

Aggression in American Political Speeches: A Sociolinguistics Study

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المستخلص

يتناول البحث الحالي العدوان في خطابات سياسية أمريكية مختارة. يعتبر الخطاب السياسي وسيلة فعالة للسياسيين للتعبير عن وجهات نظرهم والتأثير على الرأي العام وبالرغم من ذلك فالخطاب السياسي في كثير من الأحيان يحتوي على جوانب من العدوان، ان استمرار وجوده يمثل مصدر قلق ملح. أجرى الباحثون العديد من الدراسات حول العدوان و مع ذلك فهم لم يتناولون مفهوم العدوان في الخطابات السياسية الأمريكية من وجهة نظر اجتماعية لغوية يحاول البحث الحالي سد هذه الفجوة و لذلك يهدف البحث الى تحديد أنواع العدوان في الخطب السياسية المختارة و كشف اهداف العدوان في البيانات المدروسة و بيان المتغيرات الاجتماعية الأساسية التي تعزز من العدوان في البيانات المختارة. لقد تم استخدام المتغيرات الاجتماعية لترودجيل (1995) لتحقيق هدف البحث يوضح الاستنتاج أن: (1) العدوان اللفظي و المباشر وغير المباشر و الأدوات والايماي هي انواع العدوان ، يعد العدوان اللفظي الاكثر استخداما في الخطب السياسية. (2) اهداف العدوان هي النقد وادارة الانطباع والقوة السيطرة والاستبعاد، يعد النقد الغرض الاكثر شيوعا للعدوان في الخطب السياسية (3) المنصب والقوة هما المتغيران الاجتماعيان الاساسيان اللذان يرفعان من مستوى العدوان الخطب السياسية

Abstract

The current research examines aggression in selected American political speeches. Political speech is an effective means for politicians to communicate their viewpoints and affect public opinion. Despite this, it often has aggressive elements, and the persistence of aggression in political speech is an urgent issue. Researchers have carried out several studies on aggression. However, they do not discuss the notion of aggression in American political speeches from a sociolinguistic standpoint. This research tries to bridge this gap. Therefore, the present study aims to determine the types of aggression in the selected political speeches, demonstrate the purposes of aggression in the examined data, and elucidate the fundamental social variables that augment aggression in the selected data. Trudgill's (1995) sociolinguistic social variables are employed to accomplish the aim of the research. The conclusion illustrates that: (1) Verbal, direct, indirect, instrumental, and gestural are the types of aggression. The most common usage is verbal aggression in political speeches. (2) The purposes of aggression are criticism, impression management, power and dominance, and exclusion. Criticism is the most prevalent purpose of aggression in political speeches. (3) Position and power are the primary social variables that promote aggression in political speeches.

Key words:

Sociolinguistics, aggression, political speech

1. Introduction

Sociolinguists investigate how language and society interact. They want to know why humans speak differently in various social circumstances and concentrate on finding the social uses of language and how it is utilized to express social meaning. The investigation of how individuals use language in various social situations yields a lot of knowledge about how language functions, community social interactions, and how individuals use language to express and develop aspects of their social identity (Holmes, 2013). The sociolinguistic variable is an array of various methods to convey the same notion despite the variations having social importance (Fasold, 1990).

Aggressive communication is any pattern of interaction that has the purpose of harming other people. As a result, the norms of proper conduct are broken, and this behavior is prevalent with specific people and in certain situations (Dailey, Lee & Spitzberg, 2007).

Aggression in language refers to a type of communication and behavior in which an individual expresses his or her feelings, wants, and rights without considering or showing respect for the wants, rights, and feelings of others (Jones & Wortman, 1973).

Language serves as the channel to express the candidate's platform, higher political ideas, and the party's ideologies. In addition, it is the vehicle to convert them into social acts for social change and continuity (Opeibi, 2009).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociolinguistics

Hudson (1980) defines sociolinguistics as "the study of language in relation to society" (p.1). Sociolinguistics contends that language is a product of context, which relies on the speaker, where, and why it is employed. In their speeches, speakers reflect their sociocultural, economic, and geographic coordinates in time and place, along with their personal history and identity (Tagliamonte, 2006).

