

## THE POWER OF LANGUAGE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IRA'S STATEMENTS

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### *Abstract*

This paper investigates how the Irish Republican Army (IRA) used language in its statements to discursively construct realities and consensus in Northern Ireland, from the IRA ceasefire announced on 31 August 1994 to the declaration of the complete cessation of its military operations on 28 July 2005: a sensitive period which witnessed the shift of the IRA from violence towards a more peaceful attitude. The analysis aims at discovering the features of the IRA's discourse and it is conducted on different levels, following the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, with the support of Corpus Linguistics methodological tools.

**Keywords:** Access, Critical discourse analysis, Dominance, Genre, IRA statements.

### **1. Aim and study design**

The aim of this paper is to analyse how the IRA constructed its discourse, trying to understand how it discursively shapes its reality.

In particular, this paper tries to answer the following questions:

- which are the features of the IRA's discourse across the period considered?
- is the IRA's discourse a resistant form of discourse, made to challenge dominance?

In order to answer these questions, this analysis will be conducted on different levels: it will examine the structural organisation of the statements, establishing their communicative purpose, the function within the context of the lexical choices made, and also the collocation and concordances of the most relevant words, thanks to the generation of frequency and word lists, by means of WordSmith Tool 4.015. Then, the analysis will describe the syntactic level of IRA's discourse, through the use of connectors and the antithetical construction of propositions.

### *1.1 Material and sources*

The object of this study is the corpus of IRA's statements made up of fifty-four statements selected through a diachronic criterion, which includes all the available statements issued by the IRA from its ceasefire announced on 31 August 1994, to the declaration of the complete cessation of IRA military operations on 29 July 2005. These statements have been collected from the CAIN<sup>1</sup> (Conflict Archive on the Internet) Web Service – Conflicts and Politics in Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>, a website that contains information about the historic background and key events of “the Troubles”<sup>3</sup> in Northern Ireland.

### *1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: access, language and power.*

This analysis is conducted following the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, which is neither a theory, nor a method but it is preferably “an analytical framework for studying connections between language, power and ideology” (Fairclough 1995: 23).

This analytical framework is about “language as social practice” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997) and, in it, the context of language use plays a key role. Furthermore, what distinguishes CDA from other methods of language investigation is its interest in the relation between language and power. Indeed, the aim of CDA is to uncover those opaque “structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak 2001: 2). In order to achieve its aim, CDA considers both texts and the social processes that lead to their production as objects of

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<sup>1</sup> CAIN is a project aimed at introducing the Northern Ireland conflict to the people and it is located in the University of Ulster.

<sup>2</sup> <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Troubles is the definition given to the conflict which characterised Northern Ireland from 1969 to 1998.

inquiry. Therefore, the concepts of power and ideology constitute a fundamental basis for the comprehension of this critical approach. Thompson (1990) defines ideology as the circulation of symbolic forms in the social world through, and within, particular social forms and processes; thus, the study of ideology involves the analysis of “the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds” (Thompson 1990). Hence, the relevance of the social context in which these symbolic forms are developed and employed.

Hall, instead, emphasises the concept of dominance and regards ideology as “[...] the reproduction of a dominant discourse, in which particular definitions and classifications acquire, by repetition, an aura of common sense, and come to seem natural and comprehensive rather than partial and selective” (Hall 1982, in Stubbs 1996: 194).

As regards the notion of power, Wodak points out that:

Power is about relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures. The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is the contention over and a challenge to power (Wodak 2001: 11).

Language can be used by dominant discourse communities as a means to exercise their power and to express their hegemonic ideology, so, language does not have to be considered powerful in itself, but it becomes the medium of power expression, thus, what is relevant is “the use powerful people make of it”. On the other hand, language can also be used by less powerful communities, in resistant forms of discourses, to challenge power and alter its distribution (Wodak 2001: 10). Therefore, CDA research analyses discourse to uncover linguistic structures and features used by dominant groups to express their ideology and reinforce their power, in their attempt to maintain the distribution of power at social level unbalanced.

