

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Jack Ma's Motivational Speech on Social Media for Language Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates Jack Ma's motivational speech on YouTube, "Why I Learned English", utilizing integrated Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) through Ruth Wodak and Meyer's discursive strategies and Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The analysis highlights three pre-determined aspects within the speech: 1) motivation, 2) language learning, and 3) intercultural understanding of the speech. The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design using CDA. The data were collected by transcribing the spoken speech from the video and analyzed systematically through CDA. The analysis started with manual verbatim coding, followed by discursive interpretation, and further analysis at the level of social praxis. The discourse level of analysis was conducted according to five discursive strategies suggested by Ruth Wodak and Meyer: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation. The findings showed that Jack Ma's speech employs the five discursive strategies for the flowing function roles: including nomination to construct social relations, predication to express evaluation, argumentation to develop persuasive reasoning, perspectivization to present personal experience and credibility, and intensification/mitigation to strengthen or soften statements for persuasive effect. Regarding the pre-determined aspects selected, the speech represents motivation as a result of effort, resilience, and self-reliance. Meanwhile, language learning was presented as a practical skill for communication and shifting from academic knowledge to global engagement, and intercultural understanding was an essential aspect of mutual respect, cooperation, and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Motivational Speech, Motivation, Language Learning, Intercultural Understanding, Discursive Strategies.

Introduction

Recent scholarly works have utilized Discourse Analysis as a useful approach for examining language as a form of social practice, rather than analyzing its units separately. It moves beyond the analysis of isolated words, instead studying how language is used purposefully within context. As a qualitative approach, it emphasizes the relationship between linguistic choices and their functions in real-life communication [1,2]. Discourse Analysis extends to involve Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which provides an orderly framework for analyzing the connections between language, meaning, and social context. Fairclough argues that language is not neutral [3], but a system through which meanings and representations are produced. CDA integrates textual, discursive, and social dimensions of analysis. Wodak & Meyer [4] further emphasize that discourse should be analyzed in relation to its social and historical context. This analysis framework also examines motivational speeches, which can be seen as an important type of discourse, especially in educational settings. As they are widely shared through digital platforms, they serve as real-world resources that familiarize learners with natural language use and cultural relevance. Such speeches employ discursive strategies, including specific lexical and structural choices, through which ideas are represented and communicated [3]. Jack Ma's speech is particularly relevant in this respect because its central purpose is not only to encourage perseverance and self-development, but also to reflect on the role of language learning, communication, and cross-cultural understanding in achieving personal and professional success. This study adopts an integrated analytical framework that combines Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model with Ruth Wodak's approach to analyze Ma's entire spoken discourse.

This study aims to analyze Jack Ma's motivational speech *Why I Learned English* through the Critical Discourse Analysis framework that combines Ruth Wodak's discursive strategies with Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model [4,3]. It also seeks to explore how the speech presents ideas related to motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding through language use and discourse structure.

Research Question

- 1- How is Jack Ma's motivational speech analyzed through an integrated CDA framework?
- 2- How are the aspects of motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding represented in Jack Ma's speech?

Literature Review

Motivational speeches can be viewed as persuasive forms to show how speakers use linguistic and rhetorical features to inspire audiences and deliver particular messages through strategies such as emotional appeal and storytelling [5]. They often circulate through digital platforms, which facilitate wide accessibility and dissemination, such as YouTube.

This current study focuses on Jack Ma's motivational speech in general and three aspects in particular, which are motivation, language learning, and Intercultural understanding. 1) motivation refers to the

internal and external forces that drive individuals' effort and persistence toward achieving goals, 2) language learning involves the process of acquiring the ability to use and understand a language effectively across different contexts [6]. 3) Intercultural understanding refers to the ability to recognize, respect, and appropriately engage with cultural differences, supported by attitudes such as openness and empathy [7]. To analyze Jack Ma's discourse, this study relies on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is an approach to studying language as a form of social practice, focusing on how discourse relates to power, ideology, and society. Within the CDA, Fairclough's three-dimensional model provides the analytical framework for this study. The first dimension, text (micro level), focuses on the linguistic features of discourse. This includes vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and textual structure. At this level, the analysis examines how specific linguistic choices, sentence structures, and rhetorical devices contribute to meaning-making in Jack Ma's speech [3].

