

# Critical Discourse Analysis of Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1967 Speech

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**Abstract** This paper aims to investigate Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1967 stepping down speech using Fairclough's [1] model of critical discourse analysis. The paper focuses on the dimension of text, which contains lexical items, rhetorical devices, and metaphors. The analysis shows how Abdel Nasser employs all of these linguistic tools to his favor and shows a thematic use of the lexical items. Also, the analysis exhibits the use of rhetorical devices such as euphemism, which serves as a means of mitigating the intensity of the situation. Other rhetorical devices include dysphemism, digression, and rhetorical questions. Metaphors are used to describe the defeat, to glorify the revolution, or to describe the sacrifices of the fallen soldiers on the battlefield. This study is limited to the dimension of text; therefore, recommendations are due for further analysis that includes all the dimensions of Fairclough's [1] model.

**Keywords:** *critical discourse analysis, text, lexical items, rhetoric, and metaphors*

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## 1. Introduction

To present a comprehensible analysis of Abdel Nasser's speech, it is essential to have a closer look into the audience who has received it. A great way to do so is by looking at the society and the political waves that spread at the time of the war and after the defeat, or what Abdel Nasser has promoted as 'al-Naksa'. Dr. Sadik Jalal al-Azm [2] introduces in his book *Self-Criticism After the Defeat* a subjective image of the Arab nation and the mainstream notions that spread before and during the war. Al-Azm claims that prior to declaring the war, the public masses of Arab countries have taken a stand pro-war, and have supported Abdel Nasser as the new hero that will lead Arabs into victory. He mentions the glorification and aggrandizement of Abdel Nasser as a leader, and Egypt as an invincible military force, and argues that this exaggeration is an irreverence of the enemy's strength and is, therefore, one of the reasons that lead to defeat. On that matter, Al-Azm refers to what Mohammed Hasanin Haikal has written back on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1967 -a few days prior to declaring war- in Al-Ahram newspaper. Haikal states that whatever happens, and without anticipation, Israel is about to collapse from the inside and the outside ([2], para. 2-3).

With this in mind, and with the image of the audience that has been emotionally charged with dreams of pan-Arabism, it is hard to imagine the state of mind and heart that these people have gone through when they have had to face the defeat. Al-Azm mentions the state of denial

that overshadows all Arab countries after the defeat, and documents a specific incidence with the Lebanese journalist Mohsen Ibrahim, in Al-Hureyya magazine back on June 14<sup>th</sup> 1967, where he denies the defeat by a headline that says "kallā lam yuḥṭī" 'abdel Nasser w lam yuhzam al-'rab", which is roughly translated to: "No, Abdel Nasser did not make a mistake, and the Arab did not lose" ([2], forward). Another case of this denial is what Mohammed Saeed Tayeb -a Saudi activist- remembers about the war, he mentions that between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of June, western radio stations have been talking about the defeat, while Sawt Al-Arab (Egyptian radio station) talks about the victory [3].

Moreover, the geographical face of the Arab countries changes with this defeat, and Israel succeeds to occupy Sinai Peninsula, The Golan Heights, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and Gaza strip [3]. Still, with all the disappointment, denial, and anger, Abdel Nasser manages to lure the public out to the streets to cheer him on and encourage him to stay in his position as a president of Egypt and a leader to the Arabs. He manages to do that with his speech and his linguistic intuition.

## 2. Significance of the Study

The incredible response to Abdel Nasser's speech is what makes this discourse critical and of importance. Abdel Nasser is completely responsible for the 1967's defeat and is also responsible for losing Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. However, people have flooded into the streets asking him to retreat from

stepping down after he gives his speech. The speech and Abdel Nasser's deceiving charisma are essential factors in the construction of the audience's reaction. This agrees with Diong's [4] views on the importance of the rhetorical devices that Abdel Nasser uses. Moreover, Diong acknowledges the importance of Sawt Al-Arab (the radio station) in endorsing Abdel Nasser's ideologies before, during, and after 1967. Despite the thorough analysis, Diong does not analyze the lexical items of this discourse, which this paper attempts to do.

Al-Ahmad [5] describes the language Abdel Nasser uses and explains the shift between sympathy and aggression in all of his speeches. This is also applicable to this speech, in which Abdel Nasser talks about the enemy in an aggressive and strong language. He uses a language that can be described as propitiated when he talks about himself and his role in the war. Equally of importance is Abdel Latif's [6] views in his linguistic analysis of Abdel Nasser's speech in which he indicates the reason behind the response it receives. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this paper is the first to use Fairclough's [1] model of critical discourse analysis to analyze Abdel Nasser's speech.

### 3. Research Objectives

This research aims to investigate Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1967 stepping down speech using Fairclough's [1] model of critical discourse analysis. The focus of the paper will be on the text level, including the analysis of lexical items, rhetorical devices, and metaphors.

