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## Unveiling Bias in Tech Giants: a CDA of Frances Haugen's Facebook Whistleblower Speech

Marwah Firas Abdullah Al-Rawe (MA)<sup>1</sup>, Hazim Hakkush Al Dilaimy (PhD)<sup>2</sup>, Muslih Shwayash Ahmed (PhD)<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

This research analyzes the explicit and derogatory language utilized by Frances Haugen, an American former data manager, in her address on the Instagram application influence on teens' mental well-being. This study fills a need in the existing body of critical discourse analysis (CDA) research by specifically examining how abuse, negative expressions, and social power were employed in Haugen's discourse on Instagram. Information was classified following Van-Dijks' (2006) socio cognitive approaches, which employs 10 ideological criteria to reveal the existence of racism, racial, and power prejudice. The investigation explores how language is structured to convey various meanings indicative of power relations in social contexts. The study underscores the CDA role in dissecting elements of hegemony and power, demonstrating how language users manipulate them for effective communication. Abuse arises from the exercise of power by language users, shaping perceptions and ideologies imposed by speakers to assert dominance over addressees. The research suggests that Haugen's speech predominantly involves language aspects that transgress social norms, projecting a superiority and sense of authority over other participants.

**Keywords:** CDA, Facebook, Dominance, Haugen, Social power, Instagram.

### Introduction

CDA (critical discourse analysis) involves a distinctive language form and a specialized examination of words used to convey meaning that may be deemed unconventional within the social community. This study aims to illuminate the language of Haugen, recognized as a whistleblower, revealing expressions considered unusual, taboo, or arrogant. An attempt would be performed to decipher her expressions or words regarding how Instagram could be perceived as beneficial or detrimental to the recipient. The text types encompass written or spoken forms driven by social, political, and economic motives. A fundamental objective is to understand how underlying meanings are construed. This inquiry aims to fill a vacuum in the existing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) literature by examining how CDA could be utilized for analyzing power dynamics and hegemonic structures. It also explores how language users strategically manage these aspects for effective communication. Key questions include:

1. What type of discourse does Haugen employ?
2. What social impacts do these expressions have on individuals?

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<sup>1</sup> Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar, Iraq, Email: [marwa.feras@uoanbar.edu.iq](mailto:marwa.feras@uoanbar.edu.iq)

<sup>2</sup> Department of English, Al-Maarif University College, Iraq, Email: [hazimaldilaimy@uoa.edu.iq](mailto:hazimaldilaimy@uoa.edu.iq)

<sup>3</sup> Department of English, Al-Maarif University College, Iraq, Email: [muslih.shwayash@uoa.edu.iq](mailto:muslih.shwayash@uoa.edu.iq)

### 3. What ideological implications do Facebook apps incorporate?

Various types of data underwent examination and assessment from multiple perspectives to tackle these inquiries. To achieve this, the analytic techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were predominantly utilized to scrutinize the meanings elucidated in the pertinent literature.

## **Theoretical Background**

Several researchers, such as Van Dijk (1995), Wodak, Meymer (1995), and Fairclough (1995), have provided different interpretations of CDA. The definitive definition of CDA, as posited by VanDijk (2001, pp362), is as the following:

“CDA is a discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.... critical discourse analysts take an explicit position and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately challenge social inequality. This is also why CDA may be characterized as a social movement of politically committed discourse analysts.”

According to Meyer and Wodak (1995), CDA involves a thorough inspection of the relation among racial discrimination and texts, ideas of power, and favoritism. It focuses on the way language was employed to resolve these issues. Therefore, people were encouraged to explore the deeper significance of written or spoken communication. Consequently, the CDA aim is to deliver language listener with more insights that might disregarded when just literal words meaning is taken into account.

