

Topic-Based Discourse Analysis: a Blend of Discourse-Historical: Approach and the Quran's Thematic Exegesis

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Introduction

In the last few decades, critical theories, which are to understand and change social systems, as well as critical discourse studies adhered to the principles of Frankfurt School and Social Constructionism have been of a great significance in the fields of linguistics and political and social sciences. Weiss and Wodak (2014) believe that critical theory, even with different conceptions of ideology, seeks to make human agents aware of their needs and interests (p. 14). In the same vein, immanent critique, which has its roots in Hegelian-Marxist tradition, is a means of detecting the societal contradictions which offer the most determinate possibilities for emancipatory social change (Antonio, 1981).

However, these studies are now encountering a serious challenge in the process of analyzing and assessing the discursive practices of 'power elites'. In other words, as reason and the ideals of liberty, equality and justice which support social ideals decline decade-by-decade, immanent critique loses its whole power to challenge social systems and practices.

To find a complement to immanent critique, the thematic exegesis of the Holy Quran was considered in terms of philosophy, aims and application. A thematic exegetist does his best to discover and bring together the ideals, suggestions, and solutions - presented in a non-organized way in the Holy Quran - to particular individual/social problems and issues under investigation. In this article, we will introduce an approach called 'Topic-based Discourse Analysis' (TDA), intending to generalize the philosophy and application of Shahid Sadr's Approach to Thematic Exegesis (SSATE) to the field of social/ political discourse analysis.

TDA is recommended for the researchers to compile the ideals, comments, and theories of acknowledged (charismatic) leaders on a particular issue to be applied as a complement for immanent critique or as a guidebook for 'power elites'.

Methodology

TDA is a blend of analytical tools/strategies designed by Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and the operational phases of SSATE. It is introduced from these

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three dimensions: a) the Model's theoretical basics: these basics were drawn out of DHA and SSATE philosophies of application; b) its analytical tools: Four-level Theory of Context, Argumentation Theory, and Wodak's five discursive strategies were adopted from DHA. Another discursive strategy called Reverse Statement Strategy was added to the Wodak's set which was drawn out of exegesis' analytic tools; and c) its operational phases: the TDA steps were designed based on those of SSATE together with some necessary adjustments.

TDA Operational Steps

The holy Quran much like any other heavenly book is full of instructions from a variety of different fields of study. As mentioned above, a thematic exegetist brings into focus the Quran's non-organized ideals and solutions to a particular individual/social problem under each of his investigations. This process is primarily based on these three sides:

- 1) a discursive topic based on which *the exegetist's* research questions are designed;
- 2) *the Almighty Allah* as a knowledgeable reference;
- 3) the holy Quran a macro-text believed by Muslims as the words of Allah in different parts of which the answer to the question(s) can be found;

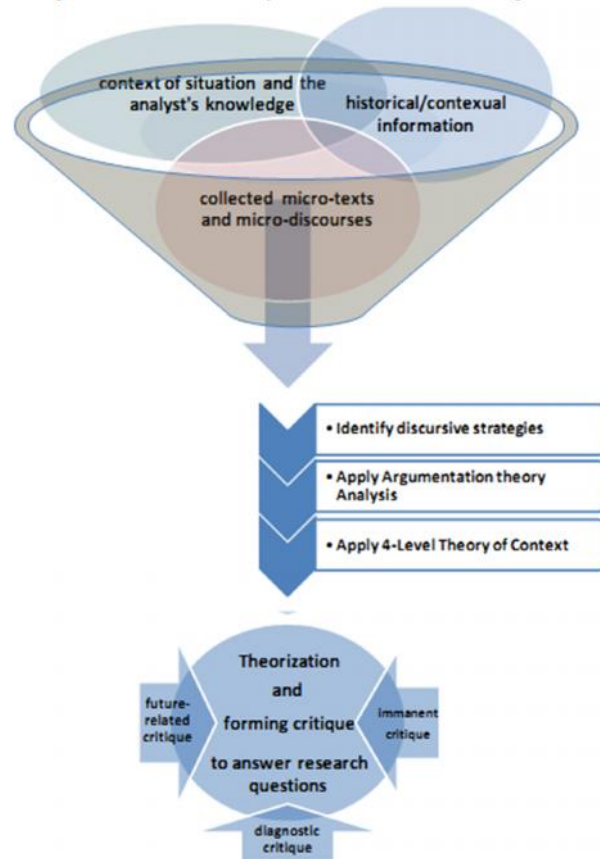
This three-side base of the Quran's thematic exegesis was adopted and generalized to make up a three-side base for Topic-based Discourse Analysis Model:

