

“President-Protector”: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of a News Report Promoting the Personality Cult of the President of Turkmenistan G. Berdymukhamedov

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Abstract

The cult of personality started by the first President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov has acquired new dimensions with the present leader of the country. The cult of personality of Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov is actively constructed via mass media. This paper examines two short clips of a news report dedicated to the President’s birthday celebration that was broadcasted on the Turkmen national TV on 26 June 2020. The paper analyzes a set of specific mechanisms of flattery inflation used in the report and demonstrates special linguistic choices and visual patterns applied to force a specific ideology on the audience. Due to the multimodal nature of the analyzed discourse, multimodal critical discourse analysis has been implemented, additionally informed by the systemic functional linguistics and the visual semiotic analysis.

Keywords: multimodal critical discourse analysis, personality cult, Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov.

1. Introduction

Today news reporting is actively used with the purpose of imposing the desired way of thinking on masses of people. This is the case in Turkmenistan, where national channels promote the cult of personality (the creation of an idealized, heroic, and worshipful image of a political leader by the means of various types of mass media propaganda) of the President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. This study aims at analyzing a two-hour news report¹ dedicated to the sixty-third birthday celebration of the President that was broadcasted on one of the national channels *Altyn Asyr*. The research questions that this paper seeks to answer are the following:

RQ1: *What linguistic elements and visual patterns are utilized to produce and practice the personality cult of the President of Turkmenistan?*

RQ2: *What mechanisms of flattery inflation are used in Turkmen national news to promote the cult of personality of the President?*

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOBWLFNEIgm>.

To answer these research questions, first, the literature for the study is consulted. Then, because of the multimodal nature of the analyzed discourse and in order to provide analysis of power relations in the video, multimodal critical discourse analysis is applied (MCDA). Since MCDA includes various approaches, in the paper I implement systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) to explore the linguistic choices and the intended meaning behind them. Additionally, visual semiotic analysis also carried out for the current project enabled to study the visuals appearing in the TV news report. However, it is worth mentioning that due to space constraints, this paper offers a micro analysis of the most salient aspects. Thus, a further investigation on the topic could be recommended.

- Personality cult of Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov is promoted in the national news.
- Special linguistic choices and visual patterns create manipulative discourse.
- The cult propaganda is spread via special mechanisms of flattery inflation.

1.1 Turkmenistan: A general overview of the country

A small body of research can be found on modern Turkmenistan (Denison, 2009; Klement, 2014; 2018). Denison (2009) explains that this is due to the “problems of gaining entry to the country, together with official harassment, often prove to be a deterrent for many researchers working in the region” (p. 1168). The current study aims to shed some light on the matter.

To provide an explanation of geographical location and characteristics of Turkmenistan, I will appeal to Kumar’s description (2005):

It [Turkmenistan] is located between the Caspian Sea and Amu Darya River in the Southeastern part of Central Asia, bordering Kazakhstan in the north, Uzbekistan in the northeast and Iran in the south and Afghanistan in the east. It is largely a desert country with more than 80 percent of the land mass occupied by the great Kara-Kum desert. Administratively, it has been divided into five *welayatlar* [Provinces] named Akhal, Balkan, Dashoguz, Lebap and Mary. (p. 193)



Figure 1. Administrative map of Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan today is considered to be one of the most hermetic countries in the world. According to Human Rights Watch², Turkmenistan is known as a repressive country that lacks basic human rights, has corruption, a flawed criminal justice system and a strong sense of nationalism. Furthermore, according to the same organization, the President and his relatives and

² <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/turkmenistan>.

their associates control all aspects of public life. Therefore, there are no private channels in Turkmenistan. Instead, according to the official website of The State Committee of Turkmenistan for Television, Radio Broadcasting and Cinematography, there are 7 national channels: *Altyn Asyr*, *Miras*, *Ýaşlyk*, *Türkmenistan*, *Türkmen owazy*, *Aşgabat*, and *Türkmenistan sport*. They are controlled by the government of the country. The information broadcasted from the channels is highly positive, any kind of criticism is absent. The only person that is “allowed” to criticize and show discontent on national news is the president himself. Often the footage of the President firing ministers is shown on the national news. For instance, on 4 May 2017, the President first strongly criticized and then sacked Amanmyrat Khallyev (prosecutor-general) for bribery and corruption at a State Security Council session on May 4 that was broadcasted on national news. In the same news report the President announced a formal reprimand for Interior Minister Isgender Mulikov and sacked several officials from the prosecutor's office and in the Interior Ministry.