A key factor in the relationship between language and power is access to communication, as “special access to various genres, forms or contexts of discourse and communication is also a power resource” (Van Dijk 1993: 254).

This interest of CDA in the relationship between language and power is essential in relation to the context in which the IRA's discourse is developed: the IRA being a paramilitary organisation, it had no access to the public media or newspapers. That means that the IRA could reach its audience, and the public at large, only through its statements, which were released through *An Phoblacht*, the republican newspaper of Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican party and its political wing: hence, its statements were the only way the IRA had to inform people about its actions and accomplishments.

## 2 Structure of IRA's statements

The analysis of text-genre structure, that is the way in which information is organised in a text, helps reveal the cognitive structure of the genre and the tactical choices; or, better, strategies; employed by the writer to carry out his/her intent (Bhatia 1993: 19). The use of particular strategies by the members of a specific discourse community in the construction of a particular genre reflects the communicative purpose set by the discourse community for that genre. Therefore, there is an "inevitable connection between the communicative purpose of a particular genre and its typical cognitive structures" (Bhatia 1993: 21).

The following analysis of IRA's statements aims to identify the moves used by the Irish Republican Army to write its statement, pointing out the strategies chosen to achieve its communicative purposes. In general, all the statements have an informative aim, as they often report a review of the actions undertaken by both the IRA and the other parties involved in the conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, we have to consider that they were written by the IRA, thus they are not completely objective in reporting information, but, rather, reflect the *Provisionals'* point of view. As a matter of fact, the IRA often provides a positive self-representation and a negative other-representation, as the following analysis will prove. This leads to the second communicative purpose: promotion. Obviously, it is not overtly declared, but a close analysis of the statements reveals that utterances are formulated in such a way as to promote the actions and decisions made by the IRA.

The communicative purposes pointed out above are the 'general' communicative purpose that characterises all the statements, which can be grouped on the basis of their specific communicative purpose: Easter and New Year statements, ceasefire statements, apology statements, killing statements and, finally, peace process and decommissioning statements. For this analysis, only

those dealing with peace process and decommissioning are analysed thoroughly, as they better reflect the IRA change towards a new peaceful attitude.

### *2.1 Peace process and decommissioning statements*

The great part of the statements issued by the IRA are about the peace process and weapon decommissioning, where the Irish Republican Army provides information on the development of the peace process and the decommissioning of weapons, explaining and describing the decisions it has undertaken to enhance these two processes.

The following statement is used as an example useful to uncover what moves are realised to accomplish the IRA's communicative purpose of informing people about its commitment and about actions, made to enhance the peace process and weapons decommissioning.

(1) The leadership of the IRA is committed to a just and lasting peace. We have sustained that commitment despite the abuse of the peace process by those who persist with the aim of defeating the IRA and Irish republicans.

Republicans believe that the British government claim to a part of Ireland, its denial of national self-determination to the people of the island of Ireland, the partition of our country and the maintenance of social and economic inequality in the Six Counties are the root causes of conflict.

(2) The maintenance of our cessation is our contribution to the peace process and to the creation of a future in which the causes of conflict are resolved by peaceful means. For our part, the IRA leadership is committed to resolving the issue of arms.

(3) The political responsibility for advancing the current situation rests with the two governments, especially the British government, and the leadership of the political parties.

(4) The full implementation, on a progressive and irreversible basis by the two governments, especially the British government, of what they have agreed will

provide a political context, in an enduring political process, with the potential to remove the causes of conflict, and in which Irish republicans and unionists can, as equals, pursue our respective political objectives peacefully.

(5) In that context the IRA leadership will initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put IRA arms beyond use. We will do it in such a way as to avoid risk to the public and misappropriation by others and ensure maximum public confidence.

(6) We will resume contact with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and enter into further discussions with the commission on the basis of the IRA leadership's commitment to resolving the issue of arms.

(7) We look to the two governments and especially the British government to fulfil their commitments under the Good Friday agreement and the joint statement.

(8) To facilitate the speedy and full implementation of the Good Friday agreement and the government's measures, our arms are silent and secure. There is no threat to the peace process from the IRA.

