
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Contrastive Critical Discourse Analysis of Pseudo-Ignorance in two English and Arabic Politicians' Speeches

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| ABSTRACT

The justification for ambiguity and hedging is known as pseudo-ignorance strategy; speakers may pretend not to know something, but they may subtly imply that they do, making assertions that do not require supporting evidence. These kinds of seeming knowledge are usually seen in disclaimers, like "I don't know, but..." which, in spite of the ignorance claimed, affirms the truth of the but-clause, which is also a tactic used in impression management. This study tries to be an attempt to contrast the political employment of the strategy pseudo-ignorance between two English and Arabic political speeches, drawing on investigating the four syntactic, semantic, lexical, and pragmatic levels of Van Dijk (1995) and James (1980) for analyzing the data contrastively. The study opines to choose speeches of two American and Iraqi politicians, Donald Trump and Ayad Allawi to be investigated and contrasted. The study concludes that pseudo-ignorance is the political strategy that is used by both politicians Trump and Ayad Allawi in order to achieve their personal and political purposes.

| KEYWORDS

Contrastive Linguistics, CDA, Pseudo-Ignorance Strategy, James (1980) Model of CA, Van Dijk (1995) Model of CDA

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In the humanities and social sciences, ideological analysis of language and discourse is a popular academic and critical endeavor. The premise of these analyses is that, if language users communicate their ideologies through language and communication, whether consciously or unconsciously, attentive reading, comprehension, or systematic analysis may be able to reveal the ideologies of speakers or authors (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 135). Accordingly, the present study tries to shed light on the political strategy of pseudo-ignorance employed by two American and Iraqi politicians, Donald Trump and Ayad Allawi. The study, firstly, investigates how those two politicians can achieve such strategy. Secondly, the study contrasts the English and Arabic employment of this strategy. To achieve this aim, the study asks the following questions: What are the objectives of employing the pseudo-ignorance strategy?; What are the devices used in achieving the pseudo-ignorance strategy?; What are the most employed devices in achieving the pseudo-ignorance strategy?; and What are the similarities and differences of employing pseudo-ignorance strategy in both English and Arabic languages?. Additionally, the current study aims at: Identifying why political leaders employ the pseudo-ignorance strategy; Finding the devices used in achieving the pseudo-ignorance strategy; Distinguishing the most employed devices in achieving the pseudo-ignorance strategy; and Exploring the differences of employing pseudo-ignorance strategy in both English and Arabic languages.

2. Contrastive Linguistics

Contrastive linguistics is a branch or topic of the study of languages (Contrastive Analysis). As its name suggests, contrastive linguistics (henceforth CA) deals with contrast or comparison. Comparison is a key technique for learning new things and studying since, as the saying goes, "only by comparison can one recognize" (Ke, 2019, p. 4). Similarly, James (1980, p. 3) claims

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that CA is a linguistic effort with the goal of producing inverted two-valued typologies. It is typically interested in two languages that could be contrasted based on their respective languages.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical theory predates World War II and the Frankfurt school is where critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) originated (Agger, 1992; Rasmussen, 1996 cited in Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). The "critical linguistics" movement that emerged in the UK and Australia towards the end of 1970 is credited for sparking the current focus of CDA on language and discourse (Fowler et al., 1979 cited in Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352).

According to Wodak (1995, pp. 24–25), CDA is the study of ambiguous and seeming constructional relations of power, segregation, and hegemony as they are expressed in language. Discourse is socially conditioned and constitutive, according to CDA. In contemporary civilizations, discourse is an instrument of power that is becoming more and more important, yet it is typically hard to understand. Consequently, by increasing the visibility and apparentness of discourse, CDA aims to facilitate this challenge. Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard (1996, p. xi) contend that the fundamental political nature of CDA stems from its practitioners' desire to change the world and help establish an inclusive society free from discrimination on the basis of gender, color, age, and socioeconomic class.

Furthermore, critical analysis of discourse is a type of research that examines how discourse in a political and social context legitimizes, reproduces, and confronts issues like power, hegemony, and inequality through speaking and text. Critical discourse analysts have a distinct perspective on comprehending, exposing, and ultimately opposing social inequality (Van Dijk, 2001 cited in Widdowson, 2004, p. 89). Blommaert (2005, p. 27) draws attention to the fact that CDA views discourse as a social phenomena and works to create the theoretical frameworks necessary for society in order to analyze discourse and situate it within it.

Furthermore, the goal of CDA is to generate and disseminate critical understanding, which empowers individuals to break free from forms of control by self-reflection (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7). Thus, on the one hand, CDA helps to eradicate delusion, and on the other, it raises awareness. Planning what is and can be said in a given society at a given time while taking into account its qualitative spectrum is the aim of CDA. It also seeks to identify the processes by which discourse constraints are widened or constricted (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 36).

