بحوث قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها

Co-selection and Lexical Cohesion in Donald Trump's Speeches and Comments on COVID-19

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to define a linguistic framework through exploring linguistic co-selection, and lexical cohesion in Donald Trump's speeches and tweets during COVID-19 pandemic. Another aim is to identify his ideological structure and implications concerning this world crisis. Corpus analysis, in addition to quantitative and qualitative data analyses were used. Two corpora were analyzed in this study. The first constituted five of Trump's speeches delivered during the period from the 11th of March, 2020 to the 23rd of April, 2020, the peak of the pandemic. The second corpus was the tweets corpus. This included Trump's tweets transcripts related to COVID-19 pandemic, since the 22nd of January, 2020 to the 3rd of January, 2022. The selected corpora were analyzed using AntConc. 4.2.2 Tools, an online free software used for corpus analysis. The results showed that the most dominant type of cohesive devices used was repetition: in most of his speeches or tweets Trump resorted to the repetition strategy. The use of lexical devices (including synonyms, hyponyms, collocations, antonyms and metonymies) in Trump's speeches can have a

rhetorical value that makes them   function as a means of social interaction with the aim of influencing the nation.

Keywords: Lexical Cohesion, Co-selection, language and ideology, Corpus linguistics, COVID- 19 pandemic, Trump's speeches and tweets.

الملخص باللغة العربية:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الإطار اللغوي، واستكشاف أنماط الاختيار المشترك، والتماسك المعجمي، في خطابات رئيس الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية الأسبق جون ترامب وتغريداته على منصة تويتر (حاليا منصة إكس) خلال جائحة كوفيد-19. ويستخدم هذا البحث الأساليب الوصفية من خلال تحليل مجموعة مختارة من النصوص: نصوص خمس خطابات لترامب خلال الفترة من 11 مارس 2020 إلى 23 أبريل 2020 (فترة ذروة انتشار عدوى جائحة كوفيد-19)، بالإضافة إلى نصوص تغريداته المتعلقة بجائحة كوفيد-19، خلال الفترة من 22 يناير 2020 إلى 3 يناير 2021 تزامنا مع نهاية فترة ترامب الرئاسية. تم تحليل المجموعات المضمنة باستخدام برنامج :LancsBox# 6.0.0. أظهرت النتائج أن السمة الأكثر شيوعًا في خطابات ترامب هي تكرار الألفاظ، من أجل التأكيد على خطابه لإظهار مدى قوته وقوة الأمريكيين. قد يكون لنتائج هذه الدراسة آثار مهمة على تعزيز التواصل عبر مجموعة من المجالات من خلال تقديم رؤى مفيدة حول فعالية استخدام الأدوات المتماسكة والهياكل المواضيعية في الخطب، لا سيما تلك التي تلقيها شخصيات عامة بارزة.

1. Introduction

Political discourse could be considered as one of the most problematic types of discourse because it is usually characterized by the use of different techniques and strategies that allow politicians to convey their political messages and persuade people of their ideologies and thoughts. COVID-19 pandemic is the contemporary major global health crisis and the greatest challenge we have faced in this decade so far. COVID-19 pandemic is much more than a health crisis; it's also an unprecedent socio-economic crisis that have created devastating social, economic and political

effects that will leave deep and longstanding scars. During times of widespread fear, uncertainty and panic, civilians look most to their leaders for guidance and reassurance. As a result, the words of leaders, are trusted, amplified, and weaponized. When a population is deprived of certainty, such as in the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic, its constituents are more inclined to take unsubstantiated propositions as facts, and opinions as knowledge. In the case of COVID-19 pandemic Trump has used this power to divisive ends, creating heroes and villains by simply identifying them. Consequently, at a time in which many Americans are especially inclined to treat his words as gospel, the victims of his baseless accusations face frightening repercussions (Malouf, 2020). Trump reacted slowly to the COVID-19 pandemic; he minimized the threat, ignored or contradicted many recommendations from health officials, and promoted false information about unproven treatments and the availability of testing. Investigating lexical cohesive devices in political speech could have discourse value as they are employed by politicians as means of social interaction aimed at influencing the nation. Therefore, the present study provides a detailed analysis of these items by integrating theoretical hypotheses introduced by Halliday & Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion and co-selection and Sinclair's categorization of lexical items (Sinclair, 2004).

