

LANGUAGE, POWER, AND IDENTITY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S 2025 MAYOR-ELECT VICTORY SPEECH USING FAIRCLOUGH'S THREE DIMENSIONAL MODEL

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the ways in which identity and political power are constructed in Zohran Mamdani's 2025 Mayor-Elect Victory Speech through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), by employing Fairclough Three Dimensional Model. This research investigates the relationship between language, power, and ideology by analyzing the victory speech at three levels which are textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The data consists of officially delivered speech by Zohran Mamdani and this speech serves as a primary data. This speech is analyzed first at textual level by using different linguistic features namely use of pronouns, lexical choices, imperatives narratives, evaluative language and rhetorical devices to reveal the construction of power relations and political identity. The results indicate that Zohran Mamdani uses different rhetoric, evaluative, inclusive, and persuasive discourse strategies and he uses such language to represent both groups as working class and marginalized population. The findings also show that the different socio-political issues particularly economic inequality, housing issues, immigrant rights and empowerment are highlighted to show existing social hierarchies. At third level which is discursive practice, the speech engages the audience by fostering solidarity and collective participation. Overall, the findings illustrate that the speech promotes social change and also highlights the crucial role of Language in shaping power relations and political identities in political contexts.

Keywords: CDA, Zohran-Mamdani's speech, Fairclough's model, power and Identity

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication; it is a most powerful tool set that shapes thought, exerts power, reflects society, and constructs social realities. According to Mammadova (2025), language transmits information, constructs meaning, reflects power relations, influences behaviours, constructs cultural values and reproduces identities and ideologies and shapes world views and perceptions. Every sentence that is uttered, every slogan that is raised, every advertisement, every song, poem, novel, article, story carries deeper socio-cultural meaning that is based on certain ideologies. These words carry hidden meanings that maintain power relations in society. Language establishes and maintains structure of power in society and it can be used to challenge it as well. Batool et al., 2023 point out that language shapes our perceptions through expressions and those expressions reflect power structures that can reinforce different ideologies and this can be done by using linguistic choices that convey different meanings. These different linguistic choices include different forms of discourse like slogans, utterances, real-life communication. Political discourse is one of the most powerful tools used by people of authority to control and shape the thoughts and opinions of masses. So, the words used by politicians are always based on certain ideologies and hidden agendas that not only describe world but construct the realities prevailing in it. Rahmani and Saeed (2024) argue that language is a tool for manipulation and persuasion in politics for shaping narratives and politicians use words as weapons to possess power through the metaphors, pronouns, emotive words and rhetorical devices.

This paper focuses on “Zohran Mamdani’s 2025 Mayor-Elect Victory Speech” as a key example of how political language functions to build social meaning. He is a prominent leader, community organizer, and son of Ugandan-Indian immigrants. Mamdani is a representation of progressive younger American generation. New-York city is a multi-cultural society where people from diverse backgrounds live and work together. Its citizens belong to different ethnicities, religions and cultural backgrounds collectively they form a diverse society. In this context, Mamdani’s victory is not only a political win but a symbol of multicultural identity and inclusive politics in New York City. Thus, his victory speech is much more than a mere celebration, it is a discursive event that solidifies a new paradigm of diversity and representativeness in a diverse and multi-cultural society of New-York city. Nufazri et al. (2026) explain that Mamdani’s speech acts as a discursive event as he uses different tools such as metaphorical, lexical to negotiate power relations and he represents his victory as a shared triumph and his language represents contemporary democracy and ethnic divides in American politics. Mamdani’s speech is positively oriented as it fosters hope and positivity among marginalized groups and creates a sense of solidarity and represents ethnic minorities and struggles of different working classes (khudadad et al., 2025)