(9) In this context, the IRA leadership has agreed to put in place within weeks a confidence-building measure to confirm that our weapons remain secure. The contents of a number of our arms dumps will be inspected by agreed third parties who will report that they have done so to the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. The dumps will be re-inspected regularly to ensure that the weapons have remained silent. (6 May 2000)

As stated before, the main communicative purpose of peace process and decommissioning statements is to inform people about IRA decisions and commitments; the following are the moves realised to accomplish:

**Move 1:** expressing commitment (1, 2)

**Move 2:** blaming the other parties (3)

**Move 3:** expressing expectations and future intentions (4 - 7, 9)

**Move 4:** issuing reassuring statements (8)

In the opening paragraph (1-2), the IRA expresses its commitment to the search of a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland, caused by the British intrusion in Irish affairs. Then, in (3), the IRA blames the Irish and, in particular, the British governments for the impasse in the peace process, while in the following paragraphs (4-7), the Irish Republican Army expresses what it expects from the two governments in relation to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and also the intention of the IRA to resume contacts with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and to put its arms ‘completely and verifiably’ beyond use. Finally, by means of the last move, the IRA ensures that its arms are silent and that ‘there is no threat to the peace process’ from its side.

Peace process and decommissioning statements are often characterised by a contrastive construction of sentences (10), (11) and (12), which highlights the contraposition between the initiative of the IRA; on the one hand, and of the British and the Unionists on the other:

(10) The leadership of the IRA is committed to a just and lasting peace. We have sustained that commitment despite the abuse of peace process by those<sup>4</sup> who persist with the aim of defeating the IRA and Irish republicans. (IRA statement, 6 May 2000)

(11) As an earnest of our commitment, and despite the British government’s position, the IRA leadership has decided to enter into further discussions with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. (IRA statement, 8 March 2001)

(12) Recent events show that the leadership of unionism have set their face against

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<sup>4</sup> The IRA here refers to the British government and the Unionist party

political change at this time. There is also a real threat to the peace process from the British establishment and its agencies, as well as the loyalist murder gangs. For our part, the IRA remains committed to the search for a just and lasting peace. (IRA statement, 30 October 2002)

## 2.2 Lexical choices

The lexical choices made by the IRA to describe the contextual situation, its expectations and its beliefs are a useful tool for the identification of IRA ideology; these lexical choices are used to stress the new mode which characterises the IRA after its cessation of military operations and its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The following table reports the most frequent lexical words which appear in the IRA statements:

**Table 1 – Most frequent lexical words**

Word	Freq.	%
IRA	175	0.972708583
PEACE	158	0.878216863
PROCESS	144	0.800400198
BRITISH	141	0.783725202
LEADERSHIP	102	0.566950142
GOVERNMENT	88	0.489133447
POLITICAL	81	0.450225115
COMMITMENT	63	0.350175083
IRISH	58	0.322383404
ARMS	55	0.305708408

Firstly, the results shown in Table 1 highlight that ‘peace’ is one of the most frequent words, as it occurs 158 times in the statements, 84 of which together with ‘process’, that is the third most frequent word. This occurrence demonstrates the importance of peace in general, and the peace process in particular, in the IRA’s discourse, as it is one of its main objectives, to which all the decisions and actions made by the IRA members are strictly connected, and also reflects the new attitude of the Irish Republican Army. After the cessation of its military operations, the IRA puts all its efforts in search of a peace settlement in Northern Ireland, completely changing its perspective on the way in which the conflict should be resolved, shifting from ‘military means’ to ‘peaceful



means'. Similarly, the IRA concern about arms decommissioning is proved by the occurrence of the word 'arms' within the first ten most frequent lexical words. The frequency with which 'peace', 'peace process' and 'arms' occur confirm what has been highlighted in the previous section, that is the relevance of the peace process and arms decommissioning as main topics of IRA statements.

