An Ideological Analysis of Persuasion in Biden’s Speech on Environmental Crisis

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to delve into Biden's speech on climate change. The objective of this study is to analyse the intended ideas and fundamental characteristics of the American President Joe Biden's political speech presented at the virtual leaders' conference on climate opening on April 22, 2021. In order to reach the central goal of the study, critical discourse analysis is employed as a main theoretical framework to examine Biden’s speech. The analysis of the selected data is conducted by drawing upon van Dijk’s four ideological strategies; actor description, consensus, number game as micro strategies and positive self-presentation as a macro strategy. The findings of the study revealed that this speech has its idiosyncratic characteristics and that language is used considerately to unveil the implicit ideologies of the speaker as a political leader. The president uses the aforementioned strategies to persuade the international world of his power and influence in dealing with major concerns, one of which being climate change.

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تحليل أيديولوجي للإقناع في خطاب بايدن حول الأزمة البيئية

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المستخلص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى التبحر في خطاب بايدن حول تغير المناخ. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحليل الأفكار المقصودة والخصائص الأساسية للخطاب السياسي للرئيس الأمريكي جو بايدن الذي ألقاه في افتتاح مؤتمر القيادة الافتراضي حول المناخ في 22 ابريل 2021. ومن أجل الوصول إلى الهدف المركزي للدراسة، تم استخدام التحليل النقدي للخطاب كإطار نظري رئيسي للدراسة. يتم إجراء تحليل البيانات المختارة من خلال الاعتماد على الاستراتيجيات الأيديولوجية الأربعة لفان دايك؛ وصف الفاعل، الإجماع، لعبة الأرقام ك استراتيجيات جزئية، والعرض الذاتي الإيجابي ك استراتيجيات كلاية.

وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن هذا الخطاب له خصائصه المميزة وأن اللغة تستخدم بشكل مدروس لكشف النقاب عن...
الأيديولوجيات الضمنية للمتحدث كقائد سياسي، يستخدم الرئيس الاستراتيجيات المذكورة أعلاه لإقناع العالم الدولي بقوته ونفوذه في التعامل مع المخاوف الرئيسية، وأحدها تغير المناخ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغير المناخي، بايدن، الخطاب السياسي، التحليل النقدي للخطاب، استراتيجيات فان دايك

1. Introduction

According to Hodge & Kress,(1993), language is utilised for both communication and dominance. As a technique for exerting control over others, the endeavours are always accompanied by language laden with authority. Beginning in infancy, language is essential to our social and cognitive development, as well as the formation of our identities. Sociolinguistics has long focused on how individuals react to the speech of others.

In the field of social psychology, attitudes toward language are a significant focus. Long have sociolinguistics and social psychology had overlapping interests and involvements in the study of language attitudes. (Garret, 2001).

According to Holmes (2001), attitudes about language ultimately reflect views toward language users and uses. In a community, the standard variety enjoys "overt prestige" (Holmes, 2001, p.344). Individuals are highly regarded in terms of education and employment, and These evaluations are based on the meanings of their different types of speech, which is generally thought to be the best way for a group to communicate. Positive attitudes toward nonstandard or vernacular speech variations are referred to as covert speech (Holmes, 2001).

Indeed, politics is usually related with actions that have an impact on government or society acts and policies. One of the goals of politics is to exert power over another person by influencing their conduct. Individuals in politics require political strategy, and the techniques by which they do this vary depending on the goal. Political ideology comprises a variety of strategies, the most basic of which is the method developed and used to achieve the goal (Keyes, 2008).

The study depends on critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) as an approach that deals with the examination and analysis of written or spoken language in order to ascertain the presence of power, domination, and inequality. A study of social, political, and historical contexts looks at how life is sustained and reproduced. The basic purpose of CDA is to make an obvious link between speech, social behaviour, and society as a whole (Fowler, 1991). In a summary, the study focuses on Biden's remarks at his virtual climate change summit, 2021. The datum is collected from www. whitehouse.gov.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA was characterised by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) as a language-based social, political, and ideological practise. Language, according to CDA, does not gain power on its own; rather, it acquires power through the usage of powerful individuals (Wodak, 2001). In the same milieu, Bloor and Bloor (2007, p.1), suggest that CDA examines “the ways language is used to persuade and manipulate both individuals and social groups”.

Also, CDA is a type of discourse analysis that looks at how social power abuse, supremacy, and inequality are shown, kept going, and fought against through text and speech in social and political settings (van Dijk, 2011).

It can be concluded that scholars interested in the relationship between language and society may use CDA to explain, clarify, and understand that relationship (Rogers, 2003).

2.2 Political Discourse

Schaffner (1996) suggests that political communication can be divided into two types based on function and theme. Political speech is defined by its cultural and historical contexts. It plays a variety of roles depending on the political climate. It is also thematic in the sense that all of its themes are closely linked to politics, like political actions, connections, as well as thoughts.