2.1.1 Social Variables

The importance of social variables becomes apparent in the various efforts speakers make when requesting something from a recipient that is mostly determined by the different social roles that the addressees perform, including their social power, sex, age, ethnicity, education level, social distance between the

speakers and recipients, etc. (Meyer, 2009). In the current research, the variables of power, position, and ethnicity are adopted to examine their influence on aggression.

2.1.1.1 Power

Wrong (1980) asserts that "power is the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others" (p.2). It is obvious that language is an essential tool for practicing power and that it plays an essential role in shaping social reality. A social constructionist viewpoint examines any communication as which involves individuals using a number of coercive and cooperative tactics to enact, reproduce, and, at times, resist institutional power relations through discourse (Holmes, 2014).

2.1.1.2 Position

Giddens (1971) explains that in Weberian perspective status matters because it occasionally serves as the foundation for social groups with a shared interest and common identity rather than class. Moreover, the existence of multiple status groups within a single class weakens class solidarity and reduces the possibility of class consciousness developing.

2.1.1.3 Ethnicity

Ethnic group refers to communities of people who maintain a subjective conviction regarding their shared ancestry due to physical resemblance or owing to recollections of colonization or migration (Weber,1968). Language is one of these factors that most clearly sets human groups apart from other groups. Party membership and cultural identification are fundamentally based on language. (Trudgill,1995)

2.2 Aggression

Colman (2003) asserts that aggression is defined as the behavior whose primary goal is to cause physical or psychological harm to another person for a predetermined motive. There are different types of aggression and it is not restricted to a specific dimension. Berkowitz (1993) divides aggression into hostile and instrumental. Hostile aggression is also known as affective, impulsive, or reactive aggression conducted with the intention to cause harm to others. It emerges in reaction to a prior emotional provocation. Hostile aggression is described as being impulsive thoughtless, motivated by anger, low behavioral control. Hostile aggression can be referred to as affective, impulsive, or reactive. Instrumental aggression is proactive, it is a planned way used to accomplish an aim other than causing damage to the target.

Aggression can be classified as direct and indirect. According to Baron and Richardson (1994), direct aggression is a kind of behavior that involves physical or verbal contact with the intent of hurting another individual. Buss (1961) states that "Indirect aggression may be verbal (spreading nasty gossip) or physical (a man sets fire to his neighbor's home)" (p.8). Three other categories of aggression are physical, verbal, and gestural or postural. Physical violence can result from direct physical contact or participants utilizing an object. Verbal aggression is expressed by words, such as gossiping, griping, whispering, disseminating false tales, mocking, sarcasm, and using code names. Gestural or postural aggression is conveyed metaphorically or via a variety of body movements and facial expressions (Berkowitz, 1994).

According to Berkowitz (1993), many social scientists think that it is not just the desire to harm a victim that drives the majority of assaults. This viewpoint, which essentially presupposes that the aggressors are operating rationally, has a different aim in mind, one that they value above the desire to hurt their targets: The desire to influence or exert power over someone else or to create a favorable identity. Naturally, these objectives occasionally work together. Berkowitz (1993) identifies these purposes as:

- **Coercion**

Attackers may cause harm mainly to their victims in order to affect the conduct of another person. They are making an effort to persuade the people to cease doing something that annoys them.

- **Power and dominance**

Some theorists think that aggressive behavior frequently aims to maintain or enhance the power and dominance of the attacker.

- **Impression management**

In accordance with another school of thought, aggressors care essentially about what other people think of them.

Aggression can serve as a means for criticism of other people (Haugh, 2010). Furthermore, Individuals are able to exclude anybody from a particular group by using aggressive words (Marra & Holmes, 2007).