4. Pseudo-Ignorance Strategy

Van Dijk (2006, pp. 82-83) argues that as is the case for vagueness and hedging, speakers may feign not to have specific knowledge, but implicitly suggest nevertheless that they do know, thus making claims that need not be substantiated a well-known fallacy. Such forms of apparent knowledge typically appear in disclaimers, such as "I don't know, but..." which despite the professed ignorance claims the but-clause to be true -- which is also a form of impression management. In our debates, these forms of pseudo-ignorance are typically used to derogate asylum seekers without any evidence, in the following case expressed in the form of a rhetorical question following an ironical accusation:

In addition to the breakfast that comes with the bed-and-breakfast accommodation, they have to be given a packed lunch, presumably in case they decide to go shopping in the middle of the day or to do a bit of work on the black economy--who knows? (Gorman). (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 83)

5. James (1980) Model of Contrastive Analysis

James (1980, pp. 63-69) states that there are two steps involved in executing a CA: description and comparison, which are performed in that sequence. It is not possible to say that these two processes sum up CA in a singular way, though. In fact, according to Corder (1973, p.144) cited in James (1980), there are three "orders of application" in applied linguistics: the first two being description and comparison, and the third occurring later.

The widely famous quotation from Fries (1945, p. 259) cited in James (1980) states that "... the most effective materials are those based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the learner's native language." This statement suggests the same viewpoint. Take note of what CA entails: a comparison and description of L1 and L2. The two descriptions must also be "parallel".

The two languages must be specified using the same description model in order for there to be "parallel description". One may wonder why the two descriptions have to be presented using the same model. There are various causes: one of them is that models are better than others at describing specific aspects of language.

Create the contrast of actual contrastive phase, and this is where a lot of procedural issues arise. The most important of these relates to how contrast is expressed: is it better to express contrast in terms of operations or imbalanced equations? This is a choice that will mostly be determined by the "model" of grammatical description that has been selected.

6. Van Dijk's (1995) Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk model of critical discourse analysis (1995) provides the following levels of critical discourse analysis:

- 1- Syntactic structure (word order, topicalization, clausal relations: main and subordinate, fronted or embedded; split constructions).
- 2- Semantic structures (explicit vs. implicit, detail and level of description, semantic macrostructures vs. details).
- 3- Lexical style (positive vs. negative opinion words).
- 4- Pragmatic (assertion vs. denial; self-congratulation vs. accusation).

7. Methodology

The data used in this study is limited at analyzing ten tweets of Donald Trump and Ayad Allawi, five for each one. Trump's tweets are gathered from the link below (<https://www.thetrumparchive.com/>), whereas Allawi's tweets from (https://twitter.com/AyadAllawi?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor). The tweets of both political figures are purposively selected to achieve the aims of the study. The analysis section will be in two steps. The first step depends on the Van Dijk's categories model (1995) by analyzing the data both qualitatively and quantitatively. The second step is adopting James (1980) model of contrastive analysis through describing, comparing and contrasting.

An Eclectic Model of Analysis

The data will be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively drawing on the eclectic model that is developed by the study, which integrates two approaches of Van Dijk (1995) and James (1980) models. The following levels of critical discourse analysis are of van Dijk (1995) model:

- 1- Syntactic structure (word order, topicalization, clausal relations: main and subordinate, fronted or embedded; split constructions).
- 2- Semantic structures (explicit vs. implicit, detail and level of description, semantic macrostructures vs. details).
- 3- Lexical style (positive vs. negative opinion words).
- 4- Pragmatic (assertion vs. denial; self-congratulation vs. accusation).

Then, the three steps of James contrastive analysis which are (Describing, Comparing and Contrasting) will be adopted.

8. Data Analysis

Trump's Tweet One

Crooked Hillary Clinton wants to flood our country with Syrian immigrants that we know little or nothing about. The danger is massive. NO!

Jul 27th 2016

In this tweet, Trump uses various linguistic devices like the subordinate clause ***that we know little or nothing about***, negative expression ***we know little or nothing about***, accusation ***The danger is massive***. Through these devices, Trump tries to portrait negative opinion about the awful future because of unknown Syrian immigrants. He derogates Syrian immigrants and accuses them as massive danger. By presenting pseudo-ignorance about Syrian immigrants through different devices, Trump attempts to undermine his opponent Hillary Clinton that he described as crooked.