Secondly, we can observe that 'IRA' is the most frequent word; it occurs 175 times of which 48 times together with the word 'leadership', fifth in the list, while 'British' occurs 141 times, 79 of which along with the word 'government'. If we proceed through the list, we find that the word 'political' occurs 81 times, of which 11 together with 'process', and along with other occurrences, such as 'political objectives' (5 times and) 'political responsibility' (6 times). The occurrences of the word 'political' with 'process', 'objectives' and 'responsibility' mark the new context, politically oriented, in which the IRA wishes to operate after the end of its armed struggle. It is worth noticing the word 'commitment', which occurs 63 times and mainly makes reference to the commitment of the Irish Republican Army (40 times), or to their volunteers commitment (4 times), so as to highlight the IRA engagement in both the peace process and conflict resolution. Finally, the word 'Irish' occurs 58 times, of which 11 with 'Republicans', 9 with 'freedom' and 8 with 'people'. As 'peace' is a crucial word in IRA's discourse, it is worth considering what the most frequent 'collocations' of this word are in the IRA statements. Sorting the results of the concordances of the word 'peace', in consideration of the first left-collocate word of 'peace', we obtain the following collocations:

- lasting peace, 32 times;
- durable peace, 11 times;
- democratic peace, 9 times;
- Irish peace, 7 times;
- permanent peace, 6 times.

Instead, sorting the results on the basis of the first word on the right, the following collocations were observed:

- peace process, 84 times;
- peace settlement, 15 times.

The words which most frequently co-occur with the word ‘peace’ highlight the search for a durable peaceful settlement, that would put an end to the conflict in Northern Ireland, which characterises the IRA ideology in the period considered for this study.

As pointed out in the previous analysis on the structure of texts, the statements about the peace process and arms decommissioning are characterised by a contrastive structure of propositions; the events are reported by comparing and evaluating the actions performed, on the one hand by the IRA and, on the other hand, by the British and Unionists. However, this way of linking sentences is typical not only of these specific statements but of IRA discourse in general; actually, IRA’s discourse pivots on a firm opposition between them and their ‘enemies’, the British and the Unionists.

This way of constructing the discourse, along with the positive evaluation of IRA’s actions and decisions on the one side, and the high degree of commitment in its statement on the other, contributes to the process of identification of the IRA, of its perspective, commitments and, in particular, of its perception of the reality that surrounds them.

### *2.3 Contrastive structure of propositions*

Taking into account the predominantly contrastive construction of the sentences in the statements, this section investigates the circumstances in which the IRA opted for the use of contrastive and concessive sentences. The frequency list obtained through WordSmith Tools 4.015 provided the results shown below:

**Table 2 – Contrastive and concessive connectors**

Conjunction	Frequency
Despite	18
But	12
Yet	10
However	9
While	9
Instead	7
Rather	6

Although	1
Notwithstanding	1
Though	1
Neither	1

Before proceeding with the analysis, two remarks are needed: firstly, we have to consider that these are results of a quantitative research, and they do not distinguish the different functions a connector can carry out in a text. In fact, the results show that ‘while’ is used nine times, but, actually, six times out of nine, it expresses the state of two clauses being contemporary rather than an opposition. Here follows an example, (13):

(13) We remember with pride Volunteer Patrick Kelly who died during the past year as a direct result of the denial of medical treatment **while** imprisoned in England and send our warmest wishes to his family (8 January 1998)

In the example above, ‘while’ carries out a temporal function, as it indicates that one event has happened in the same period, or at the same time, as another: the death of the IRA Volunteer occurred during his imprisonment in England. Therefore, ‘while’ occurs nine times in the text, but only three in its contrastive function:

(14) “**While** not being party to the Good Friday Agreement, we have taken a number of unprecedented initiatives which further demonstrate our commitment to and desire for a permanent peace in Ireland.” (11 April 2001)

(15) “This<sup>5</sup> was an unprecedented development which involved a very difficult decision by us, and problems for our organisation. **While** mindful of these concerns, our decision was aimed at enhancing the peace process.” (14 August 2001)

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<sup>5</sup> Refers to IRA’s decision to put arms beyond use.