2.3 Political Speech

It needs to communicate ideas and ideologies through language in order for the recipients to agree with them, in addition to other people who might read or hear excerpts of the speech afterward in the media. Meaning is affected by the use or omission of words and expressions in different strategies. A group of experienced speechwriters trained in using persuasive language creates political speeches

(Bread, 2000). There is more to political debate than merely expressing popular opinions. It is a political matter. It all comes down to employing words for achieving aims; words have an impact on the political body. Selecting lexical items is not limited to formal decorum standards, but additionally because their ability to effectively highlight political attitudes and viewpoints, alter public opinion, or legitimate political power (Simpson & Mayr, 2010).

3. Methodology

A qualitative method is employed in this research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as the investigation of things in their natural environments with the goal of explaining or interpreting them in terms of the meanings that individuals assign to these events. A method of qualitative analysis is adopted to investigate the notion of aggression in selected American political speeches from a sociolinguistic viewpoint. The primary concern of the data collection is the demonstration of aggression in the selected American political speeches. The internet-based way is used for data collection. The speeches are obtained from Joe Biden and Donald Trump during the period from 2023 to 2024 through their remarks regarding the upcoming 2024 American presidential election. Four speeches are chosen to investigate the concept of aggression in the selected speeches of the two American politicians. The model is based on Trudgill's sociolinguistic variables (1995).

4. Results and Discussion

A. Data Analysis

4.1 Trump's First speech

Extract (1)

Donald Trump, a former president, talks during the Republican Party Convention in California. (September 29, 2023)

"Does anybody think he's going to make it to the starting gate?

I mean a guy can't find his way off of a stage.

Look, here's the stage.

Here's the stage.

I've never seen this stupid stage before. Right?

I've never seen it.

But if I walk left, there's a stair and if I walk right, there's a stair. And this guy gets up, where am I?" (Trump, 2023)

1- Sociolinguistic Analysis

A- Power

Trump utilizes this variable to denigrate Biden when he says: *"Look, here's the stage", "Here's the stage" and "I've never seen this stupid stage before"*. Trump

uses repetition and a sarcastic tone to indicate that Biden lacks ability and is confused. In addition, he says that *"But if I walk left, there's a stair and if I walk right, there's a stair. And this guy gets up, where am I?"*. Trump implies that Biden's disorientation impairs his comprehension of where he is. He wants to throw doubt on Biden's ability to make decisions.

B- Position

As a former president and a presidential candidate, Trump attacks Biden by saying, *"Does anybody think he's going to make it to the starting gate?"*. He condemns Biden for being distracted. Trump tries to undermine his competence. In addition, he says, *"I mean a guy can't find his way off of a stage"*. Trump diminishes Biden's credibility by mocking his capacity for simple chores. He implies that Biden is unsuited for leadership.

2- Aggression

In this extract, Trump employs verbal and direct aggression: *"Does anybody think he's going to make it to the starting gate?"*. He asks this question to challenge Biden's capacity directly. Also, Trump indicates that Biden lacks basic situational awareness, *"I mean a guy can't find his way off of a stage"*. Moreover, he combines verbal aggression with gestural aggression in *"But if I walk left, there's a stair and if I walk right, there's a stair. And this guy gets up, where am I?"*. Trump ridicules Biden by pretending to walk around and lifting his hands to his head, saying, *"where am I?"*

3- Purposes of Aggression

Trump aims to criticize Biden. *"Does anybody think he's going to make it to the starting gate?"*, *"I mean a guy can't find his way off of a stage"*. He tries to undermine his capability to succeed. In addition, Trump wants to present Biden as an incompetent president. *"I've never seen this stupid stage before. Right?"* Trump asks the audience to agree with him, *"Right?"* and wants to present himself as more competent and in control of the situation. Therefore, his purpose is impression management.