Since most of the foreign alternative news websites are blocked (as well as social media websites) in Turkmenistan, national TV is the main source of information for its citizens. Three out of seven channels are news channels: *Altyn Asyr*, *Türkmenistan*, and *Aşgabat*. *Altyn Asyr* (from Turkmen “Golden Century”) is the first Turkmen national channel that started broadcasting in spring of 1992. The channel highlights events in the political arena.

1.2 *Cult of personality: Historical examples*

A cult of personality is a historical phenomenon when by the means of various types of mass media propaganda an idealized, heroic, and worshipful image of a political figure is created (Márquez, 2018; Pisch, 2016; Wells, 2014). According to Pisch (2016), the term “*kul't lichnosti*” (Cult of personality) was first used in the Soviet Union “in Nikita Krushchev's 1956 Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress of the VKP, in which he denounced the ‘cult of the individual’ surrounding the then-deceased Stalin” (p. 52). Márquez (2018) states that the term “cult of personality” appears by different names, such as ruler cult, personality cult, cult of personality, and leader cult. A cult of personality was widely produced in pre-modern monarchies. However, its occurrence in modern contexts that “stress the equality of citizens and the role of the people as the only source of legitimacy for political order”, is rather puzzling (Márquez, 2018: 1). Some of the most well-known examples of leaders with personality cults were Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Adolf Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte, Hugo Chavez. Moreover, in history some of the cults received proper name. For instance, “Leniniana” (Márquez, 2018), “Staliniana” (Márquez, 2018), “Chaveziana” (Márquez, 2018), and even “Nyýazowisation”³ (Clement, 2014).

Márquez (2018) argues that general models of the emergence and development of such phenomenon as “cult of personality” are still non-existent. Therefore, he proposes two models of political leader cults: “cult rituals” and “cult propaganda” (Márquez, 2018). Cult rituals can appear in quite open political systems, as they are “in many cases not controlled or directed by state agents, and at least some forms of cult participation are not driven by fear of social or official sanction, or by expectations of patronage in exchange for loyalty” (Márquez, 2018: 11). In opposition to “cults as rituals” there exists “cults as propaganda”. Propaganda can induce people's support to the regime, however without belief in its content, generally out of fear.

1.3 *Cult as propaganda: Flattery inflation and its mechanisms*

It appears to be that only a small number of people need to believe (or pretend to believe) in the regime for the rest of the people to follow the lead. Propaganda imposes desirable

³ Saparmyrat Nyýazow was the first president of Turkmenistan.

signals of support for the leader on people. Márquez (2018) argues that these signals of support can be called “flattery” due to its insincere nature:

“We should therefore expect that when power is highly personalized and intra-party competition for leadership-allocated resources is fierce, flattery will tend to become even more excessive and insincere, since the fact that everyone else is flattering the leader means that “ordinary” praise tends to be devalued as “cheap talk” and discounted accordingly.” (p. 9)

Therefore, people around the leader try to show their excessive loyalty by renaming streets or cities in his or her honor, erecting statues and displaying portraits of the leader, wearing special badges with the image of the leader (e.g., Lenin in Soviet Union), and giving stormy and prolonged applause usually when welcoming the leader or after his or her speeches. Thus, more and more people start to compete in expressing their loyalty and absolute admiration of the leader.

Márquez (2020) argues that there are three main mechanisms of flattery inflation: loyalty signaling, direct production, and ritual amplification. According to Márquez (2020), “Cult-building via loyalty signaling typically emerges when there is common knowledge that there are rewards or punishments arising from credibly and publicly recognizing (or failing to recognize) the leader’s exceptional qualities” (p. 7). Since there often exist some opportunities for advancement for people who recognize the exceptionalism of the qualities of the leader and sanctions for those who fail to do so, people tend to publicly praise the leader (or pretend to do so).

