



“Our Message Can Be Summarized with These Words: Britain First”: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Speech of Oswald Mosley’s character from the Peaky Blinders Series

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Abstract

Fascism is a radical and polemic political movement that had its origin in Italy after World War I. Thereupon, different versions of this ideology emerged in several European countries such as England, where Oswald Mosley was its precursor and the founder of the British Union of Fascists. Through his powerful speeches, he achieved to persuade the English elite to help him position himself as a leader and establish fascism in Britain. This article addresses a fictitious interpretation of Oswald Mosley giving a political speech in the middle of a sophisticated party. The main intention of this work is to explore the mechanisms of persuasion employed by the fictitious version of Mosley to address his audiences and convince them to accept his message. Some findings reveal that the use of polite expressions as well as remarkable confidence in his speech, helped Mosley gain the sympathy of his listeners.

Keywords: multimodal critical discourse analysis, Oswald Mosley, fascism, mechanisms of persuasion, British Union of Fascists.

1. Introduction

Sociopolitical movements are originated in particular contexts and by social agents performing a role within those environments. Furthermore, politicians making powerful speeches have been a relevant influence for the inspiration of this type of movements. For instance, Hitler had a crucial impact on history to the extent of provoking catastrophic consequences for humanity, and this is partly due to his energetic political speeches. Similar to Hitler, Oswald Mosley, a fascist politician that created the British Union of Fascists in the 1920s, influenced a sector of British society with his speeches.

For this paper, a speech of Oswald Mosley’s character from the Peaky Blinders TV series was thoroughly analyzed. The analysis was conducted based on two research questions.

RQ1: *What specific mechanisms of persuasion did Oswald Mosley utilize to move his audience?*

RQ2: *What are the visual elements that denote Oswald Mosley’s positionality concerning his audience and own speech?*

- Modal verbs of politeness, request, and invitation were mainly used by Mosley to address his sophisticated audience, keep their attention, and gain their trust.
- The use of a considerable majority of declarative sentences in Oswald Mosley's speech made him seem confident and interesting in his message.
- His enthusiasm, the energetic and dynamic use of his body, as well as his facial expressions, gave Mosley an authoritarian and determining aspect that influenced the listeners' acceptance and sympathy towards his speech.

To answer the above research questions, an extract of an episode from the series “Peaky Blinders”¹ was analyzed by using the multimodal critical discourse analysis approach and with the support of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. Moreover, a visual semiotic analysis was employed in order to address the visual elements found in the aforementioned extract.

1.1 *Oswald Mosley*

Oswald Mosley was a politician that began his political career in the Labour Party, however, he was expelled from that organization, and therefore, he founded the British Union of Fascists. McCloud (2006) mentions that “Mosley envisioned a one-party state, a coerced cooperative economic arrangement between Britain and her white dominions, a limit on the power of parliament, a dictatorship in literal fact, and a reduction in the power of Jewry” (p. 691). The above summarizes what Mosley aspired to achieve in Britain in terms of politics. Moreover, and as mentioned above, his ideological and political stance contained a hate message that was openly against different racial and social communities. In addition, his aspirations also implied an extremist and oppressive control of society and the government. According to Worley (2010), “Mosley concluded that only fascism provided the wherewithal to ‘save’ Britain from socio-economic ruin and a possible communist takeover” (p. 68). Based on this, Mosley was apparently concerned about the future of England, however, his concern was mainly related to protecting the England elite from external influences such as American capitalism or Marxism.

1.2 *Defining and characterizing fascism*

Fascism is a political movement that started in Italy after the first world war as a consequence of a social and economic crisis in Europe (Love, 2007). Its existence has not only been limited to the Mediterranean country, but it has also had a presence in several territories during different periods in history. For instance, and as mentioned above, fascism had a strong presence in England during the 1930s with the British Union of Fascists (BUF), a political organization that was led by Oswald Mosley.