4.2 Trump's second speech

Former President Trump delivers an address held at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland. (February 24, 2024)

Extract (2)

"We have countries that honestly nobody has ever heard of. We have languages coming into our country. We don't have one instructor in our entire nation that can speak that language. These are languages, it's a craziest thing." (Trump, 2024)

1- Sociolinguistic Analysis

A- Power

Trump reveals power by portraying some countries and languages as unfamiliar. This suggests that certain nations and languages valued more highly than

others. *"We have countries that honestly nobody has ever heard of"*. This illustrates an approach that holds a country's familiarity with the international scene determines its significance and impact. Trump says, *"We don't have one instructor in our entire nation that can speak that language"*, he explains a lack of funding for modifying languages that enter into America. This highlights the dominance of some languages over others. It can be seen as an instance of linguistic superiority.

B- Ethnicity

Trump's viewpoint on a nation's linguistic and ethnic variety is expressed in the extract. His statement of *"countries that honestly nobody has ever heard of"* and the existence of several languages imply ethnicity as a social variable. This means that a variety of ethnic groups from different countries have an impact on linguistic diversity.

2- Aggression

Verbal aggression is presented by Trump when he uses hostile language to insult certain countries and languages. *"We have countries that honestly nobody has ever heard of. We have languages coming into our country"* and *"it's a craziest thing"*. This indicates that speakers of other languages are subpar. By attacking people and their languages who enter into the United States, Trump employs instrumental aggression in order to criticize Biden's policy regarding immigrants.

3- Purposes of Aggression

There are two purposes of Trump's aggressive language: criticism and exclusion. The first one is shown when he says: *"We have countries that honestly nobody has ever heard of"*, *"it's a craziest thing"* to denigrate and downplay the importance of these nations and their languages by portraying the new languages and cultures as odd or inferior. Trump subtly tries to criticize Biden's immigrations policies. The second purpose is exclusion. Exclusionary language is typified by Trump's emphasis on the division between the current population and the immigrants, *"We have languages coming into our country. We don't have one instructor in our entire nation that can speak that language"*. He implies that those who speak these languages are foreigners.

4.3 Biden's First Speech

President Biden speaks on the anniversary of the Capitol Hill riot on January 6. (January 5, 2024)

Extract (3)

"Donald Trump's campaign is about him, not America, not you.

Donald Trump's campaign is obsessed with the past, not the future. He's willing to sacrifice our democracy, put himself in power.

Our campaign is different. For me and Kamala, our campaign is about America. It's about you. It's about every age and background that occupy this country." (Biden, 2024)

1- Sociolinguistic Analysis

A- Power

Biden demonstrates his power as a candidate for the upcoming election by stating the difference between his campaign and Trump's campaign *"Donald Trump's campaign is about him, not America, not you", "He's willing to sacrifice our democracy, put himself in power"*. He implies that Trump's campaign is egotistical, prioritizing his personal power over the welfare of the American people. In contrast, Biden says: *"our campaign is about America. It's about you. It's about every age and background that occupy this country"*, he emphasizes the use of authority for the common good; presenting it as a concept that should benefit the people.

B- Position

The goals of Trump's campaign are compared with the campaign's goals of Biden and Harris by saying *"Donald Trump's campaign is about him, not America, not you", "Donald Trump's campaign is obsessed with the past, not the future"* and *"put himself in power"*. As a president of America and a nominee, Biden condemns Trump by stating that Trump's viewpoint is self-serving and regressive, while he and Kamala Harris have beneficial and progressive views *"For me and Kamala, our campaign is about America. It's about you", "It's about every age and background that occupy this country"*. He wants to convey that their campaign emphasizes the nation's welfare.

3- Aggression

Biden employs verbal and direct aggression against Trump *"Donald Trump's campaign is about him, not America, not you", "Donald Trump's campaign is obsessed with the past, not the future"*. These remarks publicly challenge Trump's motivations and priorities while harshly criticizing his campaign. Furthermore, Biden deploys instrumental aggression by saying, *"Donald Trump's campaign is about him, not America, not you", "Donald Trump's campaign is obsessed with the past, not the future"* and *"He's willing to sacrifice our democracy, put himself in power"*. He attempts to undermine Trump's campaign by casting doubt on its goals and objectives.