### 4. Research Questions

1. What is the nature of the lexical items used in the speech?
2. Which rhetorical devices does Abdel Nasser use in his speech?
3. In which contexts have metaphors been used in the speech?

### 5. Review of Literature

#### 5.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough [7] sets primary characteristics of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to establish the dimensions in which CDA operates. First, CDA is not just an analysis of a text or a discourse, it is the practice of linking the analysis to social processes. Second, it needs to be a systematic analysis, not just a commentary. Last but not least, CDA "is not just descriptive, it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them" (11). Withdrawing from that, Gee [8] explains the two tasks of any discourse analysis, one examines meaning and the other one examines situated meaning. The first one as Gee puts it, is what he calls utterance-type meaning task, which studies the links between form (words, phrases,

morphemes, and syntactic structure) and function which is the meaning or the communicative purpose (24). The other task is utterance-token meaning, which is concerned with the link between form and meaning in the framework of situation. Simply put, in utterance-token meaning studies analysis, the analyst needs to discover the situations and contexts surrounding the utterance in order to decode the actual meaning. Gee emphasizes the importance of differentiating between these two tasks, to conduct a valid analysis.

Fairclough [1] creates a model of discourse analysis that depends on three basic dimensions of analysis; text, discursive practice, and social practice. Fairclough insists on the absence of a clear division between these three dimensions, because of the overlapping nature of all three features. Text as an analytical tool focuses on the linguistic features of any discourse and urges to describe and analyze lexical items, rhetorical devices, and metaphors before delving into the other two dimensions. The second dimension focuses on the shared knowledge between the producer of the discourse and the audience receiving it. To take a close look into the discursive practice of the discourse, we look at the shared knowledge, intertextuality, and the production of the discourse in question and how the audience receives and comprehends it. The third dimension is the social practice, which looks into the several social statuses in a society, the social identities, ideologies, hegemony, and the social relationship between the producer of the discourse and the audience (Fairclough [1], 62-100).

#### 5.2. Political Discourse

Wilson [9] differentiates between two types of political discourse. The first one focuses on political discourse that has an authentic association to politics, and the second type -which he withdraws from Shapiro [10]- that claims all discourse as political regardless of its actual relation to political content or context. Wilson suggests that this confusion stems from the fact that the conditions upon which any discourse is considered political are very common in most of the discourses; these conditions involve power, control, conflict, or dominance. However, this broad definition of political discourse is not practical in the field of linguistics, which is why Wilson resorts to limiting the definition of political discourse into formal and informal political context and political actors, i.e. "politicians, political institutions, governments, political media, and political supporters operating in political environments to achieve political goals" (398).

Moreover, Wilson refers to Orwell's [11] remarks on political discourse, and to the way politicians formulate language to deliver more peaceful and acceptable messages. For instance, he refers to the use of 'pacification' instead of 'invasion', which politicians use to mask the horrors and hostilities of invasions. The issue that presents itself here is the manipulation of language that blinds the masses to the negativity that might surround them, which is the case in every political statement or speech, and Abdel Nasser's speeches are no exception.

Wilson acknowledges the essential ties between linguistics and socio-politics and highlights the efforts in combining both in any political discourse analysis. He insists to focus on the language as the main tool of analysis, and still manages to emphasize the importance of sociopolitical analysis claiming the language-based analysis do not consider answering 'why'; why does this politician arrange his sentences in this manner, or what formulates his word choices? and so on.

### 5.3. Previous Studies

Bajri and Othman [12] conduct a comparative critical discourse analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech 'I have a Dream' and Malcolm X's speech 'A Message to the Grassroots'. They use Fairclough's 3D model to deconstruct both discourses into their basic features, and divide the analysis into three major headlines; text, discursive practice, and social practice. Under each headline, a few other sublines talking specifically about certain features that fall under the headlines. For example, headline: text, subline: lexical items, rhetorical devices, and metaphors. Bajri and Othman highlight the importance of the devices in both speeches -especially rhetorical-, and conclude on the importance of style in changing societies and perspectives, and point to the massive change that these discourses have inflicted.

Equally as important is the work of Lahlali [13], in which he touches on pan-Arabism in Abdel Nasser's speeches. According to Lahlali, Abdel Nasser uses words like 'Arab unity' and 'Arab values' to promote for pan-Arabism in order to gain support for his image as a leader of the Arab nation. Lahlali suggests that with his charisma and mastery of the Arabic language, Abdel Nasser manages to make the audience across Arab countries feel like one family. This mirrors what Diong [4] notices of Abdel Nasser's rhetoric techniques, whereby she asserts the importance of Abdel Nasser's word choices in the broadcasting of his propaganda and ideology. She states that the word choices "[are] made specifically to target the West and to spread anti-colonial sentiments amongst those who heard his speeches" (4). Diong withdraws from Al-Ahmed's [5] study that discusses Abdel Nasser's use of language, in which Al-Ahmad states that his language has had waves of sympathy and aggression.

