



RESEARCH PAPER

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Statements' Under Control' to the 'Declaration of the War': An Insight into Donald Trump's Covid-19 Political Rhetoric

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ABSTRACT

The Novel Coronavirus, or Covid-19 has been creating a chaotic, distressed, frustrating and turbulent situation around the globe ever since its emergence in China in December 2019. The moment it emerged, there also appeared various conspiracy theories in the surroundings which started initially from the U.S. President Donald Trump. Trumps' political ideology has been creating severe and devastating effects everywhere in the U.S in multiple fronts in the past too.. His political stance— while blaming China, the Democrats, and news agencies—has badly affected the U.S. citizens who were living without any precautionary measures under the Trump's illusion of 'under control' till he made the announcement that it had to be dealt like a war. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) considers political discourse to be a certain political agenda as per Van Dijk's perspective. Trump has been noticed more worried about the upcoming elections than the careful dealing with the pandemic. In the same political dialectics, this study explores and explains several ideological aspects which Mr. Trump made use of in order to maintain an upper hand in terms of politics via employing Van Dijk's model of political discourse.

Introduction

A global epidemic could not be anything out of the blue or entirely out of the question in today's world—technologically termed a 'global village.' The term corona virus or Covid-19 has literally gained a worldwide familiarity in a very short span of time. Politicians and government officials declare it a global health emergency. The sense of unpredictability and uncertainty that Covid-19 has created among us all was never known or realized before. Also, it is hard to believe how

drastically it has affected and altered our ways of living. The global discourse surrounding this pandemic has been so disturbing, distressing and disappointing for various political reasons. On the one hand, many considered it in terms of war and security threats. There has been an ongoing propaganda all over the world to debate over the virus instead of actually dealing with it wisely and tactfully. On the other hand, some did not even believe in its existence until it took millions of lives.

The great social change that Covid-19 brought has also affected the lexicography. It has brought with it numerous new words and phrases which were not there earlier. In this respect, this great social change is also a step towards the great lexical change. The lexicographers of the Oxford English Dictionary are trying to locate the expansion of the pandemic-era language while offering a linguistic and historical context to the usage of several words. These are the expressions which either did not formerly exist or were lesser known. Now, however, thanks to the repeated use, they are rendered common and understandable for every layman (Paton, 2020). The Oxford English Dictionary has also mentioned the top 20 collocates which occur simultaneously with coronavirus or Covid -19 from January to March 2020. The most commonly used words include: pandemic, social distancing, lockdown, epidemic, China, novel, Wuhan, Iran, quarantine, Italy, self-isolation, infected, outbreak, respiratory, flu, cough, ventilator, sanitizer, and hand wash etc.

Thus, the entire word manipulation is the product of listening to the mainstream media discourse. The politics of media, according to Fairclough (1995), should be considered in media analysis. Many critics (Chomsky, 1989; Fairclough, 1995; Fishman, 1980; Fowler, 1991; Hackett, 1991; van Dijk, 1991, 1993) observe that the commercial mainstream media works ideologically and is in the service of the powerful, the elite, and the state. Fairclough (1995) argues that media discourses "contribute to reproducing social relations of domination and exploitation" (p. 44). Sometimes the interests of the media are in conflict with the state, for example in the case of the Vietnam War when American television, by showing images of the war turned the public opinion against the war (Fairclough, 1995, p. 45). How the media works as a vested mechanism of the powerful then? To explain this, Fairclough and other analysts such as Hackett (1991), following Gramsci, use the concept of hegemony. According to Fairclough & Chuliaraki (1999), Hegemony is relations of domination based upon consent rather than coercion, involving the naturalization of practices and their social relations as well as relations between practices, as matters of common sense—hence the concept of hegemony emphasizes the importance of ideology in achieving and maintaining relations of domination and political targets (p. 24).