3- Purposes of Aggression

The main aim of Biden's hostile language is criticism. He condemns Trump and his campaign *"Donald Trump's campaign is obsessed with the past, not the future"* and *"Donald Trump's campaign is about him, not America, not you"*. Biden directly criticizes Trump by portraying him as self-absorbed and backward-looking. Another purposes of aggressive language used by Biden are impression management and exclusion, *"Our campaign is different. For me and Kamala, our campaign is about America. It's about you. It's about every age and background that*

occupy this country". He wants to influence the voters by presenting himself and Harris as representative of all people in America. Furthermore, Biden tries to exclude Trump by pointing that his campaign is incompatible with the demands of the American people or the country.

4.4 Biden's Second Speech

President Biden speaks at a conference of the North America's Building Trades Unions. (April 24, 2024)

Extract (4)

"Folks, I'm making Davis-Bacon requirements stronger to guarantee prevailing wage. By the way, we're making them stronger. That will, that alone will increase wages for more than a million construction workers. Trump's MAGA allies are trying to take it away now. But it's not going to happen on my watch." (Biden, 2024)

1- Sociolinguistic Analysis

A-Position

Biden intends to impact the financial circumstances of around a million construction workers by enacting further Davis-Bacon regulations, with the goal of improving their pay. Then, he states that *"Trump's MAGA allies are trying to take it away now"*. Biden attacks Trump supporters by indicating that they want to scale back these regulations. As president, he attempts to demonstrate that he disagrees with Trump on labor policy.

2- Aggression

Biden says: *"Trump's MAGA allies are trying to take it away now"*, he utilizes verbal and instrumental aggression. Biden attacks Trump's supporters, he assaults them as a way to criticize Trump. In addition, Biden employs indirect aggression: *"But it's not going to happen on my watch"*, he subtly challenges Trump's supporters. Biden denotes that during his presidency, he will oppose any move to reduce the *"Davis-Bacon regulations"*.

3- Purposes of Aggression

There are various purposes of aggression in this extract. Criticism is demonstrated by Biden when he says: *"Trump's MAGA allies are trying to take it away now"*. He implicitly criticizes Trump by attacking his supporters. Biden conveys that they work against the interests of the workers. In addition, he wants to show his power and dominance by saying, *"But it's not going to happen on my watch"*. Biden wants to emphasize his ability to assert his policies against any changes. Moreover, he tries to influence the workers by presenting himself as a protector of the working class and a supporter of their rights. This serves the purpose of impression management.

B. Results and Discussion

Table (2) Trump's Speeches (sociolinguistic analysis)

Sociolinguistic Analysis		
Social Variables	Fr.	Pr.
Position	238	43.59%
Power	257	47.07%
Ethnicity	51	9.34%
Total	546	100%

Trump

makes use of his power (47.07%) as a former president of America and a candidate for the presidential election of 2024 to aggress his opponents. His aggressive speech frequently attacks rivals or policies he disagrees with to sway public opinion in different topics. In an effort to energize supporters and convince hesitant voters. Ethnicity comes last (9.34%) because Trump demonstrates a variety of issues rather than concentrating just on ethnicity.

Table (3) Trump's speeches (Types of Aggression)

Types of Aggression	Fr.	Pr.
Verbal	316	33.69%
Direct	290	30.91%
Instrumental	181	19.30%
Indirect	141	15.03%
Gestural	10	1.07%
Total	938	100%

Trump mostly employs verbal aggression (33.69%) to discredit his opponents by insulting, calling names and undermining them. In addition, he deploys it to control the speech, and to display power. Gestural aggression is lowest type used by Trump (1.07%) because it is utilized to highlight certain points and it is secondary to the verbal aggression. Gestural aggression can be used strategically to highlight essential points, but they are secondary to the vocal statements he wants to express.

