluded in what van Dijk states in the following: "As a move under the general strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, semantic exaggeration is common, especially to emphasize negative outgroup characteristics or actions. (Van Dijk, 1998b, p.28)".

MPs mainly use hyperbole in their openings and closings for effect, and impression management. The unfavorable picture of 'the other' is accurately drawn through lexical choices connoting negative notions.

38- And that is the greatest danger in Iraq, that anyone can take a loan without
any guarantee. That's wrong.

39- What happened is an unforgivable treason unless one fights it.

40- This issue is greater and more critical than anyone could believe it would happen in Iraq.

Such exaggerated reference- via the use of superlative forms- to the type of problems or issues the MPs deal with attracts the attendees' attention to listen and concentrate. Moreover, it explicitly demonstrates the importance of the interpellation itself.

As for the Ministers, they utilize hyperbole to foreground the positive characteristics of the in-group (the government or its organizations) in an answer to the MPs'allegations.

41- The results confirmed that our hospitals are equipped with the latest international devices.

42- I have to say that our staff is highly honest as they were chosen by specific team.

Interestingly enough, the superlative forms of adjectives are similarly used, but associated with lexical items carrying positive connotations.

43- The Iraqi's expenditure on the health sector is considered one of the most worldwide.

The previous example is an attempt by the minister to prove that the Iraqi's expenditure on health would result into money liquidity crises, and hence there are problems as the MP is trying to show.

The Number Game

The number game is considered to be a special case of hyperbole. Large numbers are used as a means of exaggerating, maximizing and foregrounding positive or negative characteristics of 'the self' and 'the other' respectively. Though this feature is not a part of the traditional figures of speech, the play on numbers and percentages in political language can be argumentatively and persuasively effective. This feature is one of the most recurrent rhetorical devices utilized by both MPs and ministers in the data basically depending on the topic of the interpellation as the following illustrations exemplify.

To draw the negative image of the other, MPs use the number game as an evidence of corruption in the government bodies. The exact numbers – especially when detailed and with fractions – are more credible than the general reference to money, gains or losses.

44- Some of the simple tools cost 52 million although they in fact should not exceed 300 thousand.

45- The official papers presented to the Minister states that the number of the ------is 55 thousand.

CONCLUSION

This is obviously a cat and mouse situation. Both MPs and Ministers are more or less using the same persuasion strategies with variations. The MPs rely more on their possession of documents and hard evidence to prove the Minister malpractices. They try hard to brighten their positive self-image using supporting Qur'anic verses, reference to the great importance of their interpellations and even appealing to the MPs attending to take actions. On the other hand, Ministers are also aiming at drawing a more positive picture of themselves (and whoever they represent) and, at the same time, emphasize that what the MPs say are simply false allegations no matter what documents they have. Armed with their power of rhetoric, organization tactics and above all the support of the government, they tend to attack the MPs explicitly and implicitly (sometimes ironically). Interestingly, Ministers seldom resort to the documentation strategy as if what they say is automatically trusted and believed but what the MPs say need a lot of evidence to prove. However, ministers receive most of the applause in the sessions. The Mp and the Minister is each powerful in his own position.

Each of them is loaded with his own sets of weapons but each has to work hard to maintain such power and from here emerges the conflict.

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