The second dimension, discursive practice (meso level), concerns the processes involved in the production, distribution, and interpretation of texts. It focuses on how the speech is produced and how it is interpreted by audiences. In this study, attention is given to the organization of the speech, including its genre, coherence, intertextual elements, and the way ideas are structured and developed to create persuasive meaning.

The third dimension, social practice (macro level), situates discourse within its broader social and cultural context. It examines how discourse reflects, reproduces, or potentially challenges social structures and power relations.

In addition to Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional models, this study also utilizes Ruth Wodak and Meyer's discourse historical approach [4] to provide a more detailed analysis of the speech. This approach developed a set of discursive strategies within CDA. These Discursive strategies are systematic linguistic tools used to construct meaning, express viewpoints, and shape audience interpretation within social contexts. They include nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation, each serving a specific communicative and interpretive function in discourse. Among these, nomination and predication play a central role in shaping representation. 1) Nomination refers to how social actors or groups are named through linguistic choices such as pronouns or collective nouns. For example, expressions like "we as learners" create inclusion and shared identity, whereas "some people" introduces distance. In this way, nomination organizes social relations and positions participants within the discourse. In addition, 2) predication involves assigning qualities or attributes to people, ideas, or actions through descriptive language. As explained by Ruth Wodak [4], this strategy expresses an evaluation that shapes interpretation. For instance, describing mistakes as "valuable lessons" conveys a positive evaluation, while referring to early efforts as "difficult" introduces a less favorable opinion. Together, these two strategies contribute to constructing identity and guiding audience attitudes.

Similarly, other discursive strategies function to strengthen reasoning and guide interpretation more directly. 3) Argumentation, for example, involves the use of logical relations such as cause and effect to justify claims and make them persuasive. A statement like "If you keep trying, you will improve" clearly links effort to outcome and reinforces a motivational message. In addition, 4) perspectivization refers to how speakers present their viewpoint and position themselves within discourse, often through expressions such as "I believe," which signal personal stance and enhance credibility. Furthermore, 5) intensification/mitigation adjusts the strength of statements by either emphasizing or softening them. Intensification can be seen in expressions such as "you should never give up," which strengthens commitment, whereas mitigation appears in forms like "progress may take time," which reduces certainty. Taken together, these strategies work in combination to shape meaning, reinforce persuasion, and guide how the message is understood.

Several prior studies have laid the groundwork for the present research. An earlier contribution to discourse-oriented perspectives on language learning was provided by Gu [8], College English learners' discursive motivation construction in China, which examined how motivation was constructed through language rather than treated as a fixed psychological trait. Adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, the study analyzed interview and diary data from two university learners and showed that motivation emerged dynamically through interaction with social context. The findings revealed that learners' motivation was shaped by interpersonal relationships, vision of the future, and alignment with broader social discourses, stressing the role of language in constructing meanings related to learning.

Further developing the association between discourse and intercultural meaning, Hazaea [9] Fostering Critical Intercultural Awareness Among EFL Students Through Critical Discourse Analysis examined how CDA functioned as a pedagogical tool in an EFL context. This research study was conducted at a Saudi university adapting qualitative research design. It integrated CDA into a critical reading course where students analyzed intercultural texts and produced reflective writings. Through the three-level CDA framework, the study demonstrated that learners developed a more balanced intercultural awareness, showing increased ability to interpret cultural differences and recognize how identity and cultural relationships were constructed through discourse.

In more recent developments, attention shifted toward intercultural communication itself as a site of discursive construction, as illustrated by Tan-de Ramos's [10] Critical Discourse Analysis of Intercultural Communication. Using a qualitative CDA design, the study analyzed online texts written by Filipino-Chinese

authors to examine how identities and relationships were constructed linguistically. The findings showed that intercultural discourse was inherently shaped by power relations and ideological positioning, while also functioning as a medium for expressing intercultural understanding, thereby reinforcing the view of language as a non-neutral social practice.

