

Introduction

The Rationale Behind a Linguistic Analysis of Power Dynamics in NATO Military Discourse

Since the dawn of modern history, maintaining a power balance as an underlying condition for international order has been one of the most constantly pursued endeavors of humanity. Starting with the ancient Trojan War and ending with the contemporary “war on terror”, leaders all over the world, in isolation or alliance, have struggled to uphold power and play a determining role in keeping a power balance that would serve national and global interests and secure international peace and prosperity. The interpretation of international relations through the theory of balance of power involves a high degree of abstraction, reified into the visual representation of Powers, i.e., states holding the status of, as the weights in a pair of scales.

Regardless of the investigative entry point (whether it is social, cognitive, historical, or linguistic), any discussion about power must assume the existence of an equilibrium of forces; nonetheless, the balance of power has never been rigid nor static. The inherent instability of the international power balance, stemming from consistent social changes, generates a dynamic configuration of the relations between the agents involved in this mechanism. The resulting power dynamics have traditionally been explained in terms of structures, dimensions, patterns, or frameworks of power. But while patterns of power substantiate strategy, the concept of power balance leads to considerations of military potential, diplomatic initiative, and economic might.

Against a continuously changing environment, one feature that is constant throughout recorded history is the formation of alliances, tasked with the well-defined role of pursuing goals that individual states cannot achieve on their own. Maintaining international order and keeping a global power balance while securing peace and stability is one endeavor traditionally undertaken by alliances. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) makes no exception.

The challenges that NATO (in its dimension as community of powers) has faced throughout its evolution have reshaped the concept of “balance

of power” and replaced it with the more appropriate concept of “power dynamics”, so as to illustrate the continuous tendency to slide away from the notion of an even distribution of power and rather express the endless shifting and regrouping of power within the Alliance. As a consequence, the “balance of power” has become a respectable and indeed indispensable part of the diplomatic lexicon, but the real object of scientific contemplation should be the concept of “power dynamics”.

Although language is not power, it encodes power. Power is embedded in the ideological workings of language, and ideology is invested at all levels of language. When exploring language in the context of NATO discourse – defined here as official policies and positions assumed in text and talk at the level of the Alliance’s different planning groups, councils, and committees – the investigation starts from the premise that the discussions and debates that create official documents occur against a background where forces in agreement or opposition generate meaning negotiations between social actors invested with power, conventionally related to topics pertaining to military strategies and politics and manifested away from the public view. Nevertheless, the resulting policies are reified in open, official documents, which are invested with the role of making sense of the world and constructing social actions in relation to everyday realities. As a result, the discourse analysis includes historical, social, cognitive, and linguistic explorations of texts, interactions, and practices at local, institutional, and societal level.

The diverse excursions into the language that illustrates the dynamics of power in NATO discourse are informed by a discourse analytical approach founded in the theory and method of critical discourse analysis as applied to the field of International Relations. The methodology lays strong emphasis on language and how the inherited structures of language frame the discourse of power in military communication. Both the theoretical and analytical core of the paper pivot on the importance of language and discourse for the social construction of the ideology of power.

Every so often, linguists and analysts from all fields have given attention to what is being decided to the detriment of analyzing how the decisions are made and why there is opposition or consensus. The manner and the reason for decision-making have more to do with framing than with anything else. The most significant part of framing is the relationship between words and actions, with a strong emphasis on the power of

language to galvanize military and political will and reify it into action. While this investigation tries to fill the existing gap between the “what” and the “how”, I cannot claim it completely fills it. Nowhere is there a comprehensive account of how the balance of power operates, and perhaps none can be constructed, given the ever flexible and eluding character of power. However, the current research aims to discover a pattern in power dynamics at the NATO level and to confirm this pattern. To do so, the practical chapter of the thesis conducts a critical analysis of the language of power used in typical NATO discourse.

Understanding the fact that the balance of power is never rigid, uniform, and unvaried, but rather instable and insecure, generates the following cogent deduction: the power dynamics resulting from the instability are actually generated by the interactions that take place between the weights of the balance. Taking the rationale even further in the context of current investigations of power dynamics in NATO, the conclusion is that the dynamics of power manifest in a multi-layered framework. First of all, there is a level of opposition that characterizes the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, then between NATO and the Warsaw Pact states, and, after the end of the Cold War, between NATO and Russia, as well as between NATO and other state or non-state actors on the international scene. It has been framed as external bipolar balance, typified by a specific pattern of power dynamics, primarily substantiated by ideological opposition. Secondly, there is opposition at the level of NATO as an organization, generated by the conceptual polarization between member states in terms of doctrine and strategic concepts. This type of relation has been defined in terms of an internal multipolar balance framework, anchored on the background of NATO’s ideological evolution and analyzed from the perspective of the challenges brought to the American leadership in NATO (by the so-called medium powers within the Alliance: the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) and of the dynamics of the relations between these powers.

The research question that draws all these premises together is framed as follows.

How is power dynamics operationalized through language in NATO discourse?

The practical section of the book, which documents a critical analysis of the selected NATO discourse samples, brings together the results of

an in-depth description, interpretation and explanation of the contexts that foster the discursive manifestation of power and the linguistic tools used to construct them.

Extensive research conducted during my Fulbright grant at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, has generated an in-depth analysis of the ideological evolution of NATO. Although this investigation has not been the principal aim of the paper, it has offered a detailed perspective and understanding of how power dynamics function within and outside the organization. Furthermore, such an approach has proven to be extremely helpful in locating the patterns of power most prevalent in NATO military discourse. Accordingly, of the varieties of power typically deployed in discourse, three emergent types have been selected, on which to base the ideological-driven analysis: adversarial, integrative, and predominant power.