Trump's Tweet Two

Who is Miles Taylor? Said he was "anonymous", but I don't know him - never even heard of him. Just another @nytimes SCAM - he worked in conjunction with them. Also worked for Big Tech's @Google. Now works for Fake News @CNN. They should fire, shame, and punish everybody....

Oct 28th 2020

Trump in this tweet employs the syntactic structure of question ***Who is Miles Taylor?***, and negative expressions ***I don't know him - never even heard of him*** to show his pseudo-ignorance about Miles Taylor, despite this, he after that provides some detail about him such as where is he work and with who. Trump here tries to detract Miles Taylor.

Trump's Tweet Three

I don't know the so-called Whistleblower Rick Bright, never met him or even heard of him, but to me he is a disgruntled employee, not liked or respected by people I spoke to and who, with his attitude, should no longer be working for our government!

May 14th 2020

In this tweet, Trump uses various forms of negation **don't**, **never**, and **not** to prove his ignorance of Rick Bright, despite that, he shows his negative opinion about him. Through these devices, he seeks to undermine the political opponents.

Trump's Tweet Four

The people that know me and know the history of our Country say that I am the hardest working President in history. I don't know about that, but I am a hard worker and have probably gotten more done in the first 3 1/2 years than any President in history. The Fake News hates it!

Apr 26th 2020

Trump in this tweet attempts to show his modesty by using negative expression **I don't know about that** which refers to his ignorance of what the people know about him. After that, he uses positive word **hard** to assert that he is hard worker. Through these devices, Trump views his positive self-representation.

Trump's Tweet Five

Many people say they know me, claiming to be "best friends" and really close etc., when I don't know these people at all. This happens, I suppose, to all who become President. With that being stated, I don't know, to the best of my knowledge, a man named Michael Esposito.....

Nov 4th 2019

In this tweet, Trump expresses people's love and closeness to him, claiming that he does not know them. He uses the words **many**, **best**, and **really** to display his popularity. On the other hand, he uses negation to show his ignorance.

التغريدة الاولى لاياد علاوي

الدول التي تحترم سيادتها، تسارع حكومتها للرد على أي تجاوز أو خرق يطال السيادة. نستغرب صمت المسؤولين العراقيين ازاء التصريحات التي صدرت عن السيد ولايتي التي تنتهك السيادة العراقية. [#العراق_سدد_لا_تابع](#)

[١٠ فبراير ٢٠٢٠](#)

Ayad Allawi's Tweet One

Countries that respect their sovereignty, their government is quick to respond to any transgression or violation that affects sovereignty. We are surprised by the silence of Iraqi officials regarding the statements issued by Mr. Velayati, which violate Iraqi sovereignty. #Iraq_Master_Not_Follower

In this tweet, the former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi tries to express his ignorance of the reasons of the silence of Iraqi officials regarding Iranian statements. He uses the implicit verb "**surprise**" [سأفاجئ](#) to underlie his negative opinion against his political opponents, attempting to ignore the effects of Iranian political decision on Iraqi political decision.

التغريدة الثانية لاياد علاوي

ادعم وأحيي وابارك الحراك الطلابي السلمي الباسل، وصموده بوجه قتلهم المرتينين لارادة الخارج بعد ان استشهد ثلاثة منهم يوم امس . نستغرب صمت القوى الامنية والحكومات العراقية، وسنلاحق قانونياً مرتكبي تلك الجرائم حتى تتم احالتهم الى محاكم علنية.

[٢١ فبراير ٢٠٢٠](#)

Ayad Allawi's Tweet Two

I support, salute and congratulate the brave, peaceful student movement and its steadfastness in the face of their killers who are dependent on the will of the outside the country, after three of them were martyred yesterday. I surprise by the silence of the Iraqi security forces and governments, and we will legally pursue the perpetrators of these crimes until they are transmitted to public courts.

Ayad Allawi in this tweet tries to express his ignorance of the silence of Iraqi security forces and government towards killing three protesters of students. He uses the implicit verb **surprise** to show his denial and negative opinion against killing the protesters, although he knows that the government who has killed the protesters.

التغريد الثالثة لاياد علاوي

اين وصلت التحقيقات . والاف الجرحى والمعاقين من [#المتظاهرين](#) هل من المعقول تناسي دماء اكثر من ٧٠٠ [#شهيد](#) ... أين الوعود والعهود المزعومة في قتل المتظاهرين ؟ من هي الجهات التي نفذت ومن هي الجهات التي امرت ؟ متى تتم محاكمتهم ؟ الى متى يتم التستر على الجناة ؟

[يونيو ١٢٠٢٠](#)

Ayad Allawi's Tweet Three

Where are the promises and covenants... Is it reasonable to forget the blood of more than 700 #martyrs from the #demonstrators and thousands of wounded and disabled people? Where have the alleged investigations into the killing of demonstrators reached? Who are the parties that implemented it and who are the parties that ordered? When will they be tried? How long will the perpetrators be covered up?