To elucidate the essential concepts of CDA, Wodak and Faerclough (1995) and Meyer and Wodak (1995) have delineated it in the following manner: They posit that CDA is engaged in the examination of social issues, with discursive relationships being integral to the understanding of power dynamics. The study of society and culture is situated within the realm of discourse. Moreover, they argue that discourse has the capacity to fulfill both historical and ideological roles. Discourse analysis is considered to be both expository and interpretive since it is a reflection of social activity (Van Dijk, 2015). The theoretical foundations of CDA were formulated and advanced by critical linguists in the 1980s, notably by the sociolinguist Norman Fairclough (1995), whose contributions in this domain hold considerable acclaim. Norman Fairclough characterizes CDA as the systematic exploration of often intricate causal relationships between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts and (b) broader social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. CDA scrutinizes how such practices, events, and texts arise from and are ideologically shaped by power relations and struggles, investigating how the opacity of these connections between discourse and society is itself a constituent of acquiring power and hegemony (Fairclough, 1995: 132–133).

People have the ability to analyze ideological factors as they may perceive ideological mechanisms in written or spoken language, as stated by Chilton (2005: 21). Therefore, grasping the principles, functions, and operational dynamics of CDA is not obligatory. Faerclough's concept which an analyst endeavors for uncovering the inherent meaning connections among types of discourse and societal structures contributed to the establishment of CDA. Consequently, it becomes crucial to consider the origin and ideological shaping by the power of a written piece or practice. This pattern is easily noticeable on presidential addresses on politics, often acting as representations of ideological disagreements. Faerclough's viewpoint is in agreement with that of vanDijk, who argues various groupings with varying ideology

interpret politics statements in considerably different manners.

### **Van Dijk's CDA Strategy**

Van Dijk (2001:352; 2003) uses the socio-cognitive paradigm to systematically assess organized discourse, as mentioned by Oteino (2017:23). Oteino seeks to comprehend expression by using the opposition structure and dominance theories. Furthermore, he views the idea of "social dominance" as an institutional type of power that exacerbates inequality on a number of social, cultural, political, ethnic, class, and racial fronts. Van Dijk argues that discourse's cognitive capacity governs the lower level of power by means of mental regulation, which is then used to achieve tangible domination. According to Van Dijk, cognitive control refers to the exercise of knowledge over a person who is being dominated. It also includes how this information is presented, interacted with, or defined.

Based to Van Dijk (1998:131), scholars adopt critical discourse analysis (CDA) due to its relevance in addressing social and political situations. Fairclough (1995: 56) emphasizes that CDA is essential for examining social issues such as power and dominance, in which groups or individuals could influence the thoughts or actions of others. Political rhetoric in certain social contexts may reveal aspects of power and inequality, indicating social discrimination when a powerful entity controls others in society. Most of the work on CDA is on the examination of societal inequalities in relation to different ideologies such as religion, gender, race, economy, politics, and other factors. Political discourse often utilizes language constructs to communicate the notion of power throughout society. According to Meyer and Wodek (2001:6), the language of CDA was not inherently strong; its power derives from the individuals who use it and possess it themselves.

This explains why CDA frequently adopts the perspective of individuals experiencing adversity and primarily investigates the language use of influential people responsible for inequalities and who possess the means and significant opportunity to improve conditions.

### **Key Concepts of CDA**

This study examines key concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as presented in the existing literature. The research is based on the gathered data and focuses on current important discussions around Facebook applications.

### **Dominance and Power**

Access to discourse is influenced by dominance and power relationships. The dominant groups acquire their authority through their exclusive control over communication and discourse (van Dijk, 1993:255). The freedom of language users may vary in their ability to utilize certain discourse genres, styles, or arguments (vanDijk, 1993:256). Participants have different levels of effect in the characteristics of communication, such as the context, the presence of other participants, the ways in which they participate, the overall structure, the order in which people speak, the topics discussed, and the manner in which they are discussed (van Dijk, 1993:256). Various discourse access types demonstrate a correlation between discourse access and social power. The more discourse genres, settings, participants, audience, scope, and text features they actively manage or influence, the more powerful social groups, institutions, or elites are (ibid). This phenomenon is seen among professors, prime ministers, presidents, police officials, judges, party leaders, doctors, and journalists. (van Dijk, 1993:256).

### **Critique**

Critical discourse and critical linguistics analysis (CDA and CL), particularly in the discourse-historical methodology developed by Wodek and Reisigl (Meyer and Wodek, 2001:6), refer to the term “Critique” as a method that allows populations to differentiate among “manipulative and suggestive procedures of persuasion and discursive procedures of convincing argumentation.”