- 1) a discursive topic based on which *the analyst's* research questions are designed;
- 2) a charismatic *knowledgeable human reference* e. g. a political leader;
- 3) a macro-text i. e. the book(s) written by the human reference in different parts of which the answer to the questions can be found;

Having faced with a social or individual, political or religious, cultural or economic problem, a topic-based analyst is to ideally pass through these operational analytic phases recursively:

- 1) Forming the 3-side base for a particular research problem as described above.
- 2) Literature review i. e. recollection and consultation of preceding theoretical/practical knowledge.
- 3) Designing research questions and their specification for the given research problem based on the corresponding research literature.
- 4) Systematic collection of data and context information related to the time when the selected macro-text was written as well as a complete biography of chosen the charismatic leader. (Depending on the research questions, various discursive events, social actors & fields as well as corresponding genres and texts are focused on).
- 5) Macro-text data collection: the analyst's careful reading of the macro-text to firstly identify the data which are explicitly or implicitly capable to answer research questions, and to secondly classify them in accord with the discursive topics, sub-topics, and genres, etc.
- 6) Collected data analysis: the classified data from the macro-text are to be subjected to the application of Four-level Theory of Context, Argumentation Theory, and 6 discursive strategies.

Diagram 1: the relationship between TDA's 4 to 7 stages



7) Theorization by formulation of critique (answering research questions, taking into account the relevant context knowledge and referring to the DHA's three dimensions of critique).

8) Application of results (if possible, the obtained results might be applied or proposed for application)

Conclusion

In this article, we designed an approach called 'Topic-based Discourse Analysis' (TDA) to generalize the philosophy and application of Shahid Sadr's Approach to Thematic Exegesis to the field of social/ political discourse analysis as a complement for immanent critique.

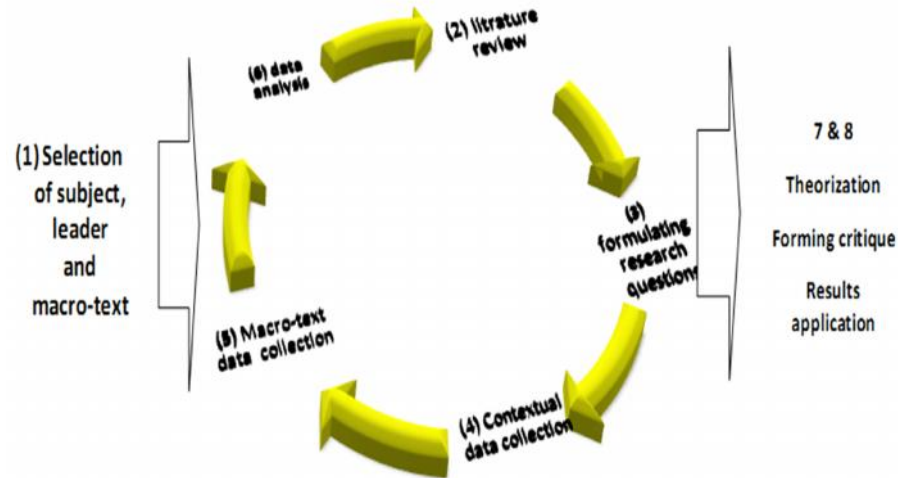


Diagram 2: the hermeneutic cycle of TDA operational phases

TDA is a blend of analytical tools/strategies designed by DHA and the operational phases of SSATE. It was introduced from these three dimensions: a) the Model's theoretical basics; b) its analytical tools; and c) its operational 8 phases. These operational phases are cyclic and of a hermeneutic taste as illustrated by Diagram 2

Keywords: Topic –Based Discourse Analysis; Discursive-Historical Approach; Thematic Exegesis; Internal Critique; Ideal.