Regarding defining this movement, Griffin (1993) mentions that “fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism” (p. 26). In this definition, the term “mythic” makes reference to a utopic and idealistic model for society conceived by fascists, while the word “permutations” implies that each manifestation of fascism in different countries has involved distinct and particular characteristics. Moreover, the term “palingenetic” makes allusion to a concept of rebirth or re-creation, thus giving a new version of nationalism that in this case, is defined as “populist nationalism”.

In relation to the permutating nature of fascism mentioned above, Love (2017) employs the word generic when referring to British fascism. This is because this political

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

movement was originally developed and characterized for and according to the Italian sociopolitical context, and therefore, the variations that emerged in other countries are viewed as “generic” since the original model was conceived for Italy. However, and despite its different versions, fascism involves several characteristics that distinguish it from other political movements or ideologies. Regarding this, Richardson (2017) states that:

Fascism is a political movement. The mass, or “popular”, nature of fascism is vital, since it is the mass nature of fascism that distinguishes it from other forms of right-wing, authoritarian rule. The first three ideological components (nationalism; capitalism; anti-Marxism) are features common to many right-wing political ideologies, ranging from the traditional right-wing through radical- and populist- varieties; it is the anti-democratic *weltanschauung* and violent methods which set fascism apart from parliamentary right-wing politics. (p. 455)

Regarding the above, fascist movements have distinguished for striving to gain popularity in society based on an excessive exaltation of nationalism or blaming others for a nation’s decadency or failure. Nevertheless, the characteristic of “popular” in fascism, does not imply that people have the right to exert any type of power, religion, or behavior that goes against this political movement. On the contrary, this social diversity is highly prohibited in fascism as it opposes its authoritarian unique model of how things, and especially people, must be. In relation to this, Renton (2000) mentions that fascism is focused “on a radical elitism, that is on the notion that certain human beings were intrinsically, genetically better than others, who consequently could be treated as if they did not have the right to exist” (p. 77). Therefore, the people in a fascist regime are what they consider the elite among other inferior human beings that do not deserve to be treated as equals.

In order to briefly summarize the above, Richardson (2017) mentions three major characteristics of fascism: “(1) strong-to-extreme nationalism; (2) anti-Marxism, and indeed opposition to any mobilisation of the working class as a class for itself; and (3) support for a capitalist political economy” (p. 448). The above clearly indicates that fascism does not advocate for the lower classes, but only for the elite and the people they consider acceptable. Also, its extreme nationalism usually goes hand-in-hand with issues such as racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism. Hence, “fascist discourse is vitally important to analyse, understand and oppose” (Richardson, 2017, p. 448). This is because its discourse has several negative implications for society due to its discriminatory, repressive and hateful nature. Thus, it is essential to be critical of any manifestation of fascism and oppose it, as mentioned above. Finally, “CDS² should be aimed at analysing and counteracting power abuse, and how this is variously represented, enacted, justified and achieved in and through discourse; fascist political projects (whether ideology, party or movement) epitomize power abuse in extremis” (Richardson, 2017, 451). The importance, therefore, of critically analyzing fascist discourse resides in the danger it represents for social and ethnic communities that have historically been oppressed. Since fascism is openly explicit in its social exclusivity and its discourse has been usually convincing throughout history, its negative repercussions must be evinced through critical discourse analysis in order to advocate for the aforementioned oppressed social classes.

² Critical discourse studies.