According to Wodek and Meyer (2007:309), “critique” refers to the process of analyzing data while retaining objectivity, considering the social context, openly stating one’s opinion and political position, and promoting self-reflection among researchers in order to better understand its importance (Fairclough, 1995a:774).

CDA investigates the interplay between language and other factors, including vocal expression, textual communication, and social groups. According to Meyer and Wodek (2014:19), there is a proposed functional connection among interpersonal and ideological concepts in scientific literature. Hence, the analysis of criticism should concentrate on the inherent correlation, elucidating how these associations relate to the characteristics of the methods used in persuading.

### **Power and Ideology**

Power is a crucial component of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), since it forms the central focus of analyzing language usage to expose financial, politics, and sociological inequalities. According to Faerclough (1995:1-3), power goes beyond conceptions of persons with imbalanced authority exerting influence in a discursive meeting. Instead, it was seen as exerting control method that was implemented in various ways and communicated via different forms of discourse, varying from person to person.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as outlined by Fairclough (1995: 132–133), surpasses the characterization of a mere analytical approach. Its importance is rooted in recognizing the interconnection between language structure and other vital dimensions of meaning within the social community. These dimensions include:

- a) the manner in which language forges social bonds symbolizing power elements and domination;
- b) the way language functions with an ideological standpoint; and
- c) the revelation of individual and social identity through language.

In summary, the foundational structure of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) comprises several core concepts, incorporating reproduction, ideology, resistance, social order, power, struggle, discrimination, and others.

Van Dijk (1996: 84-85) asserts that individuals and social entities exert analogous forms of power. Dominant groups, responsible for consequential actions, hold sway over various social circumstances. Members of social groups exhibit these power dynamics to varying degrees, wielding authority due to their capacity to oversee diverse media. Furthermore, they can influence others to a certain extent through the use of language, which mitigates the power’s impact and inequality.

Ideology is intricately connected to how individuals perceive behaviors and values, with ideological hegemonies shaping their worldview. The determination of ideology is primarily influenced by power dynamics within a community. An authority’s exercise of power control in a society is intimately connected to ideology. Language in discursive events functions as a channel for expressing views and opinions that are strengthened by the distribution of power.

According to Meyer and Wodak (2001: 6), a strong connection between language and power cannot be separated. The influence exerted by one group is intricately linked to that of another. According to Van Dijk (2006), ideologies are basic ideas that form the basis of the shared social representations of certain social groupings. Discourse practices with social repercussions should include acts of representation influenced by ideology in verbal or written communication interactions (Van Dijk, 2006:120-121).

Ideology essentially relates to three key concepts: society, discourse, and cognition. Cognition pertains to the shared views held by members within a certain social group. Society represents those social groups sharing identical personal beliefs and opinions at a particular juncture. Discourse, a crucial element of ideology, is manifested in both written and spoken versions.

Political knowledge examines the collective political actors' mental images, analyzing different aspects of how political information is processed. The study focuses on the cognitive representations of political situations, events, individuals, and organizations. It specifically examines the organization of political viewpoints, perceptions of politicians, and the development of political choices. These components include stereotypes, affiliation with political groups, public opinion, as well as memory representations and mental processes that are essential for understanding and participating in politics (van Dijk, 2002:207).

Similar to individuals requiring information for generating and interpreting discourse, Members of Parliament (MPs) need extensive and specialized knowledge for effective participation in legislative deliberations. Members of Parliament hold individual beliefs, shared attitudes, and ideas. Despite their political competitors, the facts they share or take as understanding may be regarded as an ideological attitude (van Dijk, 2006:100). Every participant has a common understanding, despite their political or ideological views (van Dijk, 1999, 2006). Parliament, along with other epistemic communities, operates on the assumption of relying on specialized and professional competence (vanDijk, 2006:100). Arguments or problems, when occur, may be addressed via debate using normative or commentary argumentation.

Mandrofa's (2018) investigation emphasizes the importance of the socio-cognitive method in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) while studying information systems (IS) and its relevance in developing theories related to social media. The objective was to formulate theories related to social media, revealing commonalities between the two fields. Notably, CDA differs in its reliance on linguistic methodologies. Although CDA is in line with critical studies in IS and presents linguistic analytical techniques for examining social phenomena, it is interesting to note that scholars in the field of CDA, which considers discourse as a social practice, are not fully utilizing the potential to analyze discourse in the current influential medium that shapes social practice and impacts social processes and issues (Mautner 2005:10).