(16) “**While** it was not our intention to injure or kill non-combatants, the reality is that on this<sup>6</sup> and on a number of other occasions, that was the consequence of our actions.” (16 April 2002)

In (14), by means of ‘while’, the IRA stresses that they have taken significant initiatives to settle a permanent peace in Ireland notwithstanding the fact that they were not part of the Good Friday Agreement; in (15), the IRA wants to highlight that they have decided to decommission their weapons despite the organisation’s concern at this regard. Finally, in (16), ‘while’ is used to reduce IRA’s responsibility in the death of non-combatants during its operations, since the death of innocents was beyond IRA’s control, as they were not the IRA’s target.

Likewise, ‘yet’ appears ten times, but only once in a contrastive form, as showed in the following example: “British intransigence was a cause for concern, **yet** hope remained” (7 April 1996). Here, ‘yet’ emphasises that the hope for the realisation of a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland remains, even if the IRA is concerned about the intransigence of the British government in relation to the measures they want take for the resolution of the conflict.

Secondly, in consideration of the high frequency with which these conjunctions occur in the text, only those particularly relevant for the contrastive construction of the IRA’s discourse are taken into consideration.

When providing information about the decisions they made in order to move the peace process forward, the IRA often uses ‘despite’ to stress that they made significant steps forward, in spite of the difficulties they have encountered and even if the other parties involved did not prove the same commitment, and also tried to hinder IRA’s efforts:

(17) The leadership of the IRA is committed to a just and lasting peace. We have sustained that commitment **despite** the abuse of the peace process by those who persist with the aim of defeating the IRA and the Irish republicans. (6 May 2000)

(18) The British government’s position shows that it is not prepared to uphold the

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to IRA’s operation in Belfast in 1972 where 9 people died and many more were injured.

commitments it made over the last number of years. This is totally unacceptable to the IRA. **Despite** this the leadership remains committed to the quest for a lasting peace in our country. (8 March 2001)

(19) IRA guns remain silent, **despite** an onslaught of unionist paramilitary violence against Catholics, including hundreds of attacks and a number of killings over the last year. (8 April 2004)

(20) [...] we honoured the terms of our cessation with discipline and honesty, **despite** numerous attempts to misrepresent those terms by others. (2 February 2005)

In these examples what is emphasised is IRA's decision to bring forward their cessation of military operations, and their commitment to the peace process, irrespective of the difficulties created by the failure of the British government to uphold its commitments, in (18), and despite the obstructionism of the Unionists, in (17). The IRA claims that it has fulfilled its promises even after serious events, such as the violent acts against the Catholics, in (19), and the misrepresentation of IRA actions by the British and Unionists, in (20).

Similarly, 'however', in (21) and (22), and 'notwithstanding', in (23), are used to express the intention of the IRA to perform actions that would enhance the peace process despite the British failures in fulfilling their commitments:

(21) Subsequent actions by the British government including a continued failure to fulfil its commitments, remove the conditions necessary for progress. On August 14 we withdrew our proposal. **However**, as an earnest of our willingness to resolve the issue of arms, the IRA leadership wish to confirm that our representative will intensify the engagement with the IICD. (20 September 2001)

(22) That cessation ended in February 1996 because the British government acted in bad faith when the then British Prime Minister John Major and Unionist leaders squandered that unprecedented opportunity to resolve the conflict. **However**, we

remained ready to engage positively and in July 1997 we reinstated the cessation on the same basis as before. (2 February 2005)

(23) **Notwithstanding** these difficulties our decision have been taken to advance our republican and democratic objectives, including our goal of a united Ireland. (28 July 2005)

In other cases, (24) and (25), instead, ‘however’ is used to stress that the IRA is actually engaged in the creation of a context that would allow a democratic settlement in Northern Ireland; nevertheless, their commitments and their actions are not enough; therefore, a collective effort is needed to achieve and maintain peace in Northern Ireland, and the British government, with the Unionists, has to play its part:

(24) The IRA’s commitment is without question. **However**, as we have said before, peace making and peace keeping is a collective effort. (20 September 2001)

(25) We remain committed to achieving our republican objectives. **However**, the securing of a democratic peace settlement is not solely a task for Irish republicans and we are mindful of the primary obligation of the British government and of the Unionist leadership. (8 April 2002)

All in all, it can be noticed that, ‘while’, ‘yet’, ‘despite’, ‘however’ and ‘notwithstanding’ are often used in sentences that emphasise the opposition between the conduct of the IRA on the one hand, and the conduct of the British and Unionists on the other hand. The problems or the difficulties the IRA tries to overcome are usually expressed in the first clause, while the actions and decisions the IRA takes to overcome these problems are expressed in the second clause.