According to Márquez (2020) another mechanism of flattery inflation “direct cult production” is one of the simplest mechanisms of cult production. It is usually performed by bureaucratic authority of the state or other organizations, and results in production of “cult artifacts calculated to persuade audiences of the charisma of the leader” (p. 7). The role of these artifacts can be performed by statues and portraits of the leader, his enhanced autobiographies etc.

Finally, ritual amplification is participation in rituals of worship of the leader by expressing one’s loyalty. These rituals of worship are mass gatherings such as concerts dedicated to the leader or his family, openings of hospitals or schools with “the help of the leader”, etc.

2. Method

To explain MCDA as a method of research, it is important to provide an understanding of some major concepts involved such as multimodality and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Therefore, I will start this section by discussing the notions of multimodality and multimodal texts.

2.1 *Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA)*

Halliday (1978) was one of the first scholars who argued that “there are many other modes of meaning, in any culture, which are outside the realm of language” (p. 4). Later, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) agreeing with Halliday, introduced the term multimodality. Multimodality refers to a set of different communicational forms or modes such as spoken and written discourse, images, music and signs (to name a few). Due to the development of digital and internet technology, the number of these modes has expanded. O’Halloran (2011) states that all discourses are arguably multimodal. Baldry and Thibault (2006) claim that:

“multimodal texts integrate selections from different semiotic resources to their principles of organization. [...]. These resources are not simply juxtaposed as separate modes of meaning making but are combined and integrated to form a

complex whole which cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of the mere sum of its separate parts.” (p. 18)

Therefore, multimodality starts with the belief that multimodal texts consist of different semiotic resources that should be analyzed together rather than separately (Mayr, 2016). This belief is one of the basic principles of MCDA.

Another important concept that needs to be addressed is CDA. CDA appeared in the late 1980s and is concerned with “relations between discourse, power, dominance and social inequality” (van Dijk, 1993). CDA not only studies these relations, but also looks at how they are reproduced and maintained in discourse. According to Hall et al. (2011), critical discourse analysis studies “the ways in which social power, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts” (p. 88). Therefore, CDA is interested in how language, ideology, and power are connected. In this study I apply CDA when illustrating and explaining various linguistic choices used to refer to the President and a possible reason behind a high percentage that they comprise of the overall text. Additionally, I implement CDA when providing interpretation of specific utterances from the two clips and elaborating on how with their help the specific ideology is promoted.

Finally, MCDA is an emerging method of research that has been developed from a social semiotic approach to multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2001; Kress, 2010). According to Mayr (2016), MCDA is used not only

“to understand the nature of non-verbal communication, [...] but to carry out a critical analysis of linguistic and visual discourses in the broader tradition of CDA. MCDA can be seen as an expansion in that it provides a systematic model for the study of the interaction between the verbal and the visual, that is, the inter-semiotic relationships between modes.” (p. 264)

Thus, MCDA combines various methods in order to analyze language as well as visual images in a provided discourse. Mayr (2016) states that “MCDA applies tools many of which are derived from Halliday (1978; 1985), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2001) and van Leeuwen (1996; 2005)” (p. 265). Similarly, in this paper, I apply systemic-functional linguistics (Halliday (1978; 1985) and visual semiotic analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2001). Further I discuss these approaches in greater detail.

2.1.1 *Systemic-functional linguistics (SFL)*

As it has been stated above, MCDA has been greatly influenced by Halliday’s SFL that examines language and its social purpose. In other words, it studies functional organization of language in contexts of everyday life. Furthermore, SFL is usually associated with Halliday’s framework for describing texts and their social contexts (1978) that includes three elements: field, tenor, and mode of the discourse. Halliday and Hasan (1989) provide following definitions to the three components:

- (1) The field of discourse refers to the nature of the social action that is achieved by the text.
- (2) The tenor of discourse refers to the participants of the discourse, their status and roles.
- (3) The mode of discourse refers to the part that language plays in the discourse (e.g., spoken or written discourse, persuasive, didactic, expository, etc.).

Halliday’s framework for describing texts and their social contexts (1978) is used in the present study.