1.3 *Mechanisms of persuasion*

Political speech is not a simple act of saying words, communicating ideas, or being polite for the occasion. It goes beyond as it is a complex act of convincing others to accept a message. In regard to this, Voicu (2013) states that:

Speech is the use of a language as well as of other communication resources in a given situation: language, vocabulary, addressing conventions, communication channels, and the identity of the interlocutor. All these, collected, converge on the idea that political speech can be treated as a project of social interaction. Producing a speech, the resources that are in this situation are used, first language, so the action must be directed to the audience and therefore to the situation. (p. 211)

Based on the previous statement, political speech implies interacting with people and using certain resources that include specific use of language, body gestures, visual elements and symbols, and so forth in order to persuade them to consent to an idea or point. Furthermore, involving the audience during a speech and connecting it to a certain situation is a common resource employed by politicians so that the public generates a feeling of interest and relevancy on the addressed issue. Expanding on the verbal and visual relationship between a speaker and their audience during a speech, Voicu (2013) declares that:

The act of communication is always an attempt to influence the other. To the extent that any exchange of communication and especially the political one stakes bears and to the extent that it represents the joint construction of a reality, this exchange is attempted as an alienation of one from the other and / or vice versa, namely the attempt to impose a possible world that would provide one or the other the control over the stakes. (p. 210)

The quote stated above provides us with remarkable elements such as “an attempt to influence the other”, “the joint construction of a reality”, “an alienation of one from the other” and “the attempt to impose a possible world” that can be present in many political speeches. In a few words, influence, construction of reality, alienation, and imposition are aspects that are widely common in convincing political speeches according to Voicu (2013). Regarding influence, Voicu (2013) adds that it “is a human resource and skill as it is to motivate the other, i.e. to make him/her able to think or act in the desired direction” (p. 210), and that is one of the main goals of politicians when giving a speech: leading people to a specific ideological target. The case of fascist speakers is not different as they seek to convince a specific audience to accept their discourse by employing influential resources and by implicitly imposing ideas and conceptions of how the world should be.

Thus, in order to influence an audience or impose an idea or message, politicians employ different mechanisms of persuasion to achieve their purpose and receive a positive reaction from the public. Therefore, these mechanisms are essential in political speeches. Regarding persuasion, Macpherson (2018) mentions the following:

The starting-point of all persuasion, of ourselves or others, is a belief or wish. Holding a certain belief, or desiring that a certain course of action shall be pursued, we set out to justify our belief and the conduct that it implies. Thus, before he begins to speak, the orator whose aim is persuasion has already present in his mind a belief or wish, fully formed, from which all his arguments and appeals flow; and the effectiveness of his persuasion will be proportionate to the clearness and fulness with which the belief has been defined, and the degree of conviction with which it is held. (p. 12).

In regard to the above, persuasion starts with a belief or a wish that an orator aims to share with an audience with the purpose of convincing it to agree with it. The success in the persuasion of a message depends on how it is transmitted. For instance, Macpherson mentions

that the degree of conviction and the clearness and fulness to express a belief has a considerable impact on the extent to which an audience is persuaded. Therefore, in this analysis, we can see below that Mosley achieved to persuade the majority of his audience as he was firmly convinced and confident about his beliefs and wishes regarding the acceptance of fascism in England.

In relation to the clearness, fulness, and conviction mentioned by Macpherson (2018), Voicu (2013) adds that “the more quality of the arguments contained in the message generates more favorable (positive) ideas in the audience, the more the persuasion effect increases and the attitudinal and behavioral exchanges will be higher” (p. 215). Thus, fascist politicians have elaborated well-structured arguments that helped them achieve their purpose of persuading people to accept their beliefs and wishes.

In a study conducted by Prihandari and Yohannes (2021), they found two persuasive strategies utilized by the Japanese military regime during World War II to inspire soldiers and make them feel more confident: the use of request and invitation forms. Likewise, these strategies were employed hand-in-hand with exalting adjectives to refer to the soldiers and to the wish that the regime was expecting to achieve in war. These mechanisms of persuasion resulted in more committed and motivated soldiers that were also firmly convinced of the regime's beliefs and wish.

