

Cancelling each other out: A critical discourse analysis of Irani-Saudi delegation discourse

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Abstract—This study is a critical discourse analysis of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's address to the United Nations General Assembly. It focuses on the analysis of power and ideology of language to uncover the representation of sympathy and enmity by political elites. I have drawn upon van Dijk's (2006) framework of political discourse analysis of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentations. The results revealed that Rouhani resorted to various ideological strategies to represent the positivity of his in-group people, the Iranians, in comparison with the negativity of other out-groups.

Keywords— *Discourse analysis, ideology, politics, positive self-presentation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening to Rouhani's speech to the United Nations Assembly shows that the Iranian President was addressing the Saudis, as if they are the only delegation present in the assembly. Most of what he has brought to light were the Saudi war on Syria and Yemen and the US sanctions and disagreement. Therefore, this study is concerned with and limited to the analysis of Rouhani's speech in the 74th United Nations session in New York. The aim is to find out and explain how ideologically Rouhani presents his socio-political stance in the speech.

Discourse is an effective role of communication. It presents the social reality of economy and politics. It can materialize ideologies when social actors act and react to discourse processes to change the status-quo of the society. Discourse is basically social [2, p 78] and Discourse Analysis (DA) is by nature interdisciplinary [3]. It is an umbrella concept for many methodological approaches of language analysis, including the function and use of both text and talk in context and social interaction. The methodological approaches are applied across disciplines of sociology, psychology, anthropology and more importantly linguistics [2, 4, 5].

The critique behind the Discourse Analysis (CDA) is primarily the analysis of how social power and ideology are reproduced, legitimated and enacted by talk and text in the social and political situations [6, 7]. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) takes the position to expose and challenge the social inequality. The primary tenet of (CDA) is to uncover all sources of social or political dominance in spoken and written

discourse [8, 9]. Therefore, CDA may be characterized as a social movement of politically committed discourse analysis [3]. By employing CDA methodology, discourse analysts can reveal the discursive strategies social actors use to maintain and construct power and ideology.

II. POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY

Political discourse is recognized by its actors, in comparison with politicians. Many of the discourse studies are about the ideology implied in the discourse of politicians and (non)governmental institutions, including, but not limited to, such as presidents, member of parliaments, elites and (see e.g., [10, 11, 12]. Ideology is often employed in social sciences. Its everyday usage is negative and reflects partisan, misguided and rigid viewpoints of others. For Marx et al.'s [13] theory of ideology presented the term 'ideology' to represent system of ideas people use to recognize their world.

One of dimensions noted in the common approaches to ideology is their prominent nature, in the way that ideologies construct an important role in justifying power abuse by elites and political groups [14, 15, 16]. One form of ideological dominance is the acceptance of ideology by dominated groups as a common or natural idea. Engels (cited in [1]) states that ideology is a form of 'false consciousnesses', together with [17] who think that the term is vague and used to discredit people who are against us by symbolic violence and power. On the other hand, [18] refers to this form of ideology as hegemony. His notion of ideology is different from other uses of the term. He focuses on the social status of the discursive power of ideology, such as authorizing and legitimizing the speeches of social actors.

The social functions of ideologies, according to [1], are (1) they organize the social communication shared by members of society, (2) they can legitimize domination, (3) they enable social actors organize their social behaviour, and (4) they manage the sociocognitive interface between social actors and social practices. Therefore, studying the ideology of the Iranian president can uncover their social practices and goals [19, 20, 21, 22].

III. METHODOLOGY

The essential aspect in speech analysis is the way it is constructed and the methodology employed in the analysis. Method of analysis uncovers the way

speakers use speech as a means to achieve social or political goals. In order to do a relevant analysis of the speeches, CDA methodology is applied. CDA tries to explain the important goal behind speeches by analyzing the economic, political, cultural and social and issues in speeches.