A further development appeared in Abdul-Ajid [11], discursive strategies in a motivational video by Jay Shetty, which extended discourse analysis to digital motivational contexts from a Positive Discourse Analysis perspective. Incorporating Wodak and Meyer's framework, the study examined how meaning was constructed through interconnected strategies, including storytelling, rhetorical questions, and lexical selection. The analysis showed that these elements worked collectively to shape the overall message, making clear how motivational speech builds meaning as one complete system, rather than a set of isolated linguistic features.

Research Gap

The reviewed studies (Gu [8]; Hazaea [9]; Tan-de Ramos [10]; Abdul-Ajid [11]) showed valuable contributions to discourse-oriented research, yet their analytical focus remained limited in scope. Although they adopted Critical Discourse Analysis frameworks, the analysis often concentrated on describing general patterns of discourse without consistently integrating the different analytical levels of discourse interpretation. In many cases, attention was given either to broader interpretations of meaning or to selected linguistic features, while the connection between textual elements, discursive processes, and wider social conditions was not fully developed in a systematic way.

In addition, each study focused on specific aspects in isolation rather than examining how multiple aspects operate together within a single discourse. Gu [8] focused on motivation in language learning contexts, Hazaea [9] addressed intercultural awareness in pedagogical settings, while Tan-de Ramos [10] and Abdul-Ajid [11] examined identity construction and motivational discourse separately. As a result, motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding were treated as independent areas of analysis, without exploring how they are jointly constructed through discursive strategies within the same communicative context.

Methodology

Study Design

To ensure a systematic and coherent examination of the research inquiry, this study adopts a carefully structured methodological approach that aligns with its interpretive and discourse-oriented nature. This study adopts a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. It draws on the Discourse-Historical Approach developed by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer and is further supported by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, which includes the textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels [4,3].

A qualitative CDA approach is appropriate for this study because it focuses on examining how language represents ideas and social realities within discourse rather than on statistical measurement or hypothesis testing. The analysis investigates how motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding are represented in Jack Ma's motivational speech through specific linguistic and discursive features.

The combination of these frameworks provides a systematic approach to analysis. Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach is used to identify and classify discursive strategies, while Fairclough's three-dimensional model is used to examine how these strategies operate at the textual, discursive, and social levels of discourse.

Corpus and Data Collection

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical approach to a single spoken text delivered by Jack Ma. The data consist of a full transcription of a motivational speech, treated as a unified discourse to examine how meaning is constructed through language in use. In discourse analysis, naturally occurring texts are considered important as they reflect authentic communicative practices rather than artificially designed data [8,12].

The selected speech, retrieved from a publicly available YouTube video titled *Why I Learned English*, was transcribed by the researchers and chosen through purposive sampling due to its relevance to the study focus. It represents a coherent instance of motivational discourse containing references to motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding. This selection aligns with qualitative research principles, where data are chosen for their analytical relevance rather than representativeness [2].

<https://youtu.be/sDy07cIYrdg>

The Motivational speech by Jack Ma

The transcribed form of Jack Ma's speech (*Why I Learned English*) was adapted from a YouTube channel SAVANTUM.

Data Analysis

The motivational speech by Jack Ma was first transcribed manually to convert the spoken discourse into written text suitable for analysis. The analysis was conducted within a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis

(CDA) framework, guided by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer's Discourse-Historical Approach [4] and supported by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis [3].

The transcribed data were systematically coded according to Wodak's five discursive strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation [4]. Three tables were used to organize the findings. The first presents the discursive strategies and analyzes them through Fairclough's textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels. The second provides a descriptive overview of the occurrence of each strategy in the speech. The third illustrates how motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding are represented through these strategies. This procedure ensured a systematic analysis aligned with the study's research questions.

Findings

Concerning the first research question, the analysis of Jack Ma's motivational speech shows that the discourse employs all major discursive strategies proposed by Wodak and Meyer [4], namely nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation. These strategies function to construct social relations, express evaluation, develop persuasive reasoning, present personal experience and credibility, and adjust the strength of statements within the discourse.