Prihandari and Yohannes (2021) also address the relationship between power and language, and how the latter is used to achieve and reflect the former. Therefore, “language and power is a complementary unit. When a person has power, the language he uses will be referred to, both his choice of words and his communication style either verbally or non-verbally” (p. 588). In the video analyzed for this article, we can see that the character of Oswald Mosley does not only employ words to evince his positionality of power, but also his body by moving energetically his hands and showing imposing facial expressions. Therefore, verbal and non-verbal communication has been key in fascist speeches so as to reflect their power and also, to firmly persuade their audience.

2. Method

2.1 *Multimodal discourse analysis*

According to O'Halloran (2011), multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) “is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound” (p.1). Therefore, I decided to employ MDA as an approach for this work since it does not only involve language but elements such as the ones mentioned above. Furthermore, I must remark that the material utilized for this paper is a video about an interpretation of Oswald Mosley giving a political speech. Thus, MDA was the most appropriate choice to carry out the analysis as the material contains verbal and visual elements that are useful for the purposes of this paper.

In addition to what the above approach consists of, and based on Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996; 2001, as cited in Machin, 2013), MDA addresses “texts which linguists study create meanings not only through language but also through visual features and elements such as images, colour, the layout of pages, even though material objects and architecture” (p. 347). The previous statement refers to the analysis of written texts, however, it can also be related to the analysis of materials such as videos or images which, as mentioned above, contain more than words and which have plenty of meaning.

2.2 Systemic functional linguistics

In order to complement and assist the multimodal critical discourse analysis, I employed Halliday’s (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach. This is because “explicit CDA needs a solid ‘linguistic’ basis, where ‘linguistic’ is understood in a broad ‘structural-functional’ sense. [...] Systemic Functional Linguistics plays a crucial role in critical discourse study” (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018, p. 16). Hence, this linguistic approach helped me to examine the linguistic features employed by Mosley in his speech with the purpose of interpreting their actual connotation beyond the explicit superficial message he communicates to his audience. In addition, Almurashi (2016) mentions that:

SFL, with regards to data, does not tackle the manner of language representation or process in the human brain, but would rather try to see discourses produced in the form of written or oral language and what is contained in the texts that are produced. (p. 71)

Based on the above, SFL was not used in this analysis to explore how language is structured per se in Mosley’s speech, but to thoroughly examine what the language employed is implicitly communicating between the lines.

2.3 Visual Semiotic Analysis

As mentioned above, the analysis conducted regarding Mosley’s speech was not limited to examining the use of verbal language, but it also included visual elements that can be perceived in the video. This inclusion was considered since “language and visual communication both realize the same more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our cultures, but that each does so by means of its own specific forms, and independently” (Machin, D., & Van Leeuwen, T., 2007, p. 17). Thus, for this paper, I took into consideration several visual elements to analyze as they transmit a specific message that verbal language does not communicate by itself.

3. Analysis and discussion

Table 1. Description of the multimodal discourse and its social context

Field	A political speech introducing the foundation of a new political party to members of high society in the middle of a sophisticated party.
Tenor	Speaker: Oswald Mosley. Audience: Members of high society, the host’s family, musicians, and a dance company.
Mode	Spoken and visual elements are part of the communication. Use of persuasive language during the interaction between Oswald Mosley and the audience.

3.1 Interpersonal function

Interpersonal function is the second level of Halliday’s (2003) framework and it is “concerned with the interaction between speaker(s) and addressee(s)” (Almurashi, 2016, p. 73). Since this MCDA seeks to analyze the communication between Oswald Mosley and his audience, as well as the elements that have an influence on them, I decided to focus this study on the aforementioned function. In addition, Almurashi (2016) also mentions that this level “is used to

establish the speaker’s role in the speech situation and relationship with others” (p. 73). Thus, it allowed me to clarify Oswald Mosley’s positionality towards his spectators and his own speech.

