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The Representation of America and China in Trump's Press Conferences
Concerning COVID-19: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the construction of “Self” and the “Other” in President Donald Trump’s political discourse concerning COVID-19. The study is based on two Critical Discourse Analysis approaches which are van Dijk’s ideological square and Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach. Van Dijk’s ideological square is utilized to investigate the representation of the “self” and the “other” throughout Trump’s conferences. Fairclough’s three-dimensional model is utilized to reveal the lexical items that are used in Trump’s political discourse to construct the “self” and the “other”. Fourteen press conferences of Trump are used for the analysis. The data is selected between periods from February 2020, until September 2020. This period represents the period of appearance and the spreading of COVID-19. The results of the study revealed that before the spreading of COVID-19, China was represented in a positive portrayal, while after the spreading of COVID-19; China was represented in a negative portrayal. On the other hand, America was represented in a positive and noble portrayal after and before the outbreak of COVID-19. Furthermore, lexical items, such as “*China virus, Wuhan virus, Wuhan labs, Kung flu, got out of control, etc.*” are associated with China, to hold it responsible for creating and spreading COVID-19.

Keywords: *Critical discourse analysis, van Dijk’s ideological square, Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach, Trump’s press conferences, China, America, COVID-19.*

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INTRODUCTION

Political discourse is considered a complex human activity that plays a central role in the organization and management of society (Akinwotu, 2013: p.43). Language is considered the main tool of political discourse, as it is a very powerful weapon in winning public support. Thus, politicians use a wide variety of linguistic devices to achieve their goals. Such goals indicate shaping the thoughts of the people, or convincing them to act as they want, manipulating their feelings against other governments, and driving them to follow the politicians' beliefs. Their language reveals their attitude towards other governments which may consider as enemies or competitors for them.

A novel virus is appeared by the end of 2019 in China, precisely in Wuhan. This infectious disease spread all over the world, which is commonly named Coronavirus (the formal and medical name is: COVID-19); the medical name is COVID-19. The World Health Organization announced it by the 11th of March 2020 as a pandemic. Many countries, especially in Europe, have suffered from increasing cases and collapsing medical institutions. The political eyes were turned towards creating medication and a vaccine for this unknown virus. Opinions were varied about the origin of the virus; some claimed that its genesis is from China, others were claimed that it is made in Chinese labs! These

variations have been led to a war of words against China, especially by the United States.

The relations between America and China were deteriorating severely under the presidency of Donald Trump. Through 2019, some political observers were started to warn about a new cold war, such as 'Kimberly Ann Elliott' has written "Why a Cold War with China Would Be So Costly", published on June 25, 2019, "Lee Jeong-ho" who wrote "Is a China-US cold war inevitable? Chinese analysts say it can't be ruled out" published on 14 Aug 2019, and 'Mehari Taddele Maru' who wrote "A new cold war in Africa: Increasing tensions between China and the US will be detrimental to African prosperity and peace". By May 2020, both sides began to attack the other regarding guilt for the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this study, the researcher intends to analyze the representation of the "self" and the "other" throughout China in Trump's political discourse. 14 press conferences are selected between the periods of the appearance of COVID-19 from January/2020, until July/2020. The study seeks to investigate the representation of America (the Self) and China (the Other) in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study examines political discourses systematically chosen to see the range of ideological strategies whether positive or negative.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The term Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) is used to refer to “the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (Fairclough, 1989, p.24). In other words, CDA is defined as an interdisciplinary approach, it views language as social practice, and aims to “investigate how social power relations are established and reinforced through language use” (Serafini and Gee, 2017: p. 199). Thus, it is not just related to analyzing the structure of the text, or linguistic features and meanings, but it investigates the critically social or historical situation in which social variation is expressed, established, and legitimized by discourse, or language use (Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

Richardson (2007) defines Critical Discourse analysis as "a theory and method analyzing the way that individuals and institutions use language" (cited in Mayr; 2008, p. 8). According to Simpson and Mayr (2009), institutional discourses can "make, form, and enforce discourse," cultivating "specific kinds of identities to fit their own intent" since they are primary sites for "truth creation." Mayr defines discourse as a social practice. He emphasizes that the Critical Discourse Analysis approach focuses on relationships between ideology "discourse, power, dominance, and social inequality", thus

it represents broader social affairs. (Mayr; 2009, 8-9).