Now when there is talk about the ongoing political agenda evident in Mr. Trump's rhetoric at the adverse pandemic times, it appears no less than a blame diversion. The U.S. blames China for spreading the virus consciously and intentionally by hiding it from other countries. She also blames the World Health Organization (WHO) for supporting China. Trump has even ordered the intelligence

agencies to look into the affair of China and WHO as to what information they may be hiding. However, the Americans also believe that Trump's discourse of blame game may be a political attempt to win the upcoming election. Besides, there are also those who are annoyed and irritated at Trump's policies: more than 17,000 people have been killed by this virus in New York alone while more than one million are infected, but the President continues to stigmatize China for the death toll. A common citizen blames Trump for taking the matter for granted till it became crucial. Trump blames Democrats and media for manipulating the reality against Trump's efforts which he has been making for long to get over the pandemic. However, there is a belief too that all states should have their own responsibilities to deal with pandemic to save their people instead of blaming the central government (Klemm, 2020).

On the other hand, China blames the USA for creating the virus and spreading it among the Chinese people (Cahill, 2020). According to Nectar Gan (May, 2020), a CNN news reporter, Chinese foreign ministry wrote an article of 11,000 words to criticise the ways the

U.S. adopted to handle the outbreak of novel corona virus and all those lies which were fabricated by Washington to shift the blame to China. The U.S. politicians – particularly President Trump and Secretary of the State Mike Pompeo – have blamed China for preparing the virus in their Wuhan Lab without providing any evidence to support their argument. Chinese officials have reacted at the claims by criticizing America's inability to deal with the pandemic like Beijing. The article also mentions Dr. Li Winliang, a national hero who died in his fight against Covid-19 while receiving the virus from one of his patients, and refutes the idea that he was silenced by the government for making the world aware of this contagious disease (Gan, 2020).

The first crucial speech that Trump delivered in March after learning the number of deaths in the U.S. due to corona could not inspire the masses. His speech was more inclined to the same policies that he has been imposing regarding travel ban on Muslim majority countries. Supposedly there was nothing motivational and influential about how to tackle the situation and save the people from pandemic. Peter Bergen (2020), the national security analyst at CNN, declared Trump's speech a disaster. Trump somehow believed that stopping Europeans from travel could solve the issue immediately just like he imposed travel ban earlier on Muslim nations. However, the terrorist activities inside the U.S. weren't connected with the banned states, but instead with the countries where trump had imposed no bans according to the American Research Institute. Similarly, Trump declared in his speech that the British nationals would be exempted from the ban. It was a ridiculous statement given the fact that the U.K. minister for health (and later even the Prime Minister Boris Johnson himself) was tested positive. In his Oval office speech, he also declared that chances of getting infected with coronavirus are very low among the Americans. But on the other hand, Dr. Anthony Fauci – Trump's top infectious disease advisor –

declared it to be ten times more lethal than the regular influenza. Perhaps, Trump also forgot the fact that 34,000 Americans had died from influenza during the 2018-19 flu season. We can also have a look at some other statements by Trump where he was more absurd and fanatical than being logical and strategic for the current deadly outbreak (Bergen, 2020).

According to Stevens and Tan (2020) Trump's policies have been fairly unpromising and inexplicable for the masses. Initially he was confident enough to declare Covid-19 as a 'Chinese virus.' Then it became the 'foreign tool' that Americans were supposed to confront in an aggressive and comprehensive manner. Everything was under control for Trump in January 2020. Next, in February, came a plain speculation—something that does not go well with the president of the most influential country—that 'when it gets a little warmer, it miraculously goes away.' Simply put, his hope was 'it is going to disappear soon'. At a time when community and local transmission of corona virus was at its peak, Mr. Trump still blamed the foreigners and was content to ban the flights. In reality, however, there were many airlines worldwide who had already closed their operations well before the U.S. It was hence just another moment for Trump to show his xenophobia and narcissist nature.

The current research dynamics analyse Donald Trump's political rhetoric qualitatively by embedding the CDA strategies derived from Teun A Van Dijk's model. Van Dijk terms ideologies as self serving ideas of dominant group that have tactics of controlling all prescribed structures (lexical preferences and syntactic structures) support to accentuate dominant group ideologies (2000). These Ideologies are invested in the political cognition and are contextualized via discourse. In the context Language is the byproduct of such ideologies (Voloshinov, 1973). Ideological prescriptions as reflects in a discourse are part of a lived society and further contextualizes with "Micro and Macro" structures as at evident in social sciences, humanities and linguistics

Stating the same factual underpinnings the attitude of nations ,be figured out or re estimated by political ideologies, and in the same context the political elites are presumed and supposed to make suitable and contextualized linguistic preferences. Political elites are chosen for decision making process about various current phenomena in a society such as the discriminatory issues that minorities are victimized of including the burning concerns of accommodation, education and housing for undersized ethnic clusters and immigrants (Layton-Henry, 1984; Layton-Henry & Rich, 1986 as cited by Van Dijk, 1997). The stances of the mentioned are well taken and well formulated in the prescribed political scenarios and views given by these renowned scholars, famous other politicians, professionals, the mass media and negotiations with the party officials (Lau & Sears, 1986; Reeves, 1983; Swanson & Nimmo, 1990 as cited in Van Dijk, 1997).