In this tweet, Ayad Allawi asks several questions, viewing his ignorance about the killing and wounding thousands of protesting people. He knows that the security forces are those who kill the protesters by orders of government. Here, he attempts to implicitly undermine the government.

التغريدة الرابعة لاياد علاوي

متى سيحاكم القتلة والمجرمون ويقتص لدماء الابرياء التي تسيل في [#الناصرية](#) و [#النجف](#) وغيرها من المدن ؟!

[٢٩ نوفمبر ٢٠١٩](#)

Ayad Allawi's Tweet Four

When will the killers and criminals be punished for the blood of innocent people flowing in #Nasiriyah, #Najaf and other cities!?

In this tweet, Ayad Allawi uses the question about when the responsible of killing the innocent Iraqi people to be punished, expressing his pseudo-ignorance. He implicitly accuses his political opponents in the government. He also employs negative words **killers** and **criminals** to show his negative opinion against the government.

التغريدة الخامسة لاياد علاوي

سنلجأ لاقامة دعاوى لدى القضاء الدولي والمحكمة الجنائية الدولية اذا لم يتم الكشف عن الجهة التي تقتل المتظاهرين ومحاكمتها علنا [#العراق](#).

[١٢ نوفمبر ٢٠١٩](#)

Ayad Allawi's Tweet Five

We will resort to filing lawsuits in the international judiciary and the International Criminal Court if the party killing the demonstrators is not revealed and tried publicly #Iraq

In this tweet, Ayad Allawi tries to express his ignorance about who killed the demonstrators. He calls on the parties that killed the demonstrators to reveal who killed the demonstrators. He uses the expression **we will resort to filing lawsuits** to explain his positive concern, and at the same time he uses the expression **the party killing the demonstrators** to implicitly accuse his political opponents.

9. Results

Through the analysis section, the study reaches to the following statistical results of both Trump's and Ayad Allawi's tweets:

Trump:

Level	Category	Frequency
Syntactic structure	Word order	1
	Subordinate clause	1
Semantic structure	Explicit	5
Lexical style	Negative opinion	2
	Positive opinion	2
Pragmatics	Accusation	1

Ayad Allawi:

Level	Category	Frequency
Syntactic structure	Word order	2
Semantic structure	Implicit	5
Lexical style	Negative opinion	3
Pragmatics	Denial accusation	2
		2

The statistical results in the tables above explores the following:

1. Trump in his five tweets uses syntactic structure level twice by word order (question) and subordinate clause.
2. In all tweets, Trump uses explicit expressions, he names the persons that he wants to say about.
3. He employs both negative opinion on others and positive opinion on himself.
4. He uses accusation pragmatically one time.
5. Ayad Allawi uses syntactic structure level two times by using questions.
6. In all five tweets, He tries to intends his political opponents by implicit expressions
7. He employs negative opinion against the government three times.
8. He denies and accuses the government pragmatically four times, two for each.

10. Discussions (comparing and contrasting)

Concerning the descriptive analysis and results above, the study discusses the following points:

Both Trump and Ayad Allawi employ the strategy of pseudo-ignorance to achieve personal and political aims, once to undermine their opponents or to support their positive self-representation. In addition, both of them use the following linguistic levels: syntactic, semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic, but with different frequencies.

Semantic devices are the most employed in both Trump and Ayad Allawi tweets. Moreover, Trump's Tweets tend to use more explicit expressions, whereas Ayad Allawi's tweets tend to more implicit. This asserts the fourth hypothesis of the study. Furthermore, Trump employs both positive and negative opinions about himself and others respectively, while Ayad Allawi employs just negative opinions about others. Finally, Ayad Allawi focuses more on pragmatic devices than Trump do.

11. Conclusion

Pseudo-ignorance approach is the rationale behind ambiguity and hedging; speakers may seem not to know something, but they may subtly hint that they do, making claims that do not need to be supported by proof. Disclaimers like "I don't know,

but..." are common examples of this type of appearing knowledge since they validate the but-clause's veracity despite the ignorance claimed—another impression control technique.

The study concludes that pseudo-ignorance is the political strategy that is used by both politicians Trump and Ayad Allawi in order to achieve their personal and political purposes. They employ various linguistic devices such as syntactic structures, semantic structures, lexical styles and pragmatic structures. These linguistic devices are achieved in uneven frequencies between the two politicians. The study discovers that the Iraqi politician implements his political aims pragmatically, while the American politician implements his political aims semantically or explicitly.

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