The contexts in which ‘instead’ and ‘rather’ are used are slightly different. In some occasions, they link two clauses, one expressing what the British government should have done, according to the IRA, to enhance the peace process, and the other expressing, on the contrary, what the British actually did in contrast with the IRA expectations:

(26) The British, **rather than** seize the moment, sought only to avoid any meaningful engagement in the Irish peace process. (7 April 1996)

(27) **Instead** of embracing the peace process, the British government acted in bad faith with Mr Major and the Unionist leaders squandering this unprecedented opportunity to resolve the conflict. (9 February 1996)

(28) **Instead** of an implementation of confidence-building measures they have continue with the remilitarisation policy of their predecessors in government. (8 January 1998)

In the excerpts listed above is it possible to observe how the IRA reproaches the British for not having taken advantage of the cessation declared in August 1994, in (26), or for having failed to embrace the peace process, (27), and for having, instead, avoided any engagement in the process and continued the remilitarisation policy carried out by John Major, the then Prime Minister (28). Similarly, 'rather than' is used in sentences, (29) and (30), in which the IRA blames the British for their continued attempt to defeat republicans, instead of seeking to move towards a peaceful resolution, as the IRA did:

(29) [...] others within the British and Irish establishments have persisted with the idea of defeating republicans **rather than** moving forward. (8 April 2004)

(30) The concerted efforts of both governments since then to undermine the integrity of our cause, by seeking to criminalise the republican struggle, is clear evidence that our opponents remain fixated with the objective of defeating republicans **rather than** developing the peace process. (23 March 2005)

To conclude, some connectors are used to stress the opposition between the actions performed by the actors involved, the IRA, the British and Unionists, while others are used to emphasise the mistakes made by the British and Unionists in clear contrast with what they should have done

instead, according to the IRA expectations. Nevertheless, ‘despite’, ‘however’, ‘while’ as well as ‘rather than’ and ‘instead’ always contribute to the construction of the IRA’s discourse based on the strong opposition ‘us’, the republicans, versus ‘them’, the British government and the Unionists. This communicative strategy has two aims: on one side, it aims at portraying the British government, and also Unionists, in a bad light. This is achieved by blaming them both for the ineffective measures adopted to enhance the peace process and for their attempts to block and undermine the achievement of a peaceful settlement. On the other, this strategy aims at redeeming the Irish Republican Army, which has always been blamed for its armed struggle, and this is achieved by means of the negative representation of the British and Unionists, in clear contrast with the IRA’s efforts in the peace process. As a matter of fact, the IRA’s armed struggle was considered by the British and Unionists as one of the main causes which prevented the necessary conditions for the resolution of the conflict from taking place. By reporting the actions it had made in favour of the peace process, such as the end of the armed campaign and the arms decommissioning, the IRA wanted to prove to the Irish people that it could no more be blamed for being the cause which prevented the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland from becoming effective.

#### 2.4 ‘Action as a reaction’

Another recurrent feature in the construction of the IRA’s discourse is the presentation of the actions performed by the IRA as a ‘reaction’ to the decisions made by the British, and not as a deliberate choice. In this way, the IRA tries to justify and legitimate the difficult decisions it has to make. Here follow some examples:

(31) The IRA whose mandate for armed struggle derives from Britain’s denial of the fundamental right of the Irish people to national self-determination and sovereignty has made its position abundantly clear. (7 April 1996)

(32) Those who have made the political process conditional on the decommissioning of silenced IRA guns are responsible for the current crisis in the peace process. In the light of these changed circumstances the leadership of the IRA have decided to end our engagement with the IICD. We are also withdrawing all



propositions put to the IICD by our representative since November. (15 February 2000)