In order to explore this relationship between language, power, and identity, the study uses Norman Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough’s model provides a powerful framework that explores how discourse operates on multiple interconnected levels. This model is based on three levels of discourse analysis. The first level of this model is “textual analysis”. This level focuses on the linguistic features of the speech such as vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, and sentence structure to reveal how particular linguistic choices are made to create meaning. The second level of this model is ‘discursive practice’. This level examines the production, distribution and consumption of speech. The aim of third level is to analyze the production of the text i.e. who produced the text, in which context and for which audience it is intended for. This includes looking at how Mamdani uses shared political narratives, media discourses, and public expectations to make his message meaningful to his audience. The third and most important level is sociocultural practice and this level explores the broader social and cultural context of the discourse to examine where the speech is situated within social and political contexts, and this is done to explore the underlying power structures, cultural norms, history, and social inequalities. Fairclough and Van Dijk models of Critical discourse analysis uncover hidden ideologies of power and highlight the importance of discourse as not just reflects reality but it also represents social action, constructs social and political identities and establishes power structures (Al-Mas’udi & Al- A’mery 2021).

With the help of Fairclough’s three dimensional model, this study moves beyond surface-level analysis of Mamdani’s words to examine how his discourse works as a form of social practice. It investigates how Mamdani uses language and make conscious linguistic and lexical choices in order to construct a hopeful image of leadership that is based on inclusion, diversity, and empathy. He uses language to reflect a collaborative society that is based on mutual cooperation and tolerance. Regardless of underlying problems, this study focuses on discovering how this society survives and maintain diversity. His speech refers to collaboration, collective struggle of the community and a new political era of New-York City. He creates a sense of collective political identity. He consciously uses language in such a way that positions him not only as a political leader but a representative of working class of New-York City and a voice of those who have been historically marginalized in the city’s political discourse.

This study also considers how Mamdani’s personal background and roots influence his communicative style. He comes from a postcolonial and diasporic background. His family is

originally from Gujrat, India where Muslims were buthchered by Hindu extremists. Those extremists were backed by powerful political leaders of Gujrat. Since his own community suffered such tragic massacre, his identity informs his understanding of justice and belonging. By studying his victory speech through CDA, we can see how political discourse becomes a space of expression of personal identity that allows a leader to reshape what it means to belong to a diverse and complex city like New York.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to demonstrate how political speeches can function as instruments of social transformation. Mamdani's 2025 victory speech is a site where political power is both exercised and negotiated through words. He emphasizes on justice, inclusivity, cheaper resources, empowerment and diversity which represents broader sentiments of majority of the members of the society. The working class of New-York city, which makes the majority of the city's population, seek representativeness and change. They elected a leader who through his active choice of language in his election campaign convinced the masses that he himself is flag bearer of inclusivity, diversity and representativeness. This study contributes to broader debate on how discourse shapes identity and power in political communication of this era.

Research Questions

Main Question :

- 1- How does Zohran Mamdani construct political identity and power through language in his victory Speech?

Sub Questions :

- 2- What Linguistic features including pronouns, lexical choices, modality, Rhetorical devices, evaluative Language, imperatives and narratives are used by Zohran Mamdani to convey power and construct identity?
- 3- How do power relations and social hierarchies in Zohran Mamdani's speech represent socio-political issues particularly economic inequality, housing, immigrant rights, public services and empowerment?
- 4- In what ways does Zohran Mamdani's speech engage audience through discursive strategies including production, distribution, and interpretation ?

Research Objectives

- 1: To explore how Zohran Mamdani construct and shape his political identity through linguistic choices in his victory Speech.
- 2: To identify how Zohran Mamdani reflect and construct diverse social identity through linguistic features such as lexical choices, modality, rhetorical devices, evaluative Language, and imperatives.
- 3: To understand how the systems of power relations and social hierarchies evident in Zohran Mamdani's speech through linguistic choices represent socio-political issues.
- 4: To describe the discursive strategies used by Zohran Mamdani to engage the audience