Table (4) Trump's speeches (Purposes of Aggression)

Purposes of Aggression	Fr.	Pr.
Criticism	312	58.71%
Impression Management	107	20.26%
Power and Dominance	63	11.92%
Exclusion	48	9.11%
Total	530	100%

Criticism (58.71%) is the most frequent purpose of aggression in the political speeches of Trump. He wants to discredit his opponents' credentials and credibility by constantly attacking them. This contributes to cast doubt on their capacity for effective decision-making and leadership. Criticism has the power to influence the public opinion and persuade undecided voters. By criticizing the policies and personalities of his opponents and by emphasizing his achievements while minimizing those of his adversaries, Trump wants to enhance his own image. He tries to present himself as more capable and competent. Exclusion perceives less percentage (9.11%) because it is limited in its influence.

Table (6) Biden's Speeches (Sociolinguistic Analysis)

Sociolinguistic Analysis		
Social Variables	Fr.	Pr.
Position	102	55.74%
Power	81	44.26%
Ethnicity	0	0%
Total	183	100%

As a president of America and a nominee of upcoming presidential election, Biden employs his position (55.74%) to aggress the adversary. It allows him to make aggressive criticism, especially when the rival is a former president who seeks to win the election again. Biden's aggressive speech can shape the public's perception of political problems and opponents. Ethnicity holds the lowest rank (0%) because Biden may try to create an image of being above ethnic distinctions.

Table (7) Biden's Speeches (Types of Aggression)

Types of Aggression	Fr.	Pr.
Verbal	127	37.05%
Direct	89	25.92%
Instrumental	68	19.82%

Indirect	59	17.21%
Gestural	0	0%
Total	343	100%

Verbal aggression is frequently used (37.05%) by Biden to attack and degrade the opponent. He tries to discredit the legitimacy and leadership of the rival. The lowest use of types of aggression is gestural (0%) because Biden mostly depends on verbal communication without accompanying gestures.

Table (8) Biden's Speeches (Purposes of Aggression)

Purposes of Aggression	Fr.	Pr.
Criticism	112	54.38%
Impression Management	54	26.21%
Power and Dominance	21	10.19%
Exclusion	19	9.22%
Total	206	100%

Criticism (54.38%) is the primary purpose behind aggressive language of Biden because holding opponents responsible for their choices or actions can be achieved by using aggressive criticism. Attacks using criticism as a tactic are employed to accomplish variety of goals, such as pointing out the distinctions and shortcomings in strategies of the rival, establishing moral or policy superiority and defending viewpoints. Biden wants to manipulate public opinion and disparage his predecessor in order to change public perception and position himself as better or more reliable option. While exclusion occupies the lowest percentage (9.22%) because exclusionary language can have negative aspects.

5. Conclusion

The objective of the present research is to demonstrate how social variables affect aggression in the selected political speeches. The data is limited to four political speeches by Joe Biden and Donald Trump. The selected data is provided as YouTube

videos. This research shows aggression in the political speeches from a sociolinguistic perspective. It is expected to be significant to students of linguistics, especially to researchers in the approach of sociolinguistics. In addition, the research attempts to reveal the impact of aggression on language by illustrating how it affects the choice and use of speech strategies. Based on the previous analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1- In political speeches, verbal, direct, indirect, instrumental, and gestural aggression are used. Verbal aggression is highly used in political speeches, while gestural aggression is less used.
- 2- Criticism, impression management, power and dominance, and exclusion are the purposes of aggression. Criticism is the most prominent purpose, whereas exclusion is the least common purpose.
- 3- Position and power are the main social variables that elevate aggression in political speeches. Trump and Biden have positions and power as former and current presidents of America. In addition, they are candidates for the upcoming presidential election.

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Data Resources

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