The frequency analysis shows that nomination and predication appear more frequently in the speech than the other strategies, followed by argumentation and perspectivization, while intensification and mitigation occur less frequently. This pattern indicates that the speech mainly depends on social representation, evaluation, logical reasoning, and personal narration in presenting its ideas.

Table 1 presents the frequency and functional roles of the discursive strategies identified in Jack Ma's motivational speech.

Discursive Strategy	Frequency	Approx. Proportion	Function Role
Nomination	9 occurrences	~28%	Constructs social actors and relational identities
Predication	7 occurrences	~ 22%	Assigns positive/negative evaluation to experiences and concepts
Argumentation	6 occurrences	~ 19%	Builds logical relations and persuasive reasoning
Perspectivization	6 occurrences	~ 19%	Expresses personal stance and credibility
Intensification/ Mitigation	5 occurrences	~ 12%	Strengthens or softens statements for persuasion balance

After identifying the frequency and functions of the discursive strategies, the analysis was examined further through Fairclough's three-dimensional model, including the textual level, discursive practice, and social practice. The following section explains how each strategy operates across these three analytical levels.

Nomination: Nomination in the speech functions to construct social actors and identities through which meaning is organized. Jack Ma relies on a range of referential expressions that position himself, the audience, and broader social groups within the discourse. This is evident in lexical choices such as "I," "you," "people," "others," "Chinese students," "Western culture," "different cultures," "friends," and "China and the U.S." These expressions categorize individuals and groups while also establishing relational proximity between the speaker and the audience. At the textual level, the frequent use of personal pronouns and group labels reflects a clear pattern of identity construction and inclusion, particularly through the shift between "I" (personal experience) and "you" (generalization to the audience). At the discursive practice level, these choices function to create an interactive and persuasive narrative, where the speaker positions himself as both an example and a guide, while inviting the audience to see themselves within the same framework. At the social practice level, nomination reinforces broader ideological meanings related to individual agency, globalization, and intercultural interaction, as it constructs a world composed of interconnected social actors who must engage across cultural and national boundaries.

Predication: Predication in the speech is used to assign qualities, values, and judgments to language, culture, and personal experience. Jack Ma employs evaluative expressions such as "language is very important," "language is so important," "it helped me a lot," "I'm not good at school" "my school was not that good," "much better," and "no good," which attribute positive or negative characteristics to specific subjects. At the textual level, these realizations appear through evaluative adjectives and comparative forms that establish clear contrasts between success and failure, importance and insignificance. At the discursive practice level, these evaluations guide the audience's interpretation by framing language and cultural understanding as valuable and necessary, while presenting traditional schooling or reliance on translation as limited or insufficient. At the social practice level, predication contributes to constructing an ideology that prioritizes self-development, practical knowledge, and intercultural competence over formal educational

achievement, thereby reinforcing the idea that success is shaped by personal effort and meaningful skills rather than institutional background alone.

Argumentation: Argumentation is a central strategy in the speech, through which Jack Ma constructs logical relationships between ideas using cause–effect and conditional reasoning. This is linguistically realized in expressions such as “because of artificial intelligence in the future,” “if you don’t have friends, how can you do business?,” “when you learn the other language, you start to understand the other culture,” “when you appreciate... you will be respected,” “if you can understand a language... it’s easier to communicate,” and “you speak good English does not mean you will do global business.” At the textual level, these examples are marked by connectors such as “because,” “if,” and “when,” as well as rhetorical questions, all of which structure the discourse logically. At the discursive practice level, these forms function to persuade the audience by presenting arguments as rational and inevitable, guiding listeners step by step toward the speaker’s conclusions. At the social practice level, argumentation constructs a broader ideology in which language learning, cultural understanding, and interpersonal relationships are essential components of global success, while also challenging the assumption that technology alone can replace human communication and cultural competence.