2.1.2 *Visual semiotic analysis*

Besides the language used in the analyzed discourse, the visionary images are also examined with the help of visual semiotic analysis. Visuals started to be treated like language in the nineteenth century when the first systematic model for visual analysis was introduced. Semiotic analysis studies signs and their meaning in relation to social situations and processes. In this paper the visual images appearing in the news report both in the foreground and background are analyzed. Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) argue about the importance of various semiotic elements such as one’s appearance, gestures, and eye contact that provide additional information in visual images. In the paper these elements are also analyzed to give the insight of the power relations between the President and his subordinates. Furthermore, Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) discuss other semiotic resources as setting, attributes, and colors that can also be informative regarding the general aim behind a particular image. Thus, in the current article, I explore how the elements discussed above are used in the video with a persuasive aim. Additionally, I find it important to explain the visuals from a cultural perspective, as one might find it challenging to comprehend some peculiarities of the Turkmen culture that are evident in the video clips.

3. Analysis and discussion of the results

In this section the analysis of the data and discussion of the results will be offered. I will start by providing a general overview of the analyzed news report:

The news report is two hours long and dedicated to the President’s sixty-third birthday celebration. It was aired on 26 June 2020 on the main national channel *Altyn Asyr* in Turkmen language. In the paper I examine two clips from the mentioned news report. The two clips analyzed in the article are about three minutes each. The timeline of the clips is the following:

- 1) For the first clip: 0:57-04:22.
- 2) For the second clip: 01:43:16-01:46:09.

In the article I present both the manually transcribed original Turkmen text and my version of its English translation.

With the help of Halliday’s framework (1978), I will further provide a description of the multimodal discourses in the two clips. Then, I will present a quantitative analysis of the linguistic elements applied to refer to the President and explain their meaning from a CDA perspective. After that, I will examine the visual images presented in the news report from a cultural viewpoint and according to Machin’s (2010) framework. Finally, the CDA analysis of the utterances produced in the clips will be provided followed by comments on power relations and national ideology.

3.1 *In the Presidential Palace: CMDA of the first clip*

To provide information on the setting of the first clip, the main characters and their actions, as well as aims behind the video, Halliday’s framework for describing texts and their social contexts is applied and adapted according to the multimodal nature of the discourse.

Table 1. Description of the multimodal discourse and its social context (first clip)

Field	The production of cult of personality in two settings (news studio and the President's palace).
Tenor	Outside of the news report: Two news presenters (a man and a woman) and the audience watching the news report. Inside of the news report: The President, twenty Cabinet ministers (two of whom are women), five heads of provinces, and ten children.
Mode	The multimodal discourse (spoken, written, and visual) combines features of informative (inform the audience about the President's birthday and the way it was celebrated) and persuasive language (convince the audience to adopt the belief about the exceptional features of the President expressed by the participants of the discourse).

The information in Table 1 shows that in the first clip two settings can be observed: the news studio where the news report was aired and the Presidential Palace in Ashgabat.⁴ Additionally, various participants of the discourse are described. In the first part of the clip the interaction is between the presenters and the audience watching the news report. In the second part of the video the interaction is between a number of participants: the President, Cabinet ministers, heads of the provinces, and children. Regarding the mode, it combines two functions: to inform and to force a desired ideology on the nation.

For the latter purpose, different linguistic choices are used, specifically when addressing the head of the state: adjectives, epithets, the word "President" itself, and the name of the President. The percentage of these linguistic elements can be seen in Table 2. Additionally, the total number of tokens and types present in the spoken discourse can be observed. Moreover, combined the tokens of these linguistic elements make around 10% (10.07%) of the total percentage of tokens, and the types – almost 4% (3.73%) of the total percentage of types. Without a doubt, 10% of the overall text to address the President is quite a significant percent for a three-minute clip. This frequent reference to the President using such adjectives as brave, dear, respectful and such epithets as the protector and grandfather (Table 2) is made to highlight the exceptional qualities of the President and impose the idea of his power and greatness.