A. Data

The data of the study is the speech delivered by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani at the 74th session of the United Nations in 2015. The speech covers various issues such as violence, terrorism, nuclear weapons and political directions. Each party has particular objectives that might not be accepted by the others. For example, Rouhani considers the United States a real source of danger in Middle East and the whole world. The Saudi delegation, on the other hand, thinks of Iran the real threat to the Saudi Arabia and the world

B. Framework

This study draws upon [1] method of analyzing power and ideology in discourse. The method has 27 categories of ideology. These ideological categories can outline positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Of the 27 strategies outlined by van Dijk, only those prominent in Rouhani's speech were analysed, namely description, illustration/example, polarization, lexicalization, evidentiality and disclaimer. For more on ideology categories, see [23, 24, 25].

In description ideology, the way actions and objects are described in language reflects the ideology of the speaker. For example, speakers describe themselves, their society members, country and any in-group members in a positive way, while they describe other out-groups in a negative way. This, also, includes the mitigation of in-group negativity, in comparison with the emphasis of out-groups negativity.

Illustration/example ideology refers to the examples speakers provide as a powerful process to justify their move. Such concrete examples are better remembered by listeners than those that are abstract, in addition to their emotional influence. Therefore, they are more persuasive.

The categorization of people as in-groups and out-groups and the expression used to highlight/front each is a polarization ideology. Polarization of people and actions can also include the use of 'right' and 'wrong' categories of in-group and out-group, as in the case of identifying friends and enemy. The discursive representation of polarization employs attributions of 'us' and 'them' to express contrast between the groups.

Similar beliefs and viewpoints can be constructed in similar terms and vice versa. This depends on the context, goals, point of view, position and role of the speaker who, then, expresses his ideology lexically. This includes the use of blatant good/bad expressions to identify the in-groups and out-groups.

When speakers provide evidence for their knowledge, their arguments and claims are more plausible. This evidentiality ideology is essential to convey messages in discourse and a discourse tactic to achieve credibility, reliability and objectivity in language, especially in speeches that are emotionally delivered. This evidentiality can be done by sources, quotations and others.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Rouhani's speeches were rich in ideology of description when he describes the national glorification of his religion, where he positively presents his group against the other group. For example:

1. At the outset, I would like to commemorate the freedom-seeking movement of Hossein (PBUH), and pay homage to all the freedom-seekers of the world who do not bow to oppression. I wanted to talk about the country's ongoing economic development and reforms in various fields, the vision that takes us back to our true Islamic faith and rejects all forms extremism, the vision that aims at achieving an advanced and innovative society in all areas, a connected society that is engaged with its surroundings and the world

Rouhani refers to his group's affiliations and principles in a way that links national ideologies with that of a well-known freedom seeker "Imam Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Mohammed. This self-glorification ideology is discursively constructed by praising his country, their principles and traditions. He links the causes of the economic development in his country and other reforms to the Islamic religion for achieving an advanced and developed society. Rouhani's use of description is a rhetoric tactic to identify the members of his group (Iranian) in a positive way and the role of the Iranian government to achieve the goals of the United Nations in maintaining peace and security in the world.

To demonstrate the agreement of his country and their will to save the region and to end the violence and terrorism, Rouhani employs illustration ideology to point out that what is happening in the Middle East. He provides a concrete example to bring attention to the living condition of people in the Middle East:

2. The Middle is burning in the flames of war, bloodshed, aggression, occupation and religious and sectarian fanaticism and extremism.

This illustration helps support Rouhani's allegations that Iran is not the nation to blame, and to make his speech more convincing and with a greater impact on the recipients. The Iranian President's reference to what is happening in the Middle East is to exclude his country from being indicted of the issues and to send a warning letters to the West and Saudi Arabia that they are to blame when they made a war coalition against Syria and Yemen:

3. I praise the spirits of all the oppressed martyrs of terrorist strikes and bombardment in Yemen, Syria, occupied Palestine, Afghanistan and other countries of the world.