Van Dijk states that powerful and influential speakers misrepresent facts and at the same time support and legitimize racist publications with the help of social

coherence, perspective, lexical, semantic and syntactic styles. Besides, rhetoric is a trademark of politicians to manipulate discourse. These can be seen in the below mentioned political inscriptions:

Access (For example Trump's access to media to discuss coronavirus)

Setting (location where discourse takes place and presence of other members such as US society),

Genre (public rhetoric of Trump)

Participant Roles and Positions (political position of Trump to discuss such agenda),

Communicative Act and Social Meaning (for instance the usage of words "best for Americans")

Macro Semantics Superstructures (concern of discussion such as Chinese virus

Super-Structures or Text Schemata (manipulation of such lexical items that make clear that Chinese virus is either lethal or not)

Level of Specificity and Degree of Completeness (disapproval on China to gain political interests)

Implicitness (implication, vagueness and presupposition as people of left wing always criticize right wing for exaggerating small issues) Trump's continuous criticism on Obama for his policies)

Local Coherence (may consider or presuppose ideologically-based beliefs to derogate opponents) Trump's declaration of ban on China and other few virus carrying countries (Van Dijk, 1997).

This paper has ultimately aimed at uncovering superficial eclecticism and paradigm controversies in the following parameters.

Trump's ideology of Blame Game against Barack Obama

As Trump states that "The Obama administration made a decision on testing that turned out to be very detrimental to what was expected"(March 4) .To him the Obama White House's response to the H1N1 pandemic was "a full scale disaster, with thousands dying, and nothing meaningful done to fix the testing problem, until now." (March 13) Referring to criticism of his administration's response, Trump tweeted: "Compare that to the Obama/Sleepy Joe disaster known as H1N1 Swine Flu. Poor marks ... didn't have a clue!" (May 10)

Recurring references to Obama constitute a political face-saving tactic that could supposedly prove Trump superior to the previous administration. However, they are not good indicators for the public. Moreover, he declared health emergency when people expected him to practically take enough precautionary measures to save their lives.

Trump's Ideology of employing the strategy of Understatement and Overstatement

Trump has been found dealing with this threatening situation more politically due to the upcoming elections. No instances could be figured out in early days of pandemic from Trump's speeches reflecting his serious concerns for the safety of Americans. In February, he declared everything to be 'under control.' In March, he once again tried to convince the people with numerous cases reported that it will hardly affect them:

Some people will have this at a very light level and won't even go to a doctor or hospital, and they'll get better. There are many people like that." (Briefing with airline CEOs on March 4). The coronavirus is "going to go away without a vaccine ... and we're not going to see it again, hopefully, after a period of time."

Then the blame game again shifted to the Democrats:

- The Fake News Media and their partner, the Democrat Party, is doing everything within its semi-considerable power ... to inflame the CoronaVirus situation." (Twitter).
- As the situation continued to get worse, his political stance against China also got momentum: "I always treated the Chinese Virus very seriously, and have done a very good job from the beginning, including my very early decision to close the 'borders' from China – against the wishes of almost all."
- There are few more instances that will help us understand this discourse of blame game better. "I don't believe you need 40,000 or 30,000 ventilators. You know, you go into major hospitals sometimes they'll have two ventilators, and now all of a sudden they're saying, 'Can we order 30,000 ventilators?'" – (Twitter, March 26) "WE WILL WIN THIS WAR. When we achieve this victory, we will emerge stronger and more united than ever before!" (March 28)
- The war like stance as George Bush declared before initiating his war on terror after the 9/11 was also chosen by Trump against coronavirus with this blame game. He said: "Nothing would be worse than declaring victory before the victory is won." The above extracts from his speeches make us realize a few significant facts:

- Situations do not get worse overnight; they do take time to reach to a certain point.
- The situations of public health emergency are not handled on assumptions and beliefs; they need certain crucial steps on urgent grounds.
- Rejecting health officials' recommendations on the basis of assumptions for declared global health emergency is incomprehensible and inexplicable.
- Focusing entirely on 'Chinese virus' at a time of public health emergency is beyond understanding.