Table 2. Analysis of the linguistic choices used to address the President (first clip)

Statistical item	Total number of words in a spoken discourse	%	No of adjectives (brave, dear, respectful) used to refer to the President	%	No of epithets (the protector, grandfather) used to refer to the President	%	No of times the word "President" was used	%	No of times the name of the President was used	%
Tokens	298	100	7	2.35	16	5.37	5	1.68	2	0.67
Types	187	100	3	1.6	2	1.07	1	0.53	1	0.53

3.1.1 Traditional clothing

Visual images can also tell quite a lot about the power relations in the analyzed discourse. Thus, the clothes worn by the people in the first video show the importance of the occasion. For instance, the female news presenter (Figure 2) in the video is dressed in a white national dress with a hand-made colorful decoration in a traditional Turkmen style on her chest

⁴ The capital of Turkmenistan.

that is called “*yaka*”. Additionally, the woman is wearing a big piece of traditional Turkmen jewelry on her chest, and a traditional headscarf covers her hair. Furthermore, the white color of the dress also shows that the occasion is special. In many cultures white color symbolizes purity (Machin, 2010). In Turkmenistan white color is usually worn for festive celebrations.



Figure 2. The news studio

Children in the Presidential Palace (Figure 3) are also dressed up, each of the girls is wearing a dress of a particular color (green, red, dark blue, light blue, and yellow) with embroidered traditional symbols). The hair of the girls is braided in two braids. Boys are dressed in traditional clothing as well (white shirts with embroidered traditional symbols and black pants). Both boys and girls are wearing traditional hats called “*takhyas*”. The festive traditional clothes of women and children give an impression of a major national holiday.



Figure 3. Presidential Palace

The President himself is wearing a grey suit with a grey tie and a white shirt (Figure 4). However, more importantly is that his glasses and his grey hair make his look appropriate for the epithet “*Atamjan*” (“Grandfather”) that children use when referring to him in their poem.



Figure 4. Children receiving books written by the President

3.1.2 Applause

When the President enters the room, he is welcomed by a round of loud applause. After that, the children come up to the President to tell a poem, a round of loud applause can be heard again. Then, the head of the Akhal province approaches the President to give a report regarding the agricultural state of the province. Everyone claps again. The fact that applause can be heard and seen many times (when the President enters the room or when he likes something) can be interpreted as a sign of loyalty signaling from the part of his subordinates.

3.1.3 Eye contact

When giving a report, the head of Akhal province (in the full video each one of the fiveheads of provinces) does not look straight in the eyes of the President (Figure 5). Instead, he bends his head and looks down. After reading the report, he hands it to the President, escaping the eye-contact with him again. It is evident that the subordinates of the head of the state realize “that there are rewards or punishments arising from credibly and publicly recognizing (or failing to recognize) the leader’s exceptional qualities” Márquez (2020). This peculiarity is another clear sign of loyalty signaling.



Figure 5. The head of Akhal province giving a report

3.1.4 President’s books

The children after telling the poem to Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov have received some presents from him. One of the gifts were books written by the President. After accepting the presents, the children put the books against their forehead three times (Figure 6), as if a President’s book were a sacred object. The production with the further distribution of the President’s books is an example of direct cult production (Márquez, 2020). The personality cult of the leader is promoted with the help of different artifacts, in this case it is the books of the President. Furthermore, the fact that the children treat the books as a sacred object is another clear evidence of loyalty signaling. It has been explained to them that public praise of the leader is welcomed with rewards, whereas the failure to do so, with punishments.



Figure 6. Children putting President’s books against their foreheads

For the additional CMDA I also provide the analysis of the utterances produced by the two news presenters. For this purpose, I use a table that is divided into two columns (Table 3). In the first column utterances originally delivered in Turkmen are presented, whereas in the second column their English translations are provided. In the table, I refer to the male news presenter as “NP1” and to the female news presenter as “NP2”. Additionally, since the children in the first clip tell a poem to the President synchronically, I refer to them both as “C”.