Numerous studies employed Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the ideology in Trump's discourse, but limited studies were related to the representation of China concerning COVID-19. Yu, H. et al. (2021) researched the COVID-19 discourse characteristics in China Daily and The Guardian newspapers. AlAfnan (2020) examined media bias, superiority, and philosophies by analyzing the American Washington Post newspaper, and the Chinese People's daily newspapers articles on COVID 19. Dezhkameh, A. et al. (2020) used CDA to investigate COVID-19 in Iranian and American publications.

Zhu and Wang (2020) studied two political discourses conveyed by President Trump and the Chinese foreign minister. Olimat (2020) investigated the dysphemistic expressions in Trump's speeches about COVID-19. Bustan & Alakrash (2020) concentrated on Trump's political discourse used on Twitter. They investigated the strategies of impoliteness in Donald Trump's tweets concerning the countries of the Middle East.

Khan et al. (2019) looked at how Muslims were represented in Donald Trump's statements. Chen W. (2018) looked at Donald Trump's inaugural address from the viewpoints of "transitivity, modality, personal pronoun,

and coherence". Rohmah (2018) looked at how Critical Discourse Analysis is organized in Donald Trump's talks. Quinonez (2018) looked into Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric in speeches before and after the US presidential election.

Unlike the previous researches, this study contains more details about China's portrayal in Trump's COVID-19 statements. It also looks into the representation of China and America in Trump press conferences. Additionally, none of the previous studies are focused on the struggle between America and China. Fourteen press conferences are elected from February/ 2020, until September /2020. The selection of data is restricted to the period of appearance and spreading of COVID-19.

FIARCLOUGH'S THREE-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

Fairclough (1989) interprets language as a form of social practice, stating that "Discourse refers to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part" (cited in Mullard & Cole, 2007: 18). He argues that critical analysts should not only concentrate on the texts, the text production's process, and texts' interpretation, but should also take into their consideration the interrelationship between texts, their social context, and the processes of production (ibid). Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) argue about the essential aim of Fairclough's three-dimensional approach based on the assumption that the

texts are ambiguous and impossible to be analyzed in isolation because "they can only be understood with webs of other texts and with the social context" (p. 70). Lexical and syntactic dimensions, of Fairclough's model, will be employed in this study. This study is based on lexical analysis. The lexical analysis consists of three dimensions: the experiential Value of words, the relational value of words, and the expressive value of words. These dimensions are explained below:

1- Experiential Value of Words: Fairclough (2001: p. 94) states that experiential values "reflects the knowledge and beliefs of the producer in question, which is evident in the choice of wordings". In this study, the researcher will concentrate on overwording and categorization. Pierce (2008) defines overwording by stating that "Overwording indicates a preoccupation with certain aspects of reality, which may reveal an ideological struggle" (p.293). Categorization reflects the way ideological expressions are organized to indicate the image of Self and the Other in Trump's discourse. Fairclough (2001) indicates that it is possible to examine the experience values of a specific text by analyzing its classification schemes.

2- Relational Value of Words: Fairclough (2001) defines the Relational value of words as "social relationships are enacted via the text in the discourse" (p. 93). This dimension underlines how words are used to create social

ties between participants in discourse. The researcher utilized euphemism to reveal whether Trump used euphemistic expressions to represent China. Euphemisms are ideologically bound techniques in which a "word or an expression" is used to replace "a taboo word" or to avoid mentioning such acts or subjects" (Fromkin et al., 2007). Euphemism is widely used in political debate as a rhetorical technique obliquely to materialize ideological coercion (Blackledge, 2006: cited in Mohamed Abidi, 2015). Euphemism is based on diminishing a negative characteristic or deliberately switching the means or names by which it is embedded, resulting in hidden and beneficial connotative meanings (Lutz, 1989).

3- Expressive Value of Words: Fairclough (2001: p. 93) defines the Expressive value of words as "A formal feature with expressive value is a trace of and a cue to the producer's evaluation (in the widest sense) of the bit of the reality it relates to. Expressive value is to do with subjects and social identities. The researcher, in this study, will focus on the predictive and pronominal adjectives to discover the expressive value of words used in Trump's press conferences. Biber et al (2007) argue that predicative adjective "occurs in the subject predicative position, following a copular verb" (p. 459). Pronominal adjectives are defined "as pre-modifier before a noun 'occurring before the head noun in a noun phrase'" (ibid: p. 455).