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1. Theoretical Framework

This paper utilizes Fairclough's [1] model of critical discourse analysis to investigate Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1967 speech.

### 6.2. Data Collection

The paper will analyze Gamal Abdel Nasser's stepping down speech, which has been delivered on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1967 through Sawt Al-Arab radio station from his office in Kubbah palace in Cairo. The text has been retrieved from

an online source dedicated to all of Abdel Nasser's speeches.

### 6.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, application and discussion section will focus on the first dimension of Fairclough's [1] 3D model, which is text. Under text umbrella falls three subcategories; lexical items, rhetorical devices, and metaphors.

## 7. Application and Discussion

### 7.1. Text

#### 7.1.1. Lexical Items

Linguistic etiquette -according to Allan and Burridge [14]- is used in implicit and indirect discourse and is found in our everyday speech. It includes "euphemism, swearing, polite talk, slang and political correctness", and it gives an indication of the speaker's attitude and intentions. Furthermore, linguistic etiquette -specifically talking about euphemism here- is a way of leveling the message, and delivering by masking the negativity in it [14].

Euphemism occurs repeatedly in Abdel Nasser's stepping down speech. He mentions the word 'al-naksa' which is translated to 'the setback' four times, serving as a substitute for the word 'defeat'. This word, in particular, is what frees Abdel Nasser from any consequences following his action that lead to the war and to losing the war.

Table 1. Recurrent positive lexical items

Arabic Word	Translation
الإخوة	brothers
الأمة - القومية العربية - العربي	Nation - Pan-Arabism - Arab
نجلس معًا - تعودنا معًا	use to (together) - sit together
- قلوب مفتوحة - للحق والأمانة تنصراح بالحقائق	Open hearts - Confess the truth - For the sake of truth and honesty
الطريق السليم - طريق النصر	righteous road - victory road
بساله - بأسل - بأسلة	valiant - valor
الشرف - الرجولة - العزة - التصميم - الإصرار	Honor - masculinity - pride - determination - willpower
الثورة - الثوار	revolution - revolutionaries
وحدة - موحدة - تماسك	unity - united - solidarity

As shown in Table 1, Abdel Nasser's speech is thematic; words reoccur in different synonyms and different stems from the same root. The main themes that appear in the speech are as follows:

1- Brotherhood: This theme is assembled in the word 'brothers' reoccurs many times in the speech to spread a feeling of intimacy and closeness among the audience.

2- Nationalism: As previously mentioned in the literature review, Pan-Arabism and the ideology of the Arab nation is heavily pushed in all of Abdel Nasser's speeches. In fact, Abdel Nasser himself mentions this ideology inflection in this very particular speech, wherein

he states that the opposing forces of pan-Arabism talk about it as if it is Abdel Nasser's own empire -which he denies.

3- Togetherness and Honesty: Again, this speech is loaded with intimate words that Abdel Nasser tucks in, to draw a friendly, warm, and informal image. He uses his words to paint an image of himself and the public sitting 'together' and talking 'together', and getting accustomed to being honest 'together'. He talks about 'open hearts' and 'professing the truth', which help him create an atmosphere of trust and closeness among his audience.

4- Righteousness: As a person who is responsible for the upsetting defeat, Abdel Nasser insists that his path is the right path, and his choice is the right choice. He mentions 'victory' and 'righteous road' as if the defeat is a natural catastrophe that happens despite all forces. Which is what Al-Azm [2] builds his argument around. Al-Azm claims that when Abdel Nasser uses the word of 'al-naksa' instead of defeat, he means to strip himself of any responsibility and to throw this defeat on the worlds' shoulders ([2], forward)

5- Courage and Arab values: Abdel Nasser mentions a few traits that all Arabs value, such as 'courage', 'honor', 'pride', and 'manliness'. These are a few traits that are deeply rooted in the psychology and history of Arabs. Abdel Nasser emphasizes on these word choices to be connect more with his audience; Arabs all over the world.

8- Revolution: 'Revolution' is Abdel Nasser's background and validation. It is how he has come into power, and it is how he gains authority, so it is not strange that he mentions it for validity in almost all of his speeches. In this discourse, Abdel Nasser mentions 'revolution' in the context of achievements. He advertises for himself through the accomplishments of the revolution. He states that the revolution -represented in his own persona- has evacuated colonialism, brought independence to Egypt, defined Egypt's Arabic character, retrieved the Suez channel, built the High Dam, and used petroleum resources. This is a short version of the long list that Abdel Nasser mentions in his speech as achievements of the revolution. Moreover, he asserts in every other sentence that these achievements have come after a long time of waiting. Abdel Nasser, being a communist, is proud in his speech that he has brought communism into Egypt and established its grounds.