Table 3. CDA of the utterances of the first clip

Nº	Utterances in Turkmen	Translation into English
1.	<i>NP1: Bilşimiz ýaly şu gün ýurdumyzyň we halkymyzyň durmuşynda şanly günleriň biri.</i>	<i>NP1: As we all know today for the life of the whole nation and the country is a special day.</i>
The reporter’s statement of the President’s birthday being a “special day” for everyone in the country appears as a strong overgeneralization. This statement seems to impose on the audience the desirable feeling of worship of the leader.		
2.	<i>NP2: Bizň özgezegimizde mähriban Arkadagymyzy ak goýun toýy mynasyp ýetli tutuş halkymyzyň adyndan tüýs ýürekden gutlayas.</i>	<i>NP2: On our part, on behalf of the whole nation, we sincerely congratulate dear Protector with his “white sheep” holiday [that he has reached the age of the prophet].</i>
Besides the repetition of overgeneralization “on behalf of the whole nation”, implicit comparison of the President to the Prophet Muhammed is made to idolize the leader of the country.		
3.	<i>NP2: Ýurdumyz we halkymyz galybersede tutuş adamlar üçin beýik işler bitirýar.</i>	<i>NP2: The great job performed [by the President] is for the well-being of the whole country, its people, and all mankind.</i>
In this statement another overgeneralization of the greatness of the President and his power is presented, particularly that his actions affect not only all the people in Turkmenistan, but “all mankind”.		
4.	<i>NP2: Her bir pursatda esasy daýanjy hasaplaýan halkyny bagyt yoluna ataran mähriban Arkadagymyzyň tagalasy bilen güleşür diýarymyz bagtyýarlyk mekanda, ýagşy işleriň aman bolýan ýurdyna öwürildi.</i>	<i>NP2: Through every opportunity he gets, our dear Protector strives for the happiness of the nation. Thanks to him, our sunny land turned into the center of good deeds and happiness.</i>
This sentence promotes a certain image of the President: as a protector, a hard worker, the only reason behind all the good things that have happened to the nation and the country.		
5.	<i>C: Atamjan yhlasyndan berekete baý bugday.</i>	<i>Thanks to grandfather’s efforts wheat is rich in abundance.</i>
From the utterance, even the success in the agriculture sector, particularly a big harvest of wheat is due to the “efforts” of the President which is an obvious exaggeration.		
6.	<i>C: Alkyşdyny şöhrat bilen, Atamjan! Alkyşdyny şöhrat bilen, Atamjan!</i>	<i>Glory to you and applause, grandfather! Glory to you and applause, grandfather!</i>
In these utterances an explicit worship of the President is encouraged.		

From the table it is evident that the utterances provided by the participants of the video, primarily by the news presenters are directed to praising the President, his qualities, and actions. Therefore, exaggeration and overgeneralization are common devices applied here.

3.2 A concert dedicated to the President: CMDA of the second clip

For the second video clip Halliday’s framework is also applied in order to provide general information of the discourse (setting, main characters and their actions, purpose of the video).

Table 4. Description of the multimodal discourse and its social context (second clip)

Field	The production of cult of personality in two settings (news studio and the square in front of the State Cultural center).
Tenor	Outside of the news report: Two news presenters (a man and a woman), a news reporter (a man), and the audience watching the news report. Inside of the news report: Singers, dancers, musicians, children, and invited audience.
Mode	The multimodal discourse (spoken and visual) combines features of informative (inform the audience about the President’s birthday and the concert that was held in his honor) and persuasive language (convince the audience to adopt the belief about the exceptional features of the President expressed by the participants of the discourse).

The information presented in Table 4 shares some similar characteristics with Table 1. Thus, the number of the settings presented in the second clip is also two. However, if the first setting is the same for both clips, that is the news studio, the second setting in clip number two is different. The second setting is the square in front of the State Cultural center in the capital of the country (Ashgabat). Regarding the participants, some similarities can be also noted. Thus, in the first part of both videos, the participants of the discourse are the news presenters and the audience that is watching the report. However, in the second clip there is another participant, a news reporter, and in the second part of the second video, the number of participants is considerably higher: singers, dancers, musicians, children, and the invited audience. Regarding the aims of the discourse in the second video, it is the same as in the first one: production and practice of the personality cult of the President of Turkmenistan. However, it is worth mentioning that in the second clip it is mainly achieved through mass gathering (concert) that is a typical example of ritual amplification (a mechanism of flattery inflation).

Moving from providing a general description of the multimodal discourse in the second clip, I will now analyze the spoken language, particularly its persuasive function that is partly achieved through various linguistic elements used to refer to the President (table 5).