VAN DIJK'S IDEOLOGICAL SQUARE

Since our data is based on a political speech, it is necessary to point out the ideological strategies that are included in Trump's discourse, thus we will rely on Van Dijk's "ideological Square". Van Dijk's ideological square model is based on "emphasize Our good things and Their bad things, a form of polarization that is semantically implemented by contrast" (van Dijk, 2006: p.49). Four conceptual possibilities are treated in van Dijk's model, to deal with text, discourse, and conversation. These possibilities focus on emphasizing our good things, and their bad things, as well as the de-emphasizing of our bad things and their good things (Van Dijk: 2006). In ideological concepts, therefore, positive self-representation and negative other-representation are prevalent, suggesting "We are good and they are bad" (Van Dijk, 1998: p. 25).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

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METHOD

Design

This study's main focus is on political speech. In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative approach to investigate Donald Trump's description of China during the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States. The current study focused on the qualitative approach of analysis because it didn't only examine: when and where, but also how and why the problem appeared. Creswell (2020) argues: because it is a descriptive method that explains the outcomes obtained from the collected data (p. 11-15). Discourse analyzers do not mention the sample size of their specified corpus because a large sample will produce an uncontrolled amount of data that will not contribute to the study's analytical result. As a result, Waikar (2018) argues that a small sample size of the corpus can yield analytical and valuable conclusions in discourse research.

Data Collection Tools

The current study, of critical discourse analysis, focuses on the analysis of political discourse. The study is based on spoken discourses, precisely, Donald Trump's press conferences. Fourteen press conferences, of Trump, are retrieved from two official news channels <https://www.whitehouse.gov> and <https://www.rev.com> the researcher matched the press conferences with the transcript of the official channels.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study is based on two approaches van Dijk's ideological square and Fairclough's three-dimensional models. Van Dijk's (1998) ideological square model was employed to observe how Trump represented China, through his political discourse about COVID-19. The three-dimensional framework of Fairclough will be utilized to identify and analyze the vocabularies and linguistics choices employed by President Trump to depict America and China throughout the spread of COVID-19.

FINDINGS

The lexical level in this research consists of Fairclough three dimensional model of a word's value, which consists of the experiential, relational, and expressive value of words. The research focused on overwording and categorization throughout the experiential analysis. The relational value is analyzed by

investigating euphemistic expressions. Furthermore, the expressive value of words is based on the investigation of the prenominal adjectives and the predicative adjectives.

Overwording in Trump's press conferences shows that he represents China as an evil force that knowingly spreads the virus and causes all of America's and the rest of the world's problems. Since it was hiding the true nature of the virus, as well as the true number of cases in COVID-19, it spread it on purpose and was unable to stop it from the start. As in: *"The world is now suffering as a result of the malfeasance of the Chinese government"* on May 29, 2020, *"China's cover-up of the Wuhan virus allowed the disease to spread all over the world"* on May 29, 2020, *"A gift from China. Not good. They should have stopped it ..."* on June 5, 2020.

Trump portrays America as a good organization that makes sacrifices to save lives and defeats COVID-19, although the virus has harmed America's economy, which Trump says is caused by China. He emphasizes the advantages of the early ban which he was made on China. As a result, he stresses that China is spreading it intentionally. As a result, he stresses the (Self's) nobleness and the (Self) wickedness (Other). Trump uses evil expressions to refer to China, while he used to use positive expressions to refer to America. Van Dijk's ideological square, emphasizes our

good characteristics (America) and emphasizes their bad characteristics (China). As in: *"We're dealing with them. We're giving them certain advice"* on February 26-2020., *"We acted extremely early in keeping China out of our country and banning people from China coming in, other than our citizens"* on 11 May – 2020, *"We saved tens of thousands of lives with that decision."* on 5 June 2020, *"We have waged a fierce battle against the invisible enemy — the China virus"* on 22- September-2020.

On the other hand, throughout characterization, Trump associates positive attributes with America and negative attributes with China throughout the categorization process. Such positive characteristics were exemplified by the sacrifices made by America during the COVID-19 period:

- *"We're dealing with them. We're giving them certain advice"* (26 Feb.)
- *"We made a lot of good decisions"* (18 Apr.)
- *"We're working on it strongly"* (30 Apr.).
- *"We saved tens of thousands of lives"* (5 Jun.)
- *"We're placing massive tariffs"* (14 July)
- *"We took swift and early action to ban"* (23 June).