(33) Because the British government has yet not honoured its undertakings, we have not resumed discussions with the IICD. (25 October 2000)

(34) The subsequent actions of the British government, including their failure to fulfil their commitments, is also totally unacceptable. The condition therefore do not exist for progressing our proposition. We are withdrawing our proposal. (14 August 2001)

(35) We do not intend to remain quiescent within this unacceptable and unstable situation.[...] Consequently, on reassessment of our position and in response to the governments and others withdrawing their commitments we are taking all our proposals off the table. (2 February 2005)

In (31), for example, the IRA states that their armed struggle is the response to the injustices perpetrated by the British against the Irish people, therefore, their struggle is legitimated by the negative conduct of the British in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the armed campaign is defined in terms of defence against British intrusion in Northern Ireland. Similarly, in the other examples (32), (33), (34) and (35), the IRA attributes its decision to withdraw the proposals they presented to the Independent International Commission on decommissioning to the failure of the British government to fulfil its commitments. In this way, the IRA tries to reduce its responsibility in relation to those actions that would delay and damage the peace progress, and blames the British for this breakdown. The use of antithetical construction and the presentation of IRA's actions as reaction are two of the main strategies used by the IRA to construct its discourse, in which they proceed by providing a positive self-representation, in contrast with the British and Unionist negative representation.

### 3 Conclusions

This analysis of the IRA statements has highlighted some of the features which characterise the discourse of the Irish Republican Army: above all, it can be observed that the Republican paramilitary organisation used its statements to provide information about its actions and decisions, performed and taken to contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions for a durable peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland. The analysis proves that the IRA used its statements to express its intention of making people aware of all the decisions the paramilitary organisation took to guarantee a peaceful resolution to the conflict of Northern Ireland. Until 1994, the Irish Republican Army attempted to put an end to British rule by means of its armed struggle and military means, but after the ceasefire declaration of 31 August 1994, the attitude of the IRA completely changed and started moving towards more peaceful means to achieve the same objectives. This radical change is reflected in IRA discourse in the words used to report and describe its attitude and actions.

The Peace process is the underlying topic which recurs in all the statements issued by the IRA from August 1994 to July 2005. The relevance of the Peace process is reflected by the lexical choices made by the IRA, since the analysis proved that the most frequently used words in the statements are 'peace', along with 'process'. The frequent occurrence of these two words stresses the IRA's new perspective on how the conflict should be resolved, i.e. no longer relying on military means, but rather on peaceful means. They clearly reflect the subjective viewpoint of the Irish Republican Army: as stated above, these statements are used to describe and promote IRA actions, commitments and decisions, which are always positively evaluated. As regards the Peace process, it is often stressed how the IRA acted to 'contribute', 'enhance', 'facilitate' this process. This positive evaluation is constantly in contrast with the negative evaluation that characterises the description of the British and Unionist attempts to block and undermine the Peace process. The IRA's intention is to emphasise the differences between its commitment in the search for a durable settlement in Northern Ireland and the British lack of commitment, pointing out how the British government wasted and rejected the chances offered them with the ceasefire and weapons decommissioning declarations issued by the IRA.

The recurring description and positive evaluation of the IRA's actions reflect its need to prove the change it has undergone: in order to achieve a permanent and peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland, the IRA decided it was time to give up its armed struggle, putting aside the ideology that

had characterised the Republican paramilitary army from 1969 to 1994. By means of the ceasefire and arms decommissioning, the IRA wanted to get rid of all the accusations, moved by the British of being the main cause of the social unrest in Northern Ireland. By providing evidence of how it acted in favour of the Peace process, the IRA tried to redeem itself and to let people recognise the efforts it had made to create a climate that would contribute to achieve political and social stability in Northern Ireland.

All the features of IRA discourse analysed in this paper can be considered the linguistic instruments the Irish Republican Army used to defend itself from the accusations made by the British Government and the Unionists, seen as the two dominant groups. The way in which the IRA shapes its discourse, in relation to the context in which it is developed, determines the assumptions that allow the readers to consider the IRA's discourse as a resistant discourse conceived to challenge dominance.

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