3.1.1 Mood analysis

Table 2. Mood types and their repetitions

Mood type	Number of sentences
Declarative	28
Interrogative	0
Imperative	6

As shown in the previous table, a considerable majority of sentences employed by Oswald Mosley are declarative, which indicates that his speech is mainly constructed by affirmative statements, “facts”, arguments, and/or beliefs. This also reflects a strong political stance and confidence in what he declares. Furthermore, Mosley utilizes imperative sentences in his speech that denote commandment, but also request and invitation to follow his steps and accept his message.

3.1.2 Modality analysis

Table 3. Modal verbs and their repetitions

Type	Modal verbs	Number of repetitions
Certainty	Must, Will	13
Permission Request Politeness	Can, Could, Will, Would, May	5
Ability	Can, Could, Be able to	1
Inability	Can’t, Couldn’t	1
Obligation	Must, Have to, Should	1

Table 3. shows us the character of Oswald Mosley’s speech and how he delivers his message to his audience. As seen above, and in relation to the majority of declarative sentences employed by him, Mosley’s speech is full of confidence as he shows to be highly certain about the message he is expressing. This serves as a mechanism of persuasion since his audience perceives him as someone wise and objective. Moreover, he used modal verbs that implied politeness in the way he addresses his audience, and that helped him to transmit more effectively his message with acceptance. Furthermore, these modal verbs are also employed to politely invite and request the sophisticated audience to agree with him. To conclude, certainty and politeness functioned as mechanisms of persuasion to move and convince Mosley’s listeners.

Table 4. Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns		Number of repetitions
First person	I	16
	We	1
Second person	You	2
Third person	She	0
	He	1
	It	5
	They	5

In regard to Table 4., we can see that the pronoun “I” has a significant presence in Oswald Mosley’s speech. This overuse and reference to himself denote Mosley's positionality of

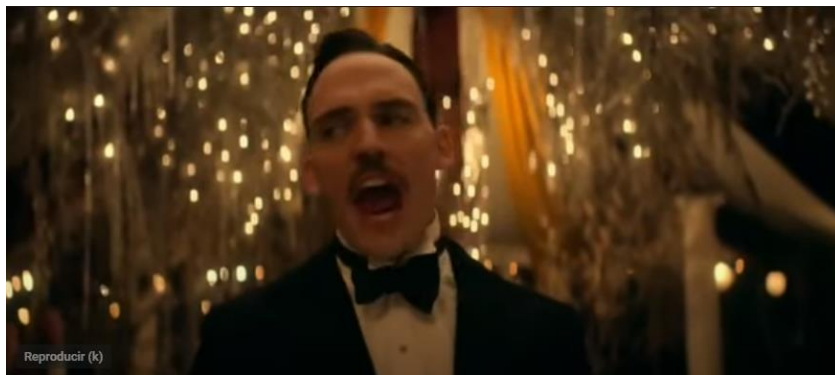
him as a political leader and even as a dictator. This is related to one of the characteristics of fascism, which is the absolute centralization of power and the exclusion of others in governmental matters. Also, the excessive use of the pronoun mentioned above suggests that he is above everyone, thus showing the relation of power between him and his audience.

3.2 Visual semiotic analysis of images from the video



Images 1 & 2. A sophisticated and attentive audience

In images 1 & 2, we can see that Oswald Mosley’s speech takes place on a dais, a platform that can potentially appeal to an audience’s attention and that might implicitly denote superiority and relevance in relation to a speaker giving a speech there. We must also notice that the audience is composed of the host’s family and sophisticated people who are members of high society as well as politicians. Therefore, Mosley is elegantly dressed and he addresses his listeners with politeness in order to persuade them and keep their attention positively.





Images 3 & 4. Oswald Mosley's gestures and enthusiasm

As for images 3 & 4, some remarkable aspects that served as mechanism of persuasion for Oswald Mosley are his gestures and enthusiasm to give his speech. For instance, he energetically moves his hands, looks firmly at his audience, and widely opens his mouth. The use of these physical resources helped him transmit confidence, authority, and conviction. Thus, the audience trusts and agrees with Mosley's words due to the strong stance and lack of hesitation shown by him.