China, on the other hand, is represented by negative characteristics such as being responsible for the spread of the virus, which has caused great economic damage to America and the rest of the world. Such declarations can be found in Trump's press conferences, for example:

- *"They were knowingly responsible (18 April).*
- *"I'm not happy with China" on (11 May).*
- *"the world is now suffering Of the Chinese government" (29 May).*
- *"China's cover-up of the Wuhan virus" (29 May)*
- *"The world needs answers from China" (29 May).*
- *"They didn't stop it cold from coming to the United States" on (5 June)..."*

The relational value of words in this study, exemplified with euphemisms in Trump's political discourse. Throughout the analysis of Trump's discourse, we notice that Trump tends to use the dysphemistic expression, rather than euphemistic expressions. Euphemistic expressions were restricted in limited periods, throughout the first appearance of COVID-19, since the virus did not yet attack America. During the 26th of February and the 21st of March, Trump uses euphemistic statements to express his positive attitude toward China. Trump's positive attitude toward China's government is

exemplified by frequent referring to China's hard-working concerning COVID-19, for instance:

- *"I spoke with President Xi. We had a great talk. He's working very hard..."* (on 26 February)
- *"He is working so hard"* (on 26 February)
- *"China has worked very hard"* (21 March).

Furthermore, euphemisms in Trump discourse were used to cover up the ugly and devastating truth of the virus and also to emphasize the notion that America is the most cooperative country even with its competitors *"We're working with China"*, *"We're dealing with them. We're giving them certain advice"* (26 February).

The results show that dysphemism is the most prominent linguistic element throughout Trump's political press conferences. Politicians tend to utilize dysphemistic statements for argumentative affairs and criticize other governments indirectly. Trump used to criticize and blame China claiming that it spread COVID-19 intentionally across America and the world. Such dysphemistic expressions embodied such declarations:

- *"China's cover-up of the Wuhan virus allowed the disease to spread all over the world" (29 May)*
- *"I could give you 19 or 20 names for that, right? It's got all different names.*

- “Wuhan.” “Wuhan” was catching on. “COVID-19,” right?” (23 June)*
- *“Kung flu,” yeah. (Applause.) Kung flu. “COVID.” “COVID-19.” “COVID.” I said, “What’s the ‘19’?” “COVID-19.” Some people can’t explain what the 19 — give me the — “COVID-19.” I said, “That’s an odd name.” I could give you many, many names; some people call it the “Chinese flu,” the “China flu.” Right?” (23 June)*
 - *“It was almost exclusively made in foreign lands, in particular, China where, ironically, this virus and others came from...” (4 July)*
 - *“it’s the China virus, not the coronavirus ...” (22 September in Pittsburgh)*
 - *“Corona. No, it’s a China virus” (22 September in Pittsburgh)*
 - *“We have waged a fierce battle against the invisible enemy — the China virus” (22 September in the White House).*

The expressive value of words in this thesis revolved around the analysis of pronominal and predicative adjectives. Pronominal adjectives are used to vividly convey an entity's individuality, whereas predicative adjectives are used to represent an

entity's overarching character, thus foregrounding the attribute. Moreover, positive adjectives such as (Smart, Powerful, Talented, Significant, Strong... etc.) are used to describe the Self (America), whereas negative adjectives such as (Infected, Responsible, Secretive, Condemned, Bad ... etc.) are utilized to describe the Other (China). Positive adjectives that are associated with America reflect Trump's stance of holding China the whole responsibility of COVID-19. In contrast, the Self is described as a savor of the world, used to hold virtuous strategies to overcome the disaster of COVID-19. Thus, Trump regards China as an enemy for Europe, accusing it of the creation and damage that occurred throughout COVID-19 spreading.

Thus, there is a crucial ideological technique used in Trump's political discourse, which is an ideological differentiation between “Self” and “Other”. According to Trump's ideological squire which is emphasizing America's good actions, strategies, and characteristics, besides, emphasizing China's negative actions, strategies, and characteristics. The following figures show Trump's representation of America and China. Figure (1) reflects the Self-representation (America), while figure (2) reflects the other representation (China)