Table 5. Analysis of the linguistic choices used to address the President (second clip)

Statistical item	Total number of words in a spoken discourse	%	N°of adjectives (national, dear, respectful) used to refer to the President	%	N°of epithets (the protector, the leader) used to refer to the President	%	N°of times the word “ President” was used	%	N°of times the name of the President was used	%
Tokens	329	100	13	3.95	13	3.95	2	0.61	2	0.61
Types	205	100	3	1.46	2	0.95	1	0.49	1	0.49

As it can be seen from Table 5, the same categories of linguistic elements as in the first video clip are observed: adjectives, epithets, the word “President” itself, and the name of the President. The percentage representing each of the mentioned groups is presented in the table alongside the total number of tokens and types in the second clip. If we combine all the tokens referring to the President, we get around 9% (9.12%) of the total percentage of tokens. Regarding the types used to refer to the leader, their numbers make up slightly more than 3% (3.39%).

In order to provide further MCDA, I will discuss visual images in the second video clip.

3.2.1 *President’s portraits and songs*

Throughout the whole clip a portrait of the President on the Turkmen flag can be seen in the background on a big screen (Figure 7). Moreover, sometimes videos of the President playing on musical instruments and singing songs of his own composition are shown on the screen. These are the examples of direct cult production Márquez (2020).



Figure 7. Portrait of the President at the concert

3.2.2 *Clothing*

The singers and dancers at the concert (Figure 8) are either wearing traditional Turkmen clothes or suits (men only). The exception is made for a song about sport written by the President. During the performance of this song, the dancers are wearing sports clothes. Moreover, the people in the audience are also quite dressed up with women wearing traditional Turkmen dresses and men wearing suits (Figure 9). This shows that people treat the President’s birthday as a major national holiday.



Figure 8. Singers and dancers performing at the concert

3.2.3 *Gestures*

The audience present at the concert seem to either dance or clap (Figure 9). Some of the people are even singing along. Everyone is listening to the concert standing up. Even though some tables can be noticed in the background, no chairs can be seen (Figure 9). This might be treated as another example of loyalty signaling. Since people participating in the celebration know that there are “rewards and punishments” (Márquez, 2020) for publicly recognizing the leader or failing to do so, they (in)sincerely show how much they enjoy the concert.



Figure 9. Audience clapping at the concert

For additional CMDA I provide the analysis of the utterances produced by the two news presenters. The same table as the one presented for the first video clip is used here as well. It is also divided into two columns (Table 6). In the first column utterances originally delivered in Turkmen are placed and in the second column their English translations. Similar to Table 3, to refer to the news reporter I use the abbreviation “NR”.