Perspectivization: Perspectivization in the speech reflects the speaker’s positioning of his own viewpoint and experiences as a source of authority and meaning. Jack Ma explicitly signals his perspective through expressions such as “let me tell you,” “I think,” “I learned my English by myself,” “I never got one day English training class,” “I understand Western culture much better,” and “I would say.” These linguistic choices foreground subjectivity and personal experience. At the textual level, perspectivization is realized through first-person narration and stance markers that indicate opinion and reflection. At the discursive practice level, these features function to construct credibility and authenticity, as the speaker draws on his own life story to legitimize his claims and engage the audience. At the social practice level, this strategy promotes an ideology that values individual experience and self-directed learning as valid and powerful sources of knowledge, while also challenging dominant assumptions about formal education and language acquisition.

Intensification and Mitigation: Intensification and mitigation are used in the speech to strengthen key messages while maintaining a degree of balance and realism. Jack Ma intensifies his statements through expressions such as “very important,” “so important,” “never give up,” “much better,” “always focus,” and the repetition of “easier,” which emphasize urgency and significance. At the same time, he mitigates certain claims through phrases like “of course,” “sometimes you have to,” and “if you can,” which soften the force of his assertions. At the textual level, this strategy is realized through degree adverbs, repetition, and modal expressions that either amplify or reduce intensity. At the discursive practice level, intensification enhances the persuasive and motivational impact of the speech, while mitigation ensures that the message remains credible and acceptable to the audience by avoiding overgeneralization. At the social practice level, this combination supports a balanced ideological stance that encourages persistence and effort while acknowledging practical limitations, thereby reinforcing a realistic yet optimistic view of personal and professional development.

Table 2. Mapping of Discursive Strategies Jack Ma’s Speech (Fairclough’s Dimensions)

Strategy	Language used in the Speech	Textual Level	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
Nomination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I, you, people, “others, Chinese students, Western culture”, “different cultures”, “friends”, “China and the U.S.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal pronouns and group labels; naming of social actors; shifts between “I” and “you” create inclusion and generalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructs the speaker as a personal example and guide; positions the audience within a shared social experience; builds relational engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represents social actors as interconnected across cultures; promotes global interaction, individual agency, and cross-cultural relations
Predication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “language is very important”, “so important”, “it helped me a lot”, “I’m not good at school”, “my school was not that good”, “much better”, “no good” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluative adjectives; comparative structures; positive/negative attribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frames language and culture positively and school negatively; guides audience interpretation through evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes ideology of self-development, valuing skills and intercultural competence over formal education
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “because of artificial intelligence...”, “if you don’t have friends...”, “when you learn... you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logical connectors (“because”, “if”, “when”); conditional structures; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds persuasive reasoning through cause–and–effect logic; presents claims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructs an ideology that communication, culture, and relationships are essential for global

	understand...”, “when you appreciate... you will be respected...”, “if you can understand a language...”, “you speak good English does not mean...”	• rhetorical questions	as logical conclusions	success; • challenges tech-dominant views
Perspectivization	• “Let me tell you, “I think, “I learned my English by myself, “I never got one day of English training,” “I understand Western culture much better”, “I would say”	• First-person narration; • stance markers; • explicit subjectivity	• Establishes credibility through personal experience; • positions speaker as authoritative voice	• Values lived experience and self-learning as legitimate knowledge sources; • challenges formal institutional authority
Intensification/ Mitigation	• “very important”, “so important”, “never give up”, “much better”, “always focus”, “easier”, “of course”, “sometimes you have to”, “if you can”	• Degree adverbs; • repetition; • modal expressions; • softeners and amplifiers	• Strengthens key motivational messages while balancing claims for credibility	• Encourages persistence and optimism while maintaining realistic awareness of limitations

Regarding the second research question, the aspects of motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding are represented through systematic linguistic patterns, including evaluation, personal narration, and logical sequencing. These aspects are constructed through specific lexical choices and discursive strategies that operate across textual, discursive, and social levels [3].