This research bridges a divide in the discourse discipline by examining hitherto unexplored data and providing an accurate transcript of Haugen's speech, which was given the day following the outage of WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. The study sheds light on social media's impact on manipulating and controlling the masses, particularly adolescents.

## **Methodology**

The study employs Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (hereafter SCA), consisting of three analytical stages: macrostructure, microstructure, and schema (superstructure). The transcripts analyzed in this study pertain to Frances Haugen's speech addressing Instagram's impact

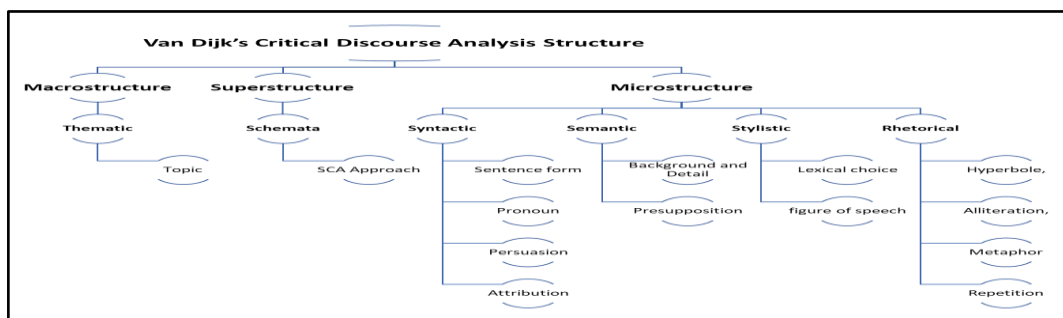
on mental health of teenagers. This speech was delivered before the Senate Committee on Transportation, Science, and Commerce on 5<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2021, during a hearing session of the Sub-Committee on Data Security Product, Safety, and Consumer Protection titled “Protecting Kids Online: Testimony from a Facebook Whistleblower.” The selected speeches were noteworthy because they occurred on October 4, 2021, at 15:39 UTC, coinciding with a global outage of Mapillary, Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, Oculus, and WhatsApp, lasting 6 to 7 hours. Importantly, this outage occurred before Facebook Inc rebranded itself as “Metaverse.” The disruption also impacted the ability of users attempting to access third-party sites via “Log in with Facebook.” Additionally, this speech unveils various plans and policies that Haugen intended to pursue within the Senate, providing insights into her considerations both after and before the outage. The speech is a verbatim transcription extracted from the video recording of Haugen’s evidence throughout the hearing session.

The structural levels discussed here represent components within the Critical Discourse Analysis sociocognitive approach. Microstructure encompasses verbal interaction, language use, and communication within the social context. Conversely, the macrostructure of analysis includes aspects such as dominance, inequality, and power between different societies.

Schema, or superstructure, comprises the following components:

- Emotional attachment
- Construction of enemy images
- Presentation of mitigating evidence
- Construction of arguments depicting past miseries
- Glorification
- Implementation of mind control
- Formation of hostile perceptions and the rhetorical art of speaking

The elements mentioned above represent facets of the socio-cognitive approach (SCA). However, the analyzed speech does not encompass every element of the SCA; only those identified will be emphasized in the discussion. The SCA’s three-tier evaluation performed to the speech are demonstrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** CDA Structure of Van Dijk’s.

## Result and Discussion

### 1. Macrostructure

Outcomes have been ascribed to primary themes addressed in the speech. Each component at the two levels is explicated and depicted in relation to the speech’s focus and subject matter. The first topic is to persuade Americans of their right to privacy protection. Later segments of

the speech convey the reconstruction of the confidence and reliability of the American citizen while being vigilant of adversaries. For instance, Haugens’ expressions:

“I joined Facebook because I think Facebook has the potential to bring out the best in us. But I am here today because I believe that Facebook’s products harm children, stoke division, and weaken our democracy. The company’s leadership knows how to make Facebook and Instagram safer but won’t make the necessary changes because they have put their astronomical profits before people.”

