

EVIDENTIALITY IN THE COLOMBIAN “DIÁLOGOS DE PAZ”: AN ANALYSIS OF QUOTATIONS AND PRESUPPOSITIONS IN COLOMBIA’S PEACE TALKS

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Buscar la paz con justicia social por medio del diálogo (“to find peace with social justice through dialogue”): was the goal that Colombia purported to achieve during its peace talks¹. Nevertheless, this type of political discourses usually carries within it more information than the main goal their words suggest, as they can transmit a particular ideology and a hidden agenda that wants to be accepted by the audience. The problem is that, in moments of conflict, a peace dialogue can be the beacon of hope, and as a consequence, every speech that came from the “mesa de diálogo” (dialogue table), whether if it is from the militia or the government, was considered a voice of hope or a reason for sorrow for the country that awaited a political change.

Since the beginning of the peace process between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, ejército del pueblo (FARC-ep), each side presented the Colombian people a series of public broadcasts intended to inform them about the progress of the dialogues. Nevertheless, as in any political discourse, those broadcasts served to advance the platforms of the respective sides by enacting their particular roles and discursively constructing them with a more favorable story than their counterparts. Berlin and Prieto-Mendoza (2015) found that: “in the public broadcasts delivered respectively by FARC ep and the Colombian Government, the pragmatic delivery of the statements followed the same patterns of evidential use with greater use of ‘distancing’ evidentials and increasingly lesser use of expressions of direct knowledge.

This study conducts a critical discourse analysis of the speeches presented during the peace dialogues to observe the relations and dynamics of power present between both political parties. In the field of pragmatics, Critical Discourse Analysis is the type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 1999:352), which has as a main goal the understanding, exposure and consequently oppose social inequality. By using the Multilayered Model of Context (Berlin, 2007; 2011) and, by studying the use of linguistic elements such as presuppositions, direct quotations, and evidential markers, this study analyzes the presence of messages that disseminate ideology or promote ideas of discrimination or inequality, for which these parties may need to be held accountable. This type of discourse analysis study is necessary to consciously observe the way people in a position of power make use of discourse structures to: “enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society” (Van Dijk 1999:353).

¹ The Colombian Peace talks began on October 18th, 2012, in Oslo, Norway and ended in La Habana, Cuba on August 2016.