9- Unity: Assertion on unity -'Arabs unity' and 'Egyptians unity' - is another recurrent theme in the speech. In which Abdel Nasser manages to include all Arabs when the context revolves around the nation and manages to include all spectrums of society when the context revolves around Egypt.

### 7.1.2. Rhetorical Devices

The first rhetorical device in this discourse is 'euphemism' as mentioned in the previous section. On that matter, Abdel Latif [6] comments that the use of the word 'al-naksa' as an alternative for defeat comes of important significance. This is because Abdel Nasser and the while Egyptian media devices have promoted victory before and during the war, and the use of any words that indicate loss will harm his image (152). Abdel Latif mentions another rhetoric device in the speech, which is

'dysphemism'. Examples for that is when Abdel Nasser uses the word 'aggression' instead of words like 'invasion', 'occupation', and 'war' to further emphasize the injustice and vices of the enemy (154).

**Table 2. Examples of Euphemism:**

Euphemism	Instead of	Euphemism	Instead of
Times of ordeal	defeat	I'm ready to take responsibility	I am responsible
Hard situation	defeat	Stepdown	Retire
Sacrifices and setbacks	defeat	crisis	defeat

**Table 3. Examples of Dysphemism:**

Dysphemism	Dysphemism
Aggression's strike	Conspiracy
Colonial collusion	Ugliness of global control forces
Covers itself with vileness and malice	Anti-Arabs forces

Another rhetorical device is 'digression', which is heavily used in the discourse at hand. According to Shahatah [15], 'digression' is of important significance in Arabic rhetoric because it is used by highly fluent people, and it is used as a sudden and surprising element. This style stimulates the receiver and charges his senses into paying closer attention to what is being said (3119). The following table contains a few examples of this rhetorical device.

**Table 4. Examples of Digression**

Digression
"We got accustomed -in times of victory and in times of ordeal, in good times and bad times- to sit together".
"I trust that we can – in no time – overcome our difficult situation".
"The Jordanian army fought a valiant battle with the leadership of King Hussain who – for truth and honesty's sake – took an excellent stand".
"but the conspiracy -and this needs to be said with courage – was bigger and stronger".
"I say with honesty – and regardless of any previous factors I might have built my attitude on – that I am ready to take full Responsibility".

Rhetorical questions are another style that Abdel Nasser uses in his speech. A rhetorical question, according to Harris [16] is a question that does not need answering, because the answer is self-evident, and it is usually implied in the question itself (171). An example of this is Abdel Nasser's question: "Does this mean that we have no responsibility for the consequences of this setback?", in which the answer is implied in the question so he does not need to assert on it.

### 7.1.3. Metaphors

Abdel Nasser's speech does not carry a lot of metaphors, perhaps for the urgency of the matter, and the hardships that accompany the topic. However, it is not totally empty of metaphors, and the first metaphor is 'no matter how dim the light is', which comes in the context where Abdel Nasser talks about the defeat. The other metaphors serve as eloquent style employed to tackle emotions like the metaphors that talks about the achievements of the revolution. For example, 'an individual is a tool in the

hands of popular will', and the High Dam was built to spread fertile greenery over the desert'. He also uses metaphors to talk about the fallen soldiers, e.g. 'glorious tournaments written by officers and soldiers of our armed forces with their blood', and these tournaments 'will remain a torch of light intact in our history', along with: soldiers 'defended the grains of sand in the desert to the last drop of their blood'.

## 8. Conclusion

The analysis shows the linguistic tools that Abdel Nasser uses in his speech on the text level. The nature of the lexical items he uses can be distributed into themes; brotherhood, nationalism -to assert on Pan-Arabism-, togetherness, and honesty - a tool to gain sympathetic reactions-, righteousness -to endorse his image as a leader-, courage and Arab values -to relate to all the masses in Arab countries using their values and identity-, revolution, and unity. The analysis also focuses on rhetorical devices and finds the main devices Abdel Nasser uses, such as euphemism, dysphemism, digression, and rhetorical questions. Some of these are used to mitigate the intensity of the defeat or magnify the enemy's responsibilities for what has happened, and the other devices are used to strengthen the speech. Regarding metaphors, the speech is not heavily loaded, but it contains some metaphors that serve as a tool to tackle emotions like the metaphors that talk about the achievements of the revolution. Other metaphors are used to describe the sacrifices and heroism of the fallen soldiers on the battlefield. All of these linguistic tools are of essence to Abdel Nasser to turn the tables in his favor. These tools are a part of the reasons why people have flooded into the streets to cheer for him despite his failure and despite the aftermath of this defeat. With that in mind, this analysis although thorough is not complete yet, since it does not cover the other dimensions of Fairclough's [1] model, which are discursive and social practices. This limitation is due to the lack of time, but further study will be conducted to cover the rest of the dimensions.

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