2．Theoretical Background

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method of analysis in intended to uncover ideology and power (Fairclough, 2013). It is an approach that examines all aspects of language use in political or

social domains. Jørgensen & Phillips, (2002) state that CDA has supplied methods for the study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in various social domains.

Van Dijk (1997) argued that CDA is a kind of discourse analytical research that studies how dominance, inequality and social power abuse are resisted, reproduced and enacted by the talk and text in the political and social context. From the abovementioned, we can say that CDA focuses on revealing the hidden meaning of the text. It also highlights how the speaker or the writer applies the power in his discourse to control the dominant groups' minds and actions, and persuade them with his beliefs and thoughts.

Fairclough (1989) focuses on the study of ideology in political discourses. He proposes a three-dimensional framework of analysis, description, interpretation and explanation. His approach is based on Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposed to explain theories of discourse, language and society associated with the linguistic theory analytical method (M. Halliday, 2020).

Fairclough's (2013) model of CDA consisted of three inter-related phases of analysis, namely description and explanation. Figure 2 presents Fairclough's model where CDA, according to Fairclough (1989 p. 109) is a three- step analysis. In the first phase, called micro-analysis or description, the focus is on the stylistic formal features of a text. In the interpretation phase (meso-analysis level) clues on intertextual relations and situational contextualization are used to discover explicit and implicit references in the text. The exploration stage (macro-level analysis) reveals the relationship

between the discourse and the social context and what this discourse wants to do with language.
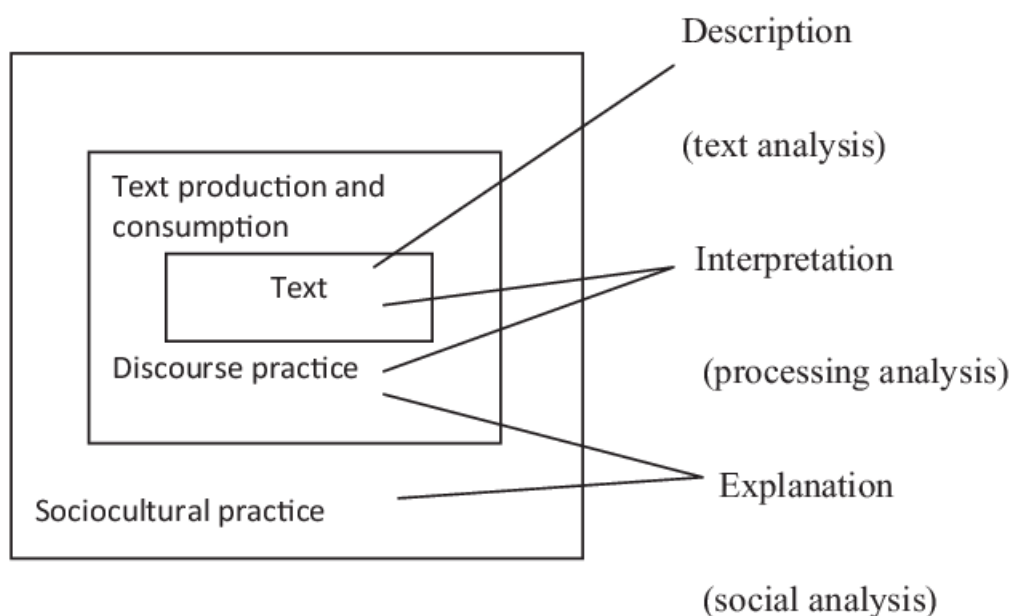

Figure 1: Fairclough's 3–Dimensional model of critical discourse analysis

2.1. Political Discourse

Political discourse is an interdisciplinary subject in which different fields of study interact, such as politics, sociology, psychology, sociolinguistics, etc. Its importance stems from this discourse's influence on the nation's future. People know very well that politicians have a direct impact on the economic, social, cultural, and political aspects of life. However, it is politics which closely affects the decisions of war, peace, stability, or conflict. For this reason, political speeches have attracted the attention of

scholars, trying to interpret all message types, whether implicit or explicit, and uncover what they mean in reality (Sheveleva, 2012).