Motivation: Motivation is represented through a narrative of failure, persistence, and self-development. At the textual level, this is realized through lexical items such as “I failed,” “I tried to study hard,” “I’m not good at school,” and the intensified expression “I never give up.” These forms combine negative self-evaluation with strong expressions of persistence. At the discursive practice level, the use of first-person narration constructs a personal success story that positions the speaker as an example of determination, making the message relatable and persuasive for the audience. At the social practice level, motivation is represented as an individual responsibility grounded in effort and resilience, reinforcing a broader ideology of self-reliance and perseverance as key factors for success.

Language Learning: Language learning is represented as a practical and enabling resource for communication and opportunity. At the textual level, this is evident in evaluative and functional expressions such as “language is very important,” “language is so important,” “it helped me a lot,” and “easier to communicate and be understood.” These lexical choices assign a strong positive value to language. At the discursive practice level, these statements are reinforced through argumentation, particularly in the rejection of alternative views such as reliance on technology (“people say... no need to learn language... no”), which strengthens the speaker’s position. At the social practice level, language learning is represented as a necessary skill for participation in global contexts, shifting its role from a purely academic subject to a tool for real-world interaction and professional engagement.

Intercultural Understanding: Intercultural understanding is represented as a central condition for successful communication and cooperation. At the textual level, this is constructed through expressions such as “it’s not about language, it’s about the culture,” “understand the other culture,” “appreciate, respect the other culture,” and “work together.” These lexical choices emphasize cultural awareness and positive evaluation of others. At the discursive practice level, the speaker uses a sequence of logical relations (“when you learn... you understand... you appreciate... then you can work together”), which organizes the discourse into a clear progression that highlights the importance of cultural understanding. At the social practice level, intercultural understanding is represented as a foundation for mutual respect, collaboration, and global cooperation, reflecting broader values associated with globalization and cross-cultural communication.

Table 3. Representation of Motivation, Language Learning, and Intercultural Understanding

Aspect	Language Used from The Speech	Textual Level	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
Motivation	“I failed”, “I tried to study hard”, “I’m not good at school”, “my school was not that good”, “I never give up”	Use of negative self-evaluation (“failed”, “not good”) combined with strong expressions of persistence (“never give up”); contrast between failure and determination	First-person narration constructs a personal success story; positions the speaker as an example of persistence and self-development; enhances relatability and persuasion	Represents motivation as individual responsibility based on effort and resilience; reinforces values of perseverance and self-reliance in achieving success
Language Learning	“Language is very important”, “language is so important”, “it helped me a lot”, “easier to communicate”, “understand and be understood”, “people say... no need to learn language... no”	Evaluative expressions emphasizing importance; functional language highlighting communication; contrastive structure rejecting alternative views	Argumentative structure strengthens the speaker’s position; counters opposing views (e.g., reliance on technology); guides audience interpretation toward valuing language learning	Represents language learning as a practical skill for communication and opportunity; shifts its role from academic knowledge to real-world and global engagement
Intercultural Understanding	“It’s not about language, it’s about the culture”, “understand the other culture, “appreciate,” “respect,” “work together”	Lexical emphasis on culture, respect, and cooperation; repetition of positive evaluative terms; clear semantic progression	Logical sequencing (“when you learn... you understand... you appreciate... then you can work together”) organizes ideas into a coherent progression	Represents intercultural understanding as essential for cooperation and mutual respect; reflects values of globalization and cross-cultural communication

The findings show that the speech employs all major discursive strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation, to organize meaning across textual, discursive, and social levels. These strategies work together through patterns of reference, evaluation, personal narration, and logical sequencing. In relation to the second research question, the analysis indicates that motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding are presented in a connected way rather than as separate elements. Motivation is expressed through persistence and personal experience, language learning is framed as a practical means of effective communication, and intercultural understanding is highlighted as essential for cooperation. Overall, the discourse brings these aspects together to emphasize the link between personal development, communication practices, and intercultural understanding.

Discussion

The findings show that Jack Ma’s motivational speech is structured through a consistent use of the main discursive strategies proposed by Wodak and Meyer [4], namely nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation. These strategies operate across Fairclough’s three levels [3], where textual features (such as pronouns, evaluative expressions, and logical connectors) are linked with discursive practices (such as narration and persuasion) and broader social meanings related to success, communication, and intercultural relations. This confirms that the speech functions as an integrated form of discourse in which meaning is produced through interaction between linguistic choices and their social implications, rather than through isolated expressions.