Undoubtedly, the background elements that inform the analysis are very complex and diverse. The approach undertaken by this paper relies on various concepts of power, defined at the intersection of language and ideology; it pivots on a multi-layered historical, social, cognitive, and political structure which is constructed based on the dynamics between the actors both within and outside NATO; it investigates language as the primary tool of operationalization of power and the dynamics associated with it. Given the complexity of the framework in which power dynamics are examined, the main research question has been detailed into three secondary research questions:

1. What kind of power rhetoric is employed to ensure cooperation both within the Alliance and with external actors?
2. How is internal and external opposition materialized in NATO military discourse?
3. What kind of discursive patterns of power does the United States use in order to assert its (pre)dominant role in NATO?

In order to address these research questions, three hypotheses that frame the notion of power and thematize the linguistic investigation have been formulated:

1. The rhetoric of integrative power has kept the Alliance coherent and cohesive under the umbrella of common values, granting the success of NATO's enduring role in international security. The validity of

this assertion has been explored by looking at discourse strands of integrative power, in the framework of external bipolar relations and of NATO's internal structure.

2. NATO is the most powerful alliance in history and, in addition to action, it has fought opposition by using language. This hypothesis has been evaluated through an analysis of discursive manifestations of adversarial power relations in both the external bipolar balance and the internal multipolar balance frameworks.
3. When the internal power balance tilts, it does so in favor of the United States, in virtue of its predominance in NATO. The hypothesis that the United States has a predominant role in NATO rests on the discursive materialization of three types of power: referent, expert and legitimate.

The link between language and power provides the point of departure for the elaboration of a systemic method of interpretation. The methodology used in this paper relies heavily on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a qualitative method aimed at analyzing the causes and effects of different social and political issues, by offering a detailed account of the relationships that exist between text, talk, society, power and ultimately ideology. Military policies, as the main object of investigation, can be better understood by analyzing the various issues of a community, as well as the language and texts that express them.

A flexible paradigm of analysis, CDA involves a shift of perspective. Language is no longer seen as an abstract construct but becomes an instrument that carries the meaning of what is being said under specific historical, social and political conditions. This particular methodology has been selected with the aim of systematically exploring interconnections between discursive practices, events and texts, and wider social organizational structures, the relations within and outside them and the processes associated with them. Further investigation will also reveal how such practices, events and texts are ideologically molded by relations of power and power dynamics. In addition to describing the relationship between texts, interactions, and social practices, CDA is used here to understand the structure of discourse practices and then combine description and interpretation in order to explain why and how power dynamics and the discourses associated with them are constituted and manifested the way they are. Starting from the premise that discourse is

socially constructed as well as socially conditioned, the main task of the present paper becomes one of understanding and revealing the social dynamics that are generated by mainstream ideology and power relations and propagated through the use of written texts.

In order to offer a more comprehensive account of how power dynamics are represented in NATO discourse, a quantitative research has also been conducted, aimed at validating the qualitative analysis and supplementing it with statistically reliable and generalizable results. Approached from a statistical entry point, the main research question generated a fourth secondary interrogation:

1. How are the concepts of integrative and adversarial power linguistically operationalized in NATO discourse between 1949 and 2018?

The theory that informs this supplementary investigation produced a fourth work hypothesis:

1. The operationalization of the concepts of integrative and adversarial power has suffered discursive modifications visible in NATO documents produced during the Cold War and in the years after the end of the Cold War.

The two periods investigated with the help of quantitative analysis tools cover 184 official texts produced between 1949 and 1990, and 1991 and 2018, respectively, with specific emphasis on the summit and ministerial meetings final communiqués which are imbued with discursive conceptualizations of integrative and adversarial power. The end of the Cold War was chosen as a reference point given its importance for the social and political changes it propagated. With the USSR fading away from the international scene, the Warsaw Pact dissolved and the Berlin Wall falling, the configuration of the security environment at the beginning of the 1990s was typified by radical modifications that bore a significant impact on the manner in which the Alliance positioned itself on the world map. Without waiving its core tasks and values, NATO had to adapt and reinvent in order to successfully cope with the new challenges occasioned by the shifting of the power balance in Europe and beyond. The quantitative analysis sets out to examine how these strategic changes impacted the manner in which the concept of power was reified in discourses by locating language variations, if any, at the level of the NATO texts produced before and after 1990.

The methodology used for the quantitative analysis stems from the investigative framework proposed by ReaderBench and is based on a corpus-assisted discourse analysis that follows a number of analytical steps and depends on the automated application of specific indices.

The results of the quantitative research methodology enrich the discussion of the results yielded by the qualitative analysis. The validation of the quantitative analysis hypothesis is a complementary indication of the fact that not only is NATO discourse a legitimate locus for the manifestation of power dynamics, but that noteworthy revisions of the discourse have also been operated, illustrated through diverse linguistic operationalizations of power, a notion that has suffered conceptual amendments during NATO's ideological evolution.

While well-aware of the fact that no method, investigation, or conclusion will provide an absolute answer to a specific issue or depict an exhaustive image of the object under scrutiny, the rationale behind this exploratory journey is to provide a better understanding of the manner in which language can become a tool for ideological expression and of how discourses can be tailored to become more efficient, straightforward, and transparent instruments that shape social reality.

By and large, the book sets out to examine the problem of power as a construct in communicative theories and the way in which it relates to and is constituted by NATO discourse. By way of an extended example, it investigates the way in which the dynamics of types of power (integrative, adversarial, and predominant) impact social, political, and military relationships between the members of the North Atlantic Organization and between the Alliance and external actors.