Images 5 & 6. Applauses and sympathy for Oswald Mosley's speech

The majority of the audience, as seen in Images 5 & 6, manifest a clear sympathy for Oswald's speech and they even applaud him more and more as he develops his oral performance. This positive reaction can be due to the elements mentioned above such as the confidence, the enthusiasm, or the politeness expressed by Mosley in his speech. This is also a proof that the mechanisms of persuasion employed in this case were highly effective to the extent of moving an audience that was not expecting a speech.



Images 7 & 8. Rejection towards Oswald Mosley’s speech

On the other hand, Images 7 & 8 show that some members of the audience, specifically the host and his family, reject Oswald Mosley’s speech as they exhibit body posture that reflects displeasure and incredulity. This is due to the implicit hate message contained in Mosley’s speech towards several ethnic and political communities and how this message pertains to the host's family.

4. Critical discourse analysis of utterances from the video

Table 5.

Utterance	Analysis
This has been a wonderful evening. And not only for the music and the dancing. It has also been about us, the people gathered here. English people in the very heart of England.	Mosley starts his speech by addressing the whole audience and by using charming words to refer to them and the party. This allows him to catch the public's attention and gain their confidence and sympathy. Moreover, remarking belonging to the country of England denotes nationalism, exclusivity, and pride, which helps to move his audience as well.
There are no people I would rather be among, no place I would rather be and no time I would rather be alive, because ever since the terrible events of October, when the money markets betrayed us all... I have known that change is coming.	Here, Mosley shows to be empathetic about a common tragedy and expresses belonging to the people of England in order to gain their confidence and acceptance. His message promotes resentment and separation between the English people and other individuals.
In the lives of great nations... there are moments of destiny... which have swept aside small men of convention and discovered men of the moment.	The use of words such as “great nations” and “men of the moment” has a positive influence on most of the audience since they are used to refer to them.
I want to tell you good folk first... that with the dawn of a new decade... I will be setting a new course, setting up a new political movement here in the very heart of England.	The poetic tone in his message in addition to the positive adjectives employed to refer to the audience, helps Mosley inspire his public and position himself as a savior and leader for them.

The men of money, the capitalists in New York, the Jews... the money-power, they... they run an international system in which the infinite mobility of money, its capacity to create financial chaos and panic, can bring down any government that dares for one moment to oppose it.	Once Mosley politely flattered his audience and proved to be of reliance for them, he was able to explicitly name enemies and guilty parties of England's decadence. In this part of his speech, it was easy for him to express his hate speech since he had already inspired his listeners with mechanisms of persuasion such as the use of polite words and his enthusiasm.
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5. Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the mechanisms of persuasion employed by Oswald Mosley and his positionality with regard to his audience during a political speech given in the middle of a sophisticated party. I must remark that this work is based on a popular TV series called 'Peaky Blinders', and therefore, the words and visual elements analyzed are fictitious. Nevertheless, the character addressed for this analysis is a faithful representation of the aforementioned fascist politician, who had a considerable presence during the 30s in the political environment of England. To achieve the objectives of this study, I employed a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach along with Halliday's (1978) systemic functional linguistics. These two approaches helped me to analyze critically and thoroughly the language employed by Mosley and the actual meaning conveyed in his speech. In addition, I carried out a visual semiotic analysis to address some visual elements of the video that contained elements that were worth interpreting for this work. Finally, the findings reveal that Mosley employed a wide range of resources to persuade his audience such as the use of polite words to address his public, remarkable confidence in his speech, the use of request and invitation forms, a clear definition of his beliefs and wishes, a strong and authoritarian positionality expressed with gestures and body movements, and so forth. These mechanisms helped him to introduce and develop his message with his audience despite the hateful and extreme connotations it contained. Hence, critical discourse analysis is useful to identify the real and hidden message of political speech so as to reveal its authentic intention and meaning.

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