Literature Review

In the theater of politics, language is not only used for communication or sharing information. It is actually the tool to gain power and form as well shape Identities. Social realities are also created through language. A victory speech is a pivotal political moment as it turns an election win into a story for people because it is not just a formality as it defines the identity of a candidate and also presents hope and vision for the future. For a figure like Zohran Hamdani, this speech is valuable as it forms the foundations of his political vision that gives him a new political direction. For a careful understanding of this speech, it is essential to study the relationship between language, power, and society. Discourse is indeed a social practice that reveals the ideological goals and political identity of audience as Fairclough's model bridges

the micro-level textual analysis and macro-level discursive and social analysis, serving as a catalyst for social change (Nasution et al., 2020)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework is useful for this purpose. CDA is a method that examines the relationship of language with power, ideologies, and social roles and how discourse influences beliefs and powers. (Fairclough, 2013,p.1)

Ghani and Hussain (2021) demonstrate that leader introduces a new vision for advanced modern political changes and challenges economic crisis through his victory speech as it serves a discursive event. There are different approaches of CDA, used by different researchers in different ways but the aim of these approaches and theories is to explore the social role of language. (Fairclough, 2012,p.452)

CDA is grounded in the perspective that social action is performed through language and it is clearly linked with the system of power, ideology, and control. Educational research demonstrates that CDA is deeply involved in revealing the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power. (Chalak & Ghasemi, 2017, p. 60).

According to Fairclough, CDA is an integral and explanatory branch that not only describes but also evaluates and explains the underlying root causes behind social conditions. (Fairclough, 2013,p.1)

CDA links linguistic detail to social context and also addresses the question of linking textual structures with the macro community context. (Tambunan et al.,2018,p.173)

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model plays a crucial role as it explores the hidden ideologies and social attitudes and values embedded in the discourse. (Ajmal & Zainab, 2024,p.18)

The main purpose of CDA in the foundational work is to analyze both overt and covert structures and subtle relationships of discrimination, dominance, and power and control through language. (Wodak,1995,p.204, as cited in Blommaert & Bulcaen ,2000,p.448).

At the heart of any political victory speech, there lies the linguistic construction of authority and identity and furthermore, Fairclough's method provides some rules to analyze the semiotic process and semiosis interacts with other key elements in three possible major ways, as a component of social actions, as a way of representing world , and as a mean for forming and shaping identities. These elements also correspond to three main semiotic categories such as genre ,style, and discourse. (Fairclough,2013,p.3)

Political leaders use inclusive pronouns and rhetoric in their speech to provide a roadmap for audience and also to win their hearts and minds and also address several issues like poverty, corruption to foster trust, hope, cooperation through emotive and empathetic language (Saeed et al., 2020). Genres refer to the ways of acting and interacting and discourse refers to the perspectives of interpreting the social realities and styles refer to the expression of identity and it is actually the ways of beings. (Fairclough, 2013,p.3)

The Political identity articulated in this victory speech does not float freely as it is not abstract and it is anchored in socio-political condition. The victory speech addressed by Mamdani is due to the emergence of democratic socialism and the social realities of governing New York City. Mamdani's historic election as the first muslim, youngest mayor, first South Asian occurred in the context of discrimination which is described as a paradigmatic shift and it also challenges the model minority narrative. (Monnappa,2025,p.1)

CDA is also concerned with other functional discourses and social fields as discourses can also be recontextualized in other discourses and this process is also seen as colonization. (Fairclough's, 2013,p.4)

Moreover urban landscapes face different challenges, including overburdened public services,difficulties of affording houses and inequality. These issues are critically addressed in victory speech. Discourses can be operationalized into new social identities through practices.

(Fairclough, 2013,p.4). Through this method, the speech highlights the ongoing struggles and contests over power and resources.

This mayor-elect victory speech by Mamdani is purely a performative act. This speech also performs the role of discursive practice. News media circulate this speech on different platforms and this speech refers to different cultural symbols, historical events and also creates deeper meanings, legitimacy and interdiscursivity. This speech is in the form of narration as it describes past events and past struggles. This speech directly addresses the audience and in this way, it engages audience and listeners act as active agents rather than just passive observers. So, this approach links with the critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which analyses the influence of how well discourse reflects social structures and strategies of social agents (Fairclough,2013 ,p.4).

Analyzing the textual analysis and references serves as the main starting point in exploring and understanding the broader strategic and structural dynamics (Fairclough, 2013,p.6).