Trump's Ideology of Using High Intensity Words:

- **most aggressive and comprehensive effort**
- **confront a foreign virus in modern history**
- I am **confident** that by counting and continuing to take these **tough measures, we will significantly reduce the threat to our citizens.**
- We will **ultimately and expeditiously defeat** this virus.
- At **the very start of the outbreak, we instituted sweeping travel restrictions on China** and put in place the **first federally mandated quarantine in over 50 years.**
- We declared **a public health emergency and issued the highest level of travel warning on other countries as the virus spread its horrible infection.**
- And taking early **intense action.**
- We have seen **dramatically** fewer cases of the virus in the United States than are now present in Europe.
- We **are cutting massive amounts of red tape to make antiviral therapies available in record time.**
- These treatments will **significantly reduce** the impact and reach of the virus. **(March 11, 2020).**

According to Peter Bergen, Trump used the high intensity words to create a fantasy land for the Americans. Yet he failed to state whether or not he had enough hospital beds and medical equipment such as ventilators in case of this global pandemic and death threat to millions of Americans. (Bergen, 2020). As a matter of fact, Trump's claims stand nowhere in reality. Italy, whom Trump blames for taking no precautions, had also followed the same path. It also imposed travel bans on China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and the country is now in a total lockdown after having observed the highest number of deaths anywhere in the world.

The usage of high intensity negative words reveals Trump's political stance: he apparently seems to be in a state of denial. Trump could not specify his meaning of public health emergency and intense actions in terms of health services. Also, what type of treatment he presented that could result in low death rate and less coronavirus cases which all Americans are observing now more than any other part

of the world. His dramatically fewer cases are now: (even he himself was tested positive very recently). There are 1.87 million confirmed corona cases across the U.S. and 108k deaths and 421k recovered cases (worldometer, 2020). All the consequences and mishandling by Trump reflect his xenophobia and blame game to gain victory in elections by stigmatizing China. Unfortunately, he had nothing to do with the actual handling of the deteriorating situation.

Moreover, on multiple occasions, Mr. Trump claimed that the usage of the hydroxychloroquine to treat Covid-19 is protected. "You're not going to get sick or die," "It doesn't hurt people". However, several large observational studies in New York, France, and China have concluded that this drug is of no use to deal with this deadly virus. On the contrary, in another research, an increased risk of heart issues and rising death rates have been noticed in the hospitalized patients.

Trump's Ideology of Praising U.S. Versus THEM

Trump states his team as the best anywhere in the world. He further claims that no nation is as well prepared and resilient than another nation in the world. Further claiming that US has the best economy and the most advanced healthcare in the world. Trump terms American doctors, scientists, and researchers best in anywhere in the world. Further claiming that Americans always rise to the challenge and overcome adversity. He further emphasizes that future remains brighter than anyone can imagine America has "developed a testing capacity unmatched and unrivalled anywhere in the world, and it is not even close (May 11, 2020). As he states in his political slogans "I've always known this is real – this is a pandemic. I felt it was a pandemic long before it was called a pandemic ... I've always viewed it as very serious" (March 17). Further claiming that a vaccine would be ready "soon."

US versus THEM strategy for pandemic has again been adopted by Trump. But the descriptions regarding the superiority claims have not been justified anywhere in the speech in terms of handling the outbreak effectively. Instead of devising a wise strategy to deal with the epidemic, the political stance is only found to be evident in all the above-mentioned statements. Till now, there are 2 million confirmed cases of Corona and 113k deaths in the U.S. However, the discourse is still being handled politically by the U.S. President Donald Trump. A striking number of false claims to conceal an otherwise open political agenda make a perfect example of mishandling of a devastating situation in the U.S. that took many lives and put many others on risk. The paper opens avenues to upcoming media and political concerns resisted through text or talk.

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