Political discourse is usually spoken. It is delivered by an effective speaker; president, king, deputy parliament, minister, etc. Effective speakers should have the advantage of voice quality which helps them influence listeners. They have to pay attention to what they say and plan the outcomes of the speech. Hence, politicians seek effective speech to control and manipulate people's minds. They use language to send their messages and achieve their goals (Fairclough, 2013).

Political language is usually simple because the speaker tries to communicate with people who cannot understand the complex language. Moreover, political speeches have a number of functions. First, it is used to transform and deepen a particular phenomenon. Second, it is used to convince listeners of the speaker's ideas using techniques such as analysis and explanation. (Fairclough, 2013) argued that political speech might constitute a domain, field or genre. Similarly, (van Dijk, 1997) states that political discourse analysis deals with political authority abuse, supremacy or dominance. Thus, it is viewed as a class of genres defined by the domain of politics but not a genre by itself. Therefore, political speeches, electoral debates, parliamentary deliberations, political programs and government discussions are some of the politics-related genres.

3. **Questions of the Study**:

1) What are the different types of the co-selection patterns that are recurrent in Trump's speeches and comments regarding COVID-19 pandemic?

2) What are the lexical cohesion devices that are traced in Donald Trump's speeches and comments on COVID–19 pandemic?

3) What are the ideological implications that are reflected in Trump's use of certain co–selection patterns and lexical cohesion devices regarding his speeches and comments on COVID–19 pandemic?

4. **Data and Methodology**:

Five Trump`s speech transcripts, short press briefs transcripts related to COVID–19 pandemic Trump during the period from 11th March, 2020 to 23th through April, 2020, this period constitutes the peak of the spread of COVID–19 infection in the USA community and the whole world, These data were extracted from Trump speeches regarding COVID–19 pandemic transcripts, which downloaded from The Miller Center of the University of Virginia (https://millercenter.org/the–presidency).

Trump's tweets transcripts related to COVID–19 pandemic, and downloaded from Trump's twitter registered website (then: https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump,   now: https://x.com/realDonaldTrump). during the period from 22th January, 2020 to 3rd January ,2021, this period constitutes the start of the spread of COVID–19 pandemic in the USA community and the whole world till the end of Trump's presidential period. The researcher used Antconc version 4.2.2 to analyze the data. Antconc is a crpus–based analysis software used to detect linguistic data. This software aids linguistic researchers to easily get lexical information about a text. The AntConc tools used in this study were: KWIC

tool (Key Word In Context) , Concordance Tool, Concordance Plot Tool, File View Tool, Clusters/N-Grams Tool, Collocates, Word List, and Keyword.

5. Analysis and results

5.1. General features of Trump's language.

The discourse employed by The Former US President Donald Trump exhibits a strong reliance on populist rhetoric, which appeals to the emotional aspects of human perception and interaction, rather than relying on rational arguments. One of the most prominent characteristics of Trump's populist rhetoric is its association with the genre of reality television. Instead of aiming to educate its audience, reality television places a strong emphasis on personal conflict and dramatic tension. The performances of Donald Trump, including his rally speeches and bestselling publications, are characterized by the utilization of reality-TV aesthetics. This aesthetics are strategically employed to captivate audiences and cultivate a perception of genuineness. Trump's "authentic populism" is intricately intertwined with traditional elements of nationalist ideology, such as nativism, anti-elitism, and religious fundamentalism.