The Political speech has been examined using the framework of Fairclough model within critical discourse studies but there is always a gap of analyzing the language of local politicians from the aspect of ideological movements such as democratic socialism by using three-dimensional model. It requires the connection between linguistic choices and macro power struggles over urban cities. Fairclough's model first focuses on semiotic dimensions, then identification of barriers and then exploring the possible paths behind these barriers that the current system is dealing with (Fairclough, 2013,pp.5_7).

According to Amoussou and Allagbe (2018), Discourse is not a neutral medium, but it also explains how social identities are linguistically constructed to represent social class and negotiate authority and maintain power relations and these are the principles on which Fairclough's model is based. By applying this Fairclough model to Zohran Mamdani's Mayor-Elect Victory Speech, it addresses this gap and it also reveals the fact that discourse constructs political authority and articulates political identity and also shows that how language serves a main tool in reshaping the future of the city.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research design which is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), by applying a framework of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model. Data consists the transcript of officially delivered Mayor-Elect 2025 victory speech by Zohran Mamdani and this speech serves as a discursive event. The methodology is applied in three stages of Fairclough's model and these stages include textual analysis, discursive practice analysis and social practice analysis. Textual analysis includes the details of linguistic examination of speech which focuses on modality, narration, pronoun usage, and vocabulary etc. Discursive Practice analysis involves the explanations of the interpretations of text including production, distribution and consumption of text and it focuses its shift on different factors like socialism, immigrant or citizens rights. Social practice analysis involves the explanation of role of discourse in its broader socio-political context to explain its relationship to power structures and ideology related to housing, rights and inequality in New York city. By employing this framework, the research provides an analysis of how microlevel linguistic choices form political identity and power relations at macro level of social structures.

Data Analysis

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model is applied to Zohran Mamdani's 2025 victory speech to analyze how discourse constructs political identity, ideology and power within a specific political context.

At textual analysis level

the speech contains specific linguistic choices that shape identity and legitimize power and authority. The strategic use of pronouns is crucial like “we”, “us”, and “our” and he used these pronouns in the sentences like “We have grasped it” to represent working classes like “Uzbek nurses” and “Yemeni bodega owners”. He used a pronoun “we” in opposition to “they” includes “bad landlords”, “billionaire class”. Moreover, he used positive terms like “home”, “hope”, and “solidarity” in contrast to negative terms like “corruption”, and “despair”. Furthermore, he used some references through citing figures Eugene Debs and Jawaharlal Nehru to represent past struggles. He used some quotes from famous historical figures in his speech like “It’s about people like Wesley...like the woman...like Richard” to recall individual narratives in order to make political problems as shared struggles.

At the level of discursive practice

The speech carefully engages audience as Mamdani uses call and response moments like he says during his speech that “we are going to freeze...” and in this way, his speech turns audience into active listeners. His slogans as well as repetitive, short phrases like “a city for the many, not the few” are playing the role of spreading the message beyond the room through social media. In this speech, Mamdani addresses to different individuals belonging to different groups. His speech also invited to ignored people to get involved in politics.

Mamdani also addressed the claims of being called as “too young” or “a democratic socialist”. Moreover, Mamdani also redefines the term “safety” that it includes the meaning of mental health support not just policing. This speech changes the perspectives of people and also gives confidence and encourages citizens of New York to question established traditional political stories and to support his new vision.

At the level of social practice

The speech works as a tool to change perspectives and ideas about power structures. Mamdani addresses different promises like free buses, freezing rents, housing affordability. In his speech, he argues that economic or financial stress is caused by billionaires, not by immigrants. Furthermore, the speech criticizes the neoliberal system and presenting an ideology of collective shared beliefs of a community instead of focusing on private interests, wealth, and profit. Mamdani claims his authority belongs to citizens of New York City and his power is coming from people as he says “This power, it’s yours”.

To sum up, the speech aims to bring about social change as it turns the real-world problems into political problems and focuses on common group-shared identity and claims that changing the language is the ultimate step in changing the social reality.