Additionally, political discourse demonstrates the media's, political parties', power groups', political workers', and pressure organizations' political activity. It is concerned with the representation of identity, the reconstruction and embodiment of ideology, the abuse of power, power dominance, and power manipulation. Political leaders and pressure organizations communicate their positions via periodicals, newspapers, and novels, among other mediums. By and large, the media plays a critical role in disseminating politicians' views. Numerous studies reveal that in a variety of nations and cultures, media discourse conveys ideological signals (Wodak, 1995).

According to Chilton (2004), Politics is perceived as a power struggle between those attempting to maintain positions of authority and those seeking to depose them. Certain countries rely on power struggles, whether democracies are genuinely democratic or not. Politics, on the other hand, is considered as a collaborative enterprise, as indicated by the processes used by society to settle conflicts of interest over money and power. Again, it is debatable whether democracies are truly self-contained.

2.3 Ideology

Ideology permeates language in numerous ways at several levels, and actually we are not obliged to choose between multiple plausible 'locations' of ideology, each of which looks to be partially justified but none of which is completely adequate. The important question is whether ideology is a structural or an event quality, and the answer is both. And the most important issue is to create an adequate explanation of the dialectic of structures and events (Fairclough, 1995).
In addition, van Dijk (1998) characterised ideology as a distinct mode of social cognition shared by members of a specific social class. Ideologies serve as the basis for the social behaviours of group members, restraining their speech while also serving as the means for ideological formation, challenge, and replication.

3. Methodology

It is unlikely that language alone can distinguish ideologies, as both the right and the left can effectively sustain political concepts. Political applications of speech patterns, such as the usage of pronouns as ingroup and outgroup strategies of persuasion, are possible, but the majority of ideological disparity will be established at the stage of meaning (van Dijk, 2006). As a result, the researcher relies on four of van Dijk's (2006) ideological data analysis strategies:

1. ACTOR DESCRIPTION: Our ideologies also affect how we describe actors in discourses. In general, ingroup members are portrayed in a neutral or positive manner, whereas outgroup members are portrayed negatively (van Dijk, 2006).

2. CONSENSUS: In situations where the nation is endangered, such as by an external attack, it is a well-known political strategy to claim or assert on cross-party or national consensus. Immigration is commonly perceived as a hazard (van Dijk, 2006).

3. NUMBER GAME: A great deal of argumentation focuses on establishing credibility by emphasising objectivity. In our society, numbers and statistics are the most persuasive means of demonstrating objectivity, and they frequently characterise press reporting (van Dijk, 2006).

4. POSITIVE SELF-PRESENTATION: “Whether or not in combination with the derogation of outgroups, group-talk is often characterized by another overall strategy, namely that of ingroup favoritism or positive self-presentation” (van Dijk, 2006, p. 739).

In fact, the micro and macro strategies are chosen as the primary tools of investigation in order to disclose the president's latent attitudes about environmental issues.

4. Data Analysis

The current study, which adheres to Van Dijk's ideological technique of textual analysis, focuses on the written language of Biden's remarks at the virtual leaders' summit on climate change. This technique conducts investigation at both the micro and macro levels. Beginning with the first strategy, actor description, it is offered initially in order to highlight the characters based on the editor's viewpoint, such as people, experts, workers, engineers, farmers, scientists and communities which are presented to positively indicate the all groups of society have a key role in achieving the climate equation, which will succeed by uniting together as one nation as illustrated in the following examples:
- “You know, your leadership on this issue is a statement to the people of your nation and to the people of every nation, especially our young people, that we’re ready to meet this moment” (Biden, 2021).

- “I talked to the experts, and I see the potential for a more prosperous and equitable future” (Biden, 2021).

- “I see workers capping hundreds of thousands of abandoned oil and gas wells that need to be cleaned up, and abandoned coalmines that need to be reclaimed” (Biden, 2021).

- “I see autoworkers building the next generation of electric vehicles” (Biden, 2021).

- “I see engineers and the construction workers building new carbon capture and green hydrogen plants to forge cleaner steel and cement and produce clean power” (Biden, 2021).

- “I see farmers deploying cutting-edge tools to make soil of our — of our Heartland the next frontier in carbon innovation” (Biden, 2021).

- “We know just how critically important that is because scientists tell us that this is the decisive decade” (Biden, 2021).

- “Thank you for being part of the summit. Thank you for the communities that you — and the commitments you have made, the communities you’re from” (Biden, 2021).

In terms of consensus, it is noteworthy to pay attention to some terms, such as “the united states”, “nation”, “we”, “America”, “our countries” and “Glasgow” are employed to confirm the president’s genuine intention to solve the climate change problems, as we can see in the following statements:

- “The United States isn’t waiting. We are resolving to take action — not only the — our federal government, but our cities and our states all across our country” (Biden, 2021).