A comprehensive examination of the populist rhetoric employed by Donald Trump reveals four fundamental elements that align with the essential criteria outlined by Lee (2006) for defining populist rhetoric. These elements include:

1. The depiction of "ordinary people" as heroic individuals;
2. The emphasis on perceived adversaries as posing a threat to traditional values;

3. The criticism directed towards a "establishment" that is perceived as endangering the interests of the people;

4. The evocation of apocalyptic imagery. In his capacity as a media figure, Trump amalgamates these attributes to create a spectacle that bears resemblance to the genre of entertainment programming that American audiences are acquainted with through reality television (Brandt, 2020).

5.2. **Lexical co–selection**

Following is an elaboration of co-selection in the combined corpora, divided into two sections; the first is listing the general examples and the following is a subdivision of the examples into the subtypes of co–selection.

Some examples of co–selection

- Trump frequently uses words with negative connotations like "danger", "threat", and "crisis" in collocation with references to China and Chinese people, co–selecting language that constructs China as a source of peril.

- When speaking about actions his administration is taking, Trump often co–selects verbs like "mobilize", "fight", and "vanquish" that invoke militaristic or heroic imagery. This portrays his efforts in battling the pandemic in an aggrandized way.

- Descriptions of the virus co–occur with xenophobic labels like "foreign", "Chinese", and "Wuhan", rhetorically framing COVID–19 as a threatening outsider.

- Trump regularly coselects optimistic adjectives like "tremendous" and "powerful" with references to the US

economy and stock market. This coselection patterns implies his actions will inevitably restore economic health.

- When speaking about Democrats and critics, Trump frequently coselects words like "hoax", "witch-hunt", and "conspiracy" to imply their legitimate concerns are unfounded attacks on him.

- References to "reopen", "liberate", and "free" recurrently co-occur when talking about Democratic-led states, constructing lockdowns as oppressive impositions.

- Trump often coselects locative descriptors like "China virus", "foreign virus", and "Wuhan virus" when mentioning COVID-19, rhetorically framing the pandemic as originating from an external enemy.

- Claims about having "total authority", "absolute power", and "all the authority" cluster around statements about overriding governors, positioning his executive power as supreme.

- Trump repetitively coselects superlative adjectives like "greatest", "biggest", and "largest" when self-praising his administration's response, exaggerating its success.

- References to vaccines and treatments are regularly accompanied byassertions about moving "at record speed", overstating the rapidity of medical breakthroughs.

- When speaking about travel restrictions, Trump frequently collocates words like "quickly", "early", and "rapidly" to claim his administration acted urgently, despite delays in responding.

- References to Democratic governors often co-occur with words like "complain", "scream", and "blame", dismissing their concerns as partisan grievances.

5.3. **Cohesive devices**

Lexical cohesion is seen in all of the analyzed corpora through repetition of a list specific words that are related to and in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. A list of words were determined by the researchers to be nominated "specific words" as regards to the this current study. The list includes: America; American; Americans; China; corona; coronavirus; COVID; death; deaths; disease; states; united; USA, letter case ignored.

Table 1: Specific related word count in speech corpus					
Word	Rank	Frequency	Range	Normal frequency	Normal range
America	151	8	8	982.439	0.053
American	61	19	15	2333.292	0.1
Americans	80	15	15	1842.073	0.1
China	151	8	8	982.439	0.053
coronavirus	98	12	12	1473.658	0.08
COVID	782	1	1	122.805	0.007
Death	782	1	1	122.805	0.007
Disease	782	1	1	122.805	0.007
States	43	27	21	3315.731	0.14
United	115	10	9	1228.049	0.06

Table 1 shows the quantitative characteristics for a chosen list of specific words related to the context of the current study. It shows that information for the speech corpus.

Overall, Trump's language during the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by its simplicity, directness, and emotional appeal. He frequently used superlatives, hyperbole, and repetition to emphasize his points. He also frequently attacked his opponents and spread misinformation about the pandemic. These features of Trump's language can be seen as an attempt to manipulate the public's perception of the pandemic and his administration's handling of it.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The results chapter identifies patterns of co-selection in Trump's speeches and tweets, including colligation, semantic preference, and semantic prosody. Many of these align with findings from previous studies cited in the references, such as his use of militaristic metaphors, superlatives, and repetition. The results chapter provides quantitative analysis of lexical cohesion in the speeches and tweets, showing a higher degree of cohesion in the speeches. References such as Jamil (2018) and Zainuddin (2018) also analyzed lexical cohesion in political speeches.