Findings

1. Textual Dimension

Through a detailed analysis of Mamdani’s speech it is evident that he actively uses language of solidarity and resistance. He uses collaborative and inclusive language in order to construct a shared political identity between him and his listeners. In this speech, the pronouns “us” and “we” have been used frequently, creating a collective agency. This strategy repositions his political actions from individualistic to community-driven.

Lexical choices such as movement, power, justice, dignity establish themes of empowerment, equality, and political transformation. This speech is marked by a deliberate conscious rhythm and repetition which signifies collective struggle, and solidarity. Similarly, lexical choices such as “hope,” “rebirth,” “mandate for change,” “new age,” and “power in our hands” construct themes of morality, inclusivity, and emotional integrity. This creates a vision of renewal and transformation of society. Mamdani uses such imagery and metaphors that redefines the legitimacy of power in society. Such as the imagery “fingers bruised from lifting boxes... palms calloused from delivery bike handlebars”, points toward the struggle that working class go through in order to keep society running. This redefines who is entitled to power.

Furthermore, the metaphors of light versus darkness, breathing, and rebirth recur throughout the text, which symbolizes moral awakening. Metaphors of: “We have held our breath for longer than we know... We are breathing in the air of a city reborn.” This line points towards the suppression and exploitation that working class has suffered so far by the hands of a system that works for the benefits of the elite and ignoring the welfare of the majority working class. Through this line, Mamdani gives hope to the working class that we no longer have to suffer and suffocate in this city as soon the city will be transformed. They have given power to a man who belongs to their group and who will keep their rights and benefits as first priority. This creates a sense of collectivism and societal reform.

2. Discursive Practice Dimension

At the level of discursive practice, the speech acts as a product of collective authorship. Its content draws heavily from grassroots experiences. The phrases like “Yemeni bodega owners,” “Mexican abuelas,” and “Senegalese taxi drivers” mirror the importance of working class struggles. The struggles of immigrants, who usually in discourse are related to negative connotation and are considered a burden for the economy, are not only highlighted but are appreciated with a promise of a better future full of respect, integrity and inclusion for all. This signifies the reliance on immigrant voices for message construction. This ensures the Mamdani’s political identity inseparable from the community of working class and immigrants he represents.

The distribution of this speech mainly occurred through digital media channels, social media platforms, and progressive outlets. This exemplifies Fairclough’s notion of resisting dominant media hegemony through alternative communicative practices

3. Social Practice Dimension

At the level of social practice, Mamdani’s discourse represents a counter-hegemonic intervention. The speech challenges existing hierarchies by redefining power as held collectively by all members of society and leadership as service-oriented. He gives hope to the working class, by statements such as “Politics is no longer something done to us; now it is something we do.” He redirects the power of participation in affairs of the state as a shared moral duty and not as an Institutional privilege. He deliberately names the marginalized groups like immigrants, Black women, trans individuals, and working-class labourers. With this Mamdani expands the boundaries of political representation. Moreover he identifies himself as young, Muslim, democratic and socialist reversing the stigmatization associated with Muslims, immigrants and other socially marginalized members of the society.

Conclusion

This study investigated the construction of political identity and power through language in Zohran Mamdani’s 2025 Mayor-Elect Victory Speech by using Norman Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Speech is analyzed at three levels. At textual level, Mamdani uses different linguistic choices including pronouns (we, us), metaphors of revival and words that compares hope with despair to build political identity. By using such terms, his election speech turns into a story of shared struggles.

At discursive level, the speech functions as a conversation and interaction. He uses call and response patterns. His speech involved audience. Through social media, his message reaches beyond the room.

At sociocultural level, this speech directly challenges power dynamics. He changes the meaning of power by saying to audience that this power is yours. He highlights the struggles of marginalized people. His speech addresses the issues like housing affordability, inequality instead of just policy making problems. To sum up, this speech is a form of action ,not just a lecture. This speech proposes a new vision of redefining the concept of power and safety. Mamdani’s speech is actually a blueprint for new social reality.

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