Table 6. CDA of the utterances of the second clip

No	Utterances in Turkmen	Translation into English
1.	NR: <i>Çünki çeper dörejelige aýratyn gadyr goýýan mähriban Arkadagymyz medeniýetiň we sungatyn ösdürinmägine oň halkymyzyň ruhy dünýasiniň baýlaşmagyny edýän tasirene möhüm ahmet berýar.</i>	<i>Our dear protector who does all the best he can for the happiness of the nation, pays special attention to the development of art, music, and culture, as he thinks that they enrich the souls of the people.</i>
An apparent exaggeration of the role of the leader in the lives of the nation can be seen in the utterance. Moreover, the actions that are clearly performed by a group of people such as “development of art, music, and culture” are attributed to one person (the President). This is done to show the exceptionalism of the qualities of the leader.		
2.	NR: <i>Baýramçylyk dawarasında çykyş eden meşhur aýdymçylar sungat dessantlar we ýaş ýerine ýetirjiler hoş owalyk üsti bilen, berkarar döwletimiziň bagtyýarlyk dowurini mähriban Arkadagymyzyň ýol açalagyňyza ýurdumyzyň ýeten derejegisini, ýurdumyzyň tebigi aýratynlaryny we päk söýgüni wasp etdiler.</i>	<i>The famous singers, young performers, and composers praised the accomplishments of our stable state and its era of happiness, all achieved with the help of our dear protector. They also did not forget to mention the beauty of the Turkmen nature.</i>
The internationally known truth about modern Turkmenistan becoming a highly hermetic country under the rule of the current leader is concealed. Moreover, it is substituted with an untrue argument of the country presently experiencing the “era of happiness”. However, from the Human Rights Watch organization it is known that the country undergoes quite serious challenges. Once again, the importance of the President’s role in misrepresented reality in the life of modern Turkmenistan is emphasized.		
3.	NR: <i>Mähriban Arkadagymyzyň sözlerine döredilen ajaýyp aýdymlar konserde tomuş edýänler üçin öz bolşly baýramçylyk sowgadyna öwürildi.</i>	<i>The wonderful songs, composed with the words of our dear protector, have become a beautiful gift for those who attended the concert.</i>
In the statement one of the exceptional qualities of the President, such as writing songs, is highlighted.		
5.	NR: <i>Milli liderimiziň sözlerine döwlet baş tutamyzyň agtygy Kerimiň sazyny döredilen “Sportly Türkmenistan” atla aýdym özüniň belent ruhy, joşgunly owazly bilen tomaşaçylary ony diňleýarleri beýik ýenişler ruhlandyrýar.</i>	<i>One of the songs “Sporty Turkmenistan” written by our national leader was accompanied by the music composed by his grandson Kerim. The audience enjoyed the President’s great spirit and beautiful voice.</i>
President’s extraordinary talent of writing songs as well as his grandson’s music composing abilities are emphasized in the statement. Moreover, overgeneralization of the audience appreciating the President’s spirit and voice has been made.		

Similar to Table 3, in the current table exaggeration is made regarding the role of the President. Moreover, the reality of the country is misrepresented and internationally accepted facts about the country are concealed. Instead, as in Table 3, the exceptional qualities of the leader of the country are highlighted, particularly his talent to write and sing songs. Furthermore, the President’s grandson is also mentioned, specifically his music composing abilities.

Throughout the first and second video clips it is observable that all three mechanisms of flattery inflation (direct cult production, loyalty signaling, and ritual amplification) are implemented to promote the cult of personality of Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. An example of direct cult production evident in the first clip with the distribution of the books written by the President. The signs of loyalty signaling can be observed in subordinates of the President, news presenters, and even the children who told a poem to the President. Thus, the subordinates express their loyalty by applauding the President, bending their heads when greeting the head of the state and by not making eye-contact with him. The news presenters signal their loyalty primarily by means of language. It has been established in previous sections that the language used in the news report is persuasive. Its purpose is to convince the audience of the extraordinary qualities of the leader (the President) and impose the belief that all the deeds performed by him are only for the good of the country. 9% (in the second clip) to 10% (in the first clip) of the text (from clips that are only three minutes long) dedicated to addressing the President seems quite significant. Moreover, the news presenters use various linguistic elements: adjectives and epithets (brave, protector, grandfather, etc.). They even make an implicit comparison of the President to the Prophet Muhammed. Further worship of the leader of the country can be observed when the children in the first video put his books against their forehead three times, as if they were sacred. Finally, the mass gathering at the concert dedicated to the President’s sixty-third birthday where his and his family’s talents are praised is a clear example of ritual amplification.

4. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore how the cult of personality of the President of Turkmenistan is promoted in the context of national news reports. For this purpose, two short video clips of a two-hour news report, that was dedicated to the sixty-third birthday celebration of the President, were analyzed. Due to the multimodal nature of the selected discourse, multimodal critical discourse analysis informed by the systemic functional linguistics and the visual semiotic analysis, was adopted. The findings revealed the manipulative discourse of Turkmen national news reporting and discussed special linguistic choices and visual patterns used to impose the desired way of thinking on the masses of people. Furthermore, special mechanisms of flattery inflation such as loyalty signaling, ritual amplification, and direct production were detected in the news report. They were used to produce the cult of personality of Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov through propaganda. Therefore, the current paper offers an initial approach to investigating the promotion of the cult of personality of the Turkmen President in the discourse of national news reports. However, future research should focus on the complex analysis of news reports from different national channels and perhaps newspaper articles to argue the common tendencies in the construction of the cult of personality in Turkmenistan.

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