Rouhani, on the other hand, uses polarization ideology by categorising or classifying making explicit difference between the Iranian and others. He positively refers to Iran as a peace seeker and the centre of the neighbouring countries in the region. As can be seen in the following example, Rouhani uses the in-group 'we' as the agentive and theme of peace and freedom:

4. We Iranians have been the pioneers of freedom-seeking movements in the region, while seeking peace and progress for our nation as well as for our neighbor's, and we have never surrendered to foreign aggression and imposition.

Negatively polarizing others was also apparent in Rouhani's speeches when he amplifies the negativity of the Saudis:

5. Public opinion demands that Saudi Arabian officials promptly fulfill their international obligations and grant immediate consular access for the expeditious identification and return of the cherished bodies.

In this example, Rouhani reports gruesome acts Saudi Arabia which did not make enough effort to identify and return the corpse of people who died in the gathering of the Hajj, due to a stampede after a panic in the tunnel in Mecca.

In a more textual representation of his ideology, Rouhani lexically chooses terms that defines the positivity of Iran and the negativity of other groups. This lexicalization ideology guarantees the meaning of his words:

6. Prevent the slaughter of innocent people and the bombardment of civilians, as well as, the promotion of violence and killing of other human beings [...] – And once stability is established, build diplomacy and democratic governance in the Middle East region.

In this example, terms such as slaughter, bombardment, violence and killing explicitly instigate negativity and implicitly refer to the Saudis suicidal who were reported in thousands during the Syrian and Iraqi war on terrorism. Rouhani recalls the dangerous security situation, emphasising the threat that might hit either country if security is threatened. Rouhani emphasised that the Iranians always represent the positive side in the Middle East by asking to build diplomacy, rather than raising war.

In order to justify his positive representation of Iran, Rouhani resorts to evidentiality ideology of by providing concrete evidence of Iranian objectivity and credibility against the negativity of the West which applied sanctions on Iran:

7. How can one believe that the silent killing of a great nation and pressure on the life of 83 million Iranians, especially women and children, are welcomed by the American government officials who pride themselves on such pressures and addictively exploit sanctions against a spectrum of countries such as Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, China and Russia.

Rouhani's concrete evidence of sanctions on 83 million Iranians is a more transparent medium to highlight the negativity of the West and the positive innocence of his country. This is made clear when he refers to Iran as abiding by its promises to the world, quite the opposite of the US for not fulfilling its promises to end the sanctions on Iran.

Rouhani's evidentiality was accompanied by disclaimer ideology, when he tries to show lack of seriousness of the US to settle down concord between the two nations. Rouhani wants to distance himself from the responsibility of the disagreement the US always raises:

8. It has now become clear for all that the United States turns its back on its commitments and Europe is unable and incapable of fulfilling its commitments. We even adopted a step-by-step approach in implementing paragraphs 26 and 36 of the JCPOA. And we remain committed to our promises in the deal.

Rouhani affirms the dignity of his country and the positivity of the government which adopted all the United Nations resolutions to settle down the nuclear deal and agreement. However, no agreement has been set with the US and the negotiations are still on hold, except for some year prior the election of Donald Trump.

V. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to uncover the ideology of representing the Iranian government and people by President Rouhani in his speech delivered to the United Nation assembly in 2015. By drawing on [1] model of ideology analysis, the analysis of Rouhani's speech has shown how the Iranian President used various ideological strategies to communicate his political stance and to unveil others' adverse positions.

Rouhani relied on the ideology of positive self-presentation when referring to his country and government, while using negative other-presentation to refer to other groups, primarily the Saudis and the US. Notably, Rouhani focused on highlighting the positive side of his country more than highlighting the negative side of the other groups.

In his description, Rouhani uses self-glorification ideology to discursively praising his country, their principles and traditions. He positively provides concrete examples of who Iran is abiding by the United Nations resolutions, in contrast to the disagreement of the US and the sanction it has been imposing on Iran. Rouhani polarizes his country the center of peace in the Middle East, while lexically uses explicit negative terms to identify the actions of the West and the Saudis. This was accompanied by a concrete example of the negativity of the West through the sanctions the US imposed and the war coalition against Styria and Yemen.

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