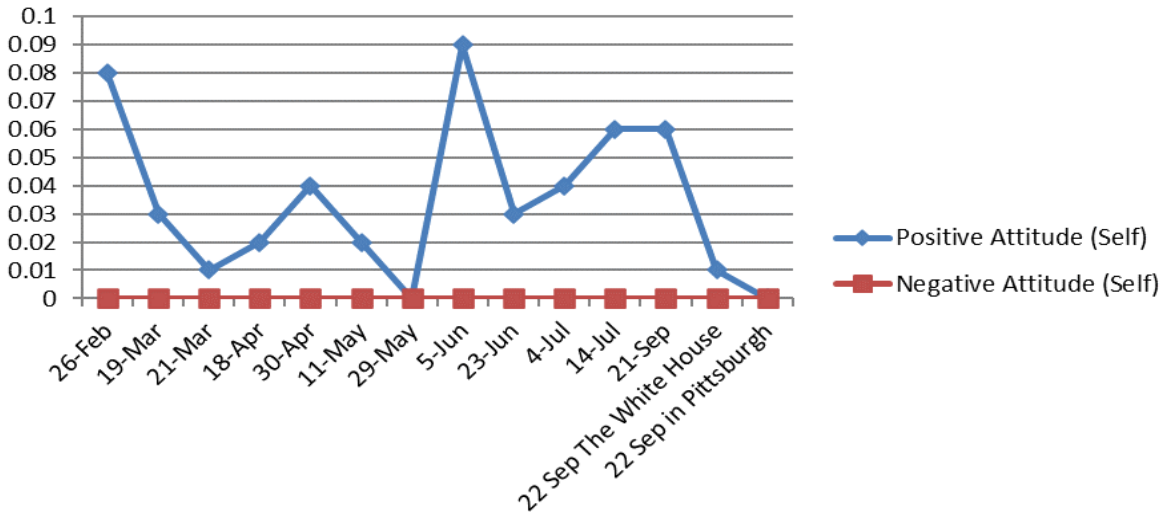


Figure (1): Trump's Positive Representation of America (the Self-representation)

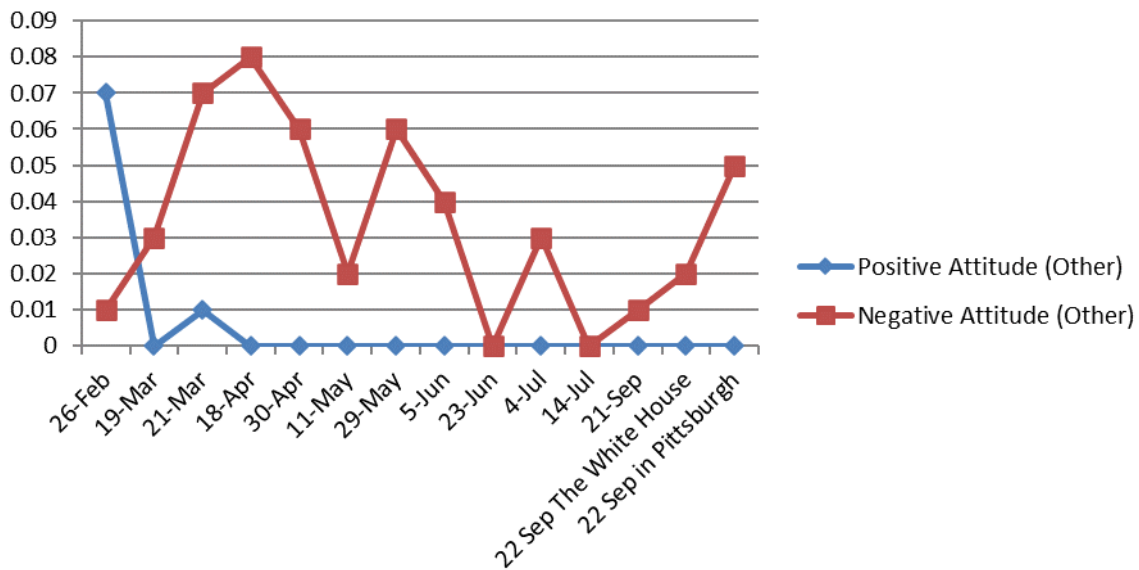


Figure (2): Trump's Negative representation of China (the Other-Representation)

CONCLUSION

Throughout the data analysis, we find that Trump emphasizes that the Other (China) spread the virus to destroy the world, we (America) endeavor to save the world by finding “Vaccines and Therapeutics”. Thus, the actors precisely differentiate between good characteristics and

bad characteristics, as Van Dijk (2009) states about using such opposite characteristics “not only contribute to the overall polarization of the conceptual structure of the text, but also to the formation of a bias, polarized model of the events, where the actors are neatly differentiated between the Good and the Bad”.

The speaker's representation of himself conforms to van Dijk's ideological square theory. He emphasizes the good characteristics of himself and his followers. He represents himself as the guardian and protector of America and the world from the evil virus which

came from China. Fundamentally, every presentation of Trump and America is positive, which indicates positive things about the Self, while every wicked characteristic attached to China, demonstrates emphasizing negative things about the Other



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