Throughout emotional phase, Haugen issued warnings regarding the adverse of Facebook effects and the perils associated with unpredictable algorithms susceptible to interference from “lawless” third-party hackers. Notably absent from her discourse was any mention of national emergency power. Haugen’s speech conveyed a threat in which she highlighted the temporary removal of Facebook from the Internet for over five hours, during which it did not contribute to deepening divides, destabilizing democracies, or negatively impacting the self-esteem of young girls and women. She emphasized the impact on small businesses and the absence of celebratory moments for new babies worldwide. She contended that this outage was not a result of certain social media users’ sentiments but rather Facebook’s pursuit of relentless growth at the expense of safety, transforming into an almost trillion-dollar company.

Within the schema of the discourse, Haugen sought to depict numerous adversaries that recipients should exercise caution against. These adversaries were characterized as social media platforms that, when used responsibly, connect people without jeopardizing democracy, endangering children, or inciting ethnic violence globally. Haugen also addressed Facebook’s profit-driven motives, emphasizing its pursuit of financial gains at any cost. The final stage of the schema involved Haugen glorifying America. During this stage, she mentally countered the negative images associated with the perceived enemy. In glorifying Facebook Company (now Metaverse) for Americans, Haugen stressed the importance of American residents being cognizant of certain aspects, a point significantly emphasized in the speech. Positive adjectives such as “impact,” “great,” and “power” were employed to describe Facebook’s strength. The speech incorporated elements of mitigating evidence, mind control, emotional attachment, the generation of opponent images, glorification, and rhetorical speaking art. This discourse revealed Haugen’s use of constructing enemy images to encourage American officials and citizens to avert a potentially bleak future for teenagers and women.

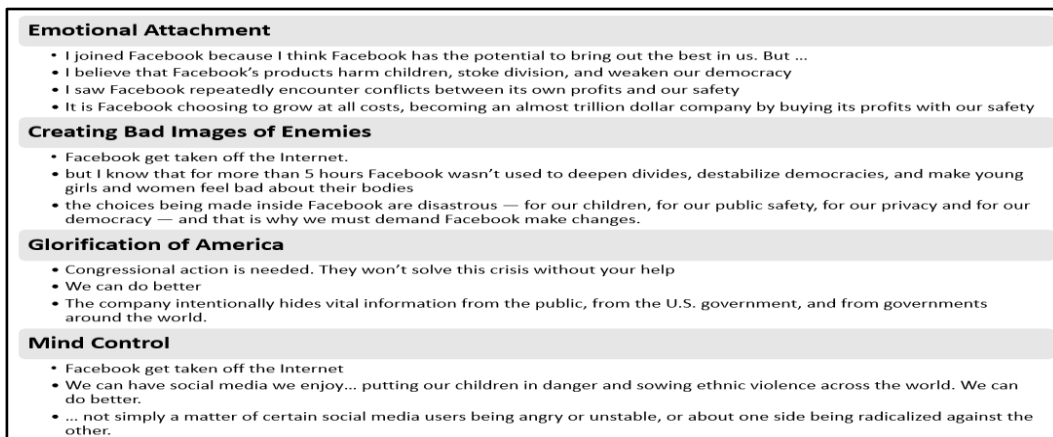


Figure 2: Haugen’s Speech Schema.

## Conclusion

The study's objective is to demonstrate how Haugen's speech strategically employs the core elements of SCA to unveil linguistic and semantic features, effectively manipulating language for persuasive and emotive impact on the audience. This pattern is discernible across all issues addressed by Haugen. The initial topic is meticulously crafted to sway Americans into recognizing their right to safeguard their privacy. The subsequent theme revolves around reinstating trust among American citizens and raising awareness about potential adversaries. The microstructure analysis unveils Haugen's adept use of vivid imagery to evoke emotional connections with the audience. Repetition plays a significant role in highlighting the delayed response of the United States of America. Haugen tactfully oscillates between referencing "Facebook" and "the company" when discussing taking action, utilizing both logical arguments and emotional appeal to capture the audience's concentration and convince them to immerse themselves in her discourse. Positive self-portrayal is consistently woven into each argument. However, it is evident that Haugen tends to present a pessimistic portrayal of another group or individuals before transitioning to her positive depiction, skillfully employing third-person pronouns to achieve this rhetorical effect.

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