- “By maintaining those investments and putting these people to work, the United States sets out on the road to cut greenhouse gases in half — in half by the end of this decade” (Biden, 2021).

- “That’s where we’re headed as a nation, and that’s what we can do if we take action to build an economy that’s not only more prosperous, but healthier, fairer, and cleaner for the entire planet” (Biden, 2021).

- “No nation can solve this crisis on our own, as I know you all fully understand. All of us, all of us — and particularly those of us who represent the world’s largest economies” (Biden, 2021).

- “The steps our countries take between now and Glasgow will set the world up for success to protect livelihoods around the world and keep global warming at a maximum of 1.5 degrees Celsius” (Biden, 2021).

Within the number game strategy, the president mentions numbers, such as “500,000” in order to make his audience proud of his achievements within the country he tries to
rebuild. Besides, he adds “net-zero emissions, 15% and 2050” in a reference that his country will definitely solve the crisis of the nation. 1.5 degree Celsius refers to his ability to stabilize the temperature of the planet to reduce global warming as an effective way to solve the problem of climate change. Overall, it is a matter of objectivity and reliability. The following examples highlight this idea:

- “I see autoworkers building the next generation of electric vehicles, and electricians installing nationwide for 500,000 charging stations along our highways” (Biden, 2021).

- “You know, these steps will set America on a path of net-zero emissions economy by no later than 2050. But the truth is, America represents less than 15 percent of the world’s emissions” (Biden, 2021).

- “We must try to keep the Earth’s temperature and — to an increase of — to 1.5 degrees Celsius” (Biden, 2021).

- “You know, the world beyond 1.5 degrees means more frequent and intense fires, floods, droughts, heat waves, and hurricanes tearing through communities” (Biden, 2021).

Through the positive self-presentation strategy, the president portrays people positively, such as “people of our nation”, “people of every nation” and “our young people” as ingroups who are a part of his campaign to save the planet.

Additionally, by employing the pronoun “I”, the president expresses himself positively for being the only leader who proposes the idea of investing climate change to serve the working class as exemplified below:

- “I’d like to build — I want to build a — a critical infrastructure to produce and deploy clean technology” (Biden, 2021).

- “I talked to the experts, and I see the potential for a more prosperous and equitable future” (Biden, 2021).

- “Time is short, but I believe we can do this. And I believe that we will do this” (Biden, 2021).

Besides, he employs “our colleagues”, “we”, “our federal government”, our cities and “our states” to positively refer to his country that will definitely has the power to solve the climate crisis as shown below:

- “We are resolving to take action — not only the — our federal government, but our cities and our states all across our country; small businesses, large businesses, large corporations; American workers in every field” (Biden, 2021).

In a nutshell, pronouns, such as “us”, “we”, “our”, “your”, “I” and “all” are also introduced positively to indicate all the nations participated in this summit have the power and influence to get this job done perfectly. Many examples are used to clarify this situation:
“I thank you. You know, your leadership on this issue is a statement to the people of your nation and to the people of every nation, especially our young people, that we’re ready to meet this moment” (Biden, 2021).

“I’d like to buil— I want to build a — a critical infrastructure to produce and deploy clean technology — both those we can harness today and those that we’ll invent tomorrow” (Biden, 2021).

“We must get on the path now in order to do that” (Biden, 2021).

“Thank you for being part of the summit. Thank you for the communities that you — and the commitments you have made, the communities you’re from. God bless you all” (Biden, 2021).

“And I look forward to progress that we can make together today and beyond. We really have no choice. We have to get this done” (Biden, 2021).

5. Findings and Discussion

Based on the previous analysis, it could be understood that the president Biden via video conference employs many strategies to convince the global audience of his power to solve the most problematic case that occupies world public opinion. First of all, the actor description strategy is introduced to positively review the work of the middle class, which has a great impact on solving the difficult equation of the climate dilemma.

Consensus as a political techniques is also used by the president in order to persuade the audience of the influence of his country and its ability to solve big problems and climate change is one of them.

Moreover, the number game strategy is employed by the president as a tool of persuading since numbers indicate objectivity and validity in order to be sincere in his claim in front of the world. Finally and in the light of macro strategies, the positive self-presentation strategy is utilized to positively spotlight the tremendous work that is being done by his workers, scientists and all nations that are participating in this summit since they have a genuine effort in dealing with the current climate problem.

6. Conclusion

Regarding the ideological strategies are employed in the president’s speech, it can be concluded that the president focuses on the actions of ingroups more than outgroups; he tries to reveal the positive traits of his people as a real united nation seeking for a healthier environment free of carbon dioxide emissions. Furthermore, he exaggerates the use of pronouns to achieve the same purpose, i.e. to generalize the idea of joint action undertaken by the country in cooperation with all other countries to solve the crisis soon.

This study's primary goal is to examine Biden's ideological strategies, which demonstrate his ability to persuade the world to believe his claims.
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