In relation to the first research question, the analysis shows that the identified discursive strategies collectively structure the speech. Nomination defines social actors and speaker–audience relations, while predication assigns evaluations that shape how language, education, and experience are perceived. Argumentation develops logical relations that support the speaker’s claims, and perspectivization strengthens credibility through personal experience. Intensification and mitigation adjust the degree of emphasis to balance persuasion and moderation. Together, these strategies contribute to a coherent construction of the motivational discourse.

Regarding the second research question, the findings indicate that motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding are closely interconnected rather than separate categories. Motivation is constructed through narratives of struggle and persistence that foreground resilience. Language learning is represented as a practical resource for communication and participation in global contexts, while intercultural understanding is framed as a basis for cooperation and respect across cultures. These aspects

are consistently reinforced through evaluation, narration, and reasoning, producing a unified orientation toward self-development and global engagement.

The findings of the present study show several points of similarity with earlier studies on discourse, motivation, and intercultural understanding, although each study approached the topic from a different context. Similar to the study by Gu [8], the present analysis shows that motivation is socially constructed through discourse, personal experience, and interaction with others rather than being treated as an individual characteristic only. Both studies highlight how language is used to communicate ideas about success, learning, and future goals. However, Gu's [8] study focused on learners' own experiences through interviews and diaries, while the present study examines how Jack Ma uses discursive strategies to deliver motivational and ideological messages to a wider audience. The findings are also close to those of Hazaea's study [9], particularly in the way intercultural understanding is represented through respect, appreciation, cooperation, and positive attitudes toward other cultures. In both studies, discourse functions as a means of encouraging mutual understanding between cultures. Still, Hazaea [9] concentrated on classroom practices among EFL students, whereas the current study discusses intercultural understanding within a motivational speech connected to globalization and communication across cultures.

The present findings also correspond with the study of Tan-de Ramos [10], which emphasized the role of discursive strategies in constructing social and ideological messages through language. Both studies demonstrate that discourse is not limited to transferring information; it also shapes perspectives, values, and relationships between speakers and audiences. Nevertheless, Tan-de Ramos focused mainly on written intercultural discourse and the representation of dominance and social relations, while the current study pays greater attention to motivation, language learning, and intercultural understanding in spoken discourse. A further similarity appears with Abdul-Ajid's [11] analysis of Jay Shetty's motivational speech. Both studies identified the major discursive strategies proposed by Wodak and Meyer, and both showed that personal narration, evaluation, and logical reasoning contribute strongly to persuasion and inspiration. At the same time, there is a noticeable difference in the distribution of strategies. Abdul-Ajid [11] found perspectivization to be the most dominant strategy in Jay Shetty's speech, whereas nomination and predication appeared more frequently in Jack Ma's speech. This difference suggests that Jack Ma depends more on constructing social messages and evaluative meanings related to language learning and intercultural understanding, while Jay Shetty relies more heavily on personal reflection and emotional framing.

However, this study also has certain limitations. It does not measure the psychological impact of the speech on the audience, nor does it investigate how listeners emotionally or cognitively respond to the motivational message. In addition, the analysis remains focused on discourse structure and meaning construction, without extending into empirical investigation of reception or behavioral outcomes. These aspects may be considered in future research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of motivational discourse effects.

Conclusion

This study contributes to discourse-oriented research by offering a detailed examination of how a motivational speech operates as a structured form of meaning-making rather than a collection of isolated linguistic features. By applying both Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Wodak and Meyer's discursive strategies [3,4], it demonstrates how different analytical levels can be combined to produce a more comprehensive understanding of spoken discourse. The study also provides insight into how motivational communication functions in shaping interpretations of personal experience, language use, and cultural awareness within a single discourse. In addition, by focusing on a widely circulated public speech, it highlights the relevance of digital motivational content as a site where social values and communicative practices are constructed and circulated, offering a useful basis for further research in similar contexts.

Conflict of interest. Nil

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