While the results chapter focuses specifically on lexical choices, the references analyze Trump's rhetoric through various linguistic lenses, including pragmatics, semantics, syntax, and corpus linguistics. However, lexical choices are a common theme. The results align with the references in noting Trump's use of pronoun patterns, especially his frequent use of "I" and inclusive "we", as Sheveleva (2012) also found. The results chapter provides original

computational analysis and quantitative data to augment the qualitative critical discourse analyses found across much of the references. The Faming analysis done by Maru et al. (2023) on Trump's three addresses revealed the use of repetition as a rhetorical device in his addresses, serving to spotlight, stress, and embrace people with proposed messages and ideals of the presidents. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the repetition appears to be employed to recall public conviction and support for the government in general and the president as the national leader.

Tsao et al's (2021) review identifies various topics, themes, and methodological approaches in studies on social media and COVID-19, with public attitudes being the most common theme. Twitter was the leading social media platform, followed by Sina Weibo. Most studies used traditional statistical methods, and real-time surveillance was not found. The review also highlights the importance of accurate and reliable information through social media platforms in tackling infodemics, misinformation, and rumors.

Allen & McAleer's (2022) paper analyzes former President Trump's early tweets on COVID-19 in the context of Dr. Fauci's recently revealed email trove. The analysis uses various data mining techniques, including sentiment analysis, to explore content and sentiments within the texts and their potential implications for the national and international reaction to COVID-19. The data set includes 159 tweets from January 24, 2020, to April 2, 2020, sourced from the Trump Twitter Archive.

Kampić & Bagić Babac (2021) reached a conclusion that social media has become a platform for generating and consuming information for the masses, and sentiment analysis is used to quantify attitudes about a certain topic. Twitter is one of the popular platforms where people post their real-time experiences and opinions on various day-to-day issues, and political candidates are using it extensively to attract and retain followers and influence election outcomes. This paper presents results of sentiment analysis with a lexicon-based approach, revealing that President Trump's tweets mostly fall into the category of positive tweets.

Lange (2021) suggests that Trump's presidency has altered how we perceive future Presidents, and it is important to consider how Biden was perceived as President following Trump. Rhetoric and ideology will continue to be important areas of study under critical studies, especially in communication and politics. It is vital to keep analyzing and viewing discourse from Presidents and other powerful politicians to be aware of what their messages mean both on the surface and at a powerful and persuasive ideological level.

COVID-19 is rhetorically framed as a foreign outsider threat by repeatedly co-selecting words like "China virus" and "Wuhan virus".Trump's language often constructs China and Chinese people as a dangerous threat through negative lexical collocations. Wang & Catalano's (2023) research found that comments made by Trump on public forums or social media were repeated and expanded by his followers, indicating a direct link between Trump's 'Chinese virus' discourse and the dissemination and defense of racist discourses on YouTube. This suggests that while the data cannot show how this discourse led to violence in the physical world, it is

important to be cautious about racist public discourse by elite politicians.

The study of Ma'yuuf & Abbas (2021) discusses the use of bullying by Donald Trump, particularly with those who oppose him, such as China and Biden. Trump employs direct strategies for impoliteness, such as using phrases like "bald on record impoliteness," "positive impoliteness," "negative impoliteness," "offrecord impoliteness," and "withhold politeness." Implicature is also used in his speeches to cover his mocking manner.

In conclusion, Trump's COVID discourse shows simple, direct language with repetition to persuade; self–aggrandizing personal pronouns like "I"; exaggeration through superlatives and hyperbole; emotional appeals to fear, anger, hope to manipulate; slogans and catchphrases repeated for emphasis; inflammatory attacks against opponents; and COVID misinformation spreading confusion. While accessible, Trump's style inflames tensions, obscures facts, and consolidates personal power amid the pandemic.

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