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## Speech Acts as a Strategy of Bias in Donald Trump's Political Speeches

### A B S T R A C T

This study deals with analyzing bias in selected political speeches delivered by Donald Trump in different occasions from a pragmatic perspective, namely speech act theory. The reason behind choosing this topic is that it has not been given its due attention, especially from a pragmatic perspective, to the best of the researcher's knowledge. The study aims at finding out the pragmatic strategies, namely speech acts that American politicians exploit to issue bias in their political speeches. Six speeches have been chosen randomly to be analysed as far as types of speech acts are concerned. Data analysis is followed by a table and a figure to illustrate the frequency and percentage of the identified speech act. Finally, there are the main conclusions that the researcher arrived at.

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## دراسة استراتيجية افعال الكلام التحيزية في الخطابات السياسية لدونالد ترامب

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### الخلاصة:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تحليل التحيز في خطابات سياسية مختارة ألقاها دونالد ترامب في مناسبات مختلفة من منظور براغماتي ، وهي نظرية الفعل الكلامي. السبب وراء اختيار هذا الموضوع هو أنه لم يحظ بالاهتمام الواجب ، خاصة من منظور عملي ، لأفضل معرفة لدى الباحث. تهدف الدراسة بالنسبة

للسياسيون الى معرفة الاستراتيجيات البراغماتية ، وهي أفعال الكلام التي يوظفها السياسيون ، الأمريكيون لإحداث في خطاباتهم السياسية المتحيزية. تم اختيار ستة خطابات عشوائياً لتحليلها فيما يتعلق بأنواع أفعال الكلام. يتبع تحليل البيانات جدول وشكل لتوضيح التكرار والنسبة المئوية لفعل الكلام المحدد. أخيراً ، هناك بعض الاستنتاجات الرئيسية التي توصل إليها الباحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: افعال الكلام, التحيز, ترامب, التحيز الاجتماعي, التحيز الديني, التحيز العرقي

## 1. A Spotlight on Bias

Niven (2001: 31) states that bias refers to a general tendency for people to think or act in ways that unwittingly favor their own political group or cast their own ideologically-based beliefs in a favorable light. Politically involved individuals, of course, hold many beliefs that favor their chosen political party or ideology, and many engage in actions deliberately intended to promote the political groups they identify with and the political beliefs they hold. Moreover, bias is considered as an unfaithful direction and lack of sincerity .

The operational definition of bias, in this study , is adopted from Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (Web source 1) as the tendency to prefer individuals or points of view depending on preferences of certain religions, cultures and races.

According to Holroyd et al.(2017: 7-9), the characteristics of bias include :

### (i) bad

Many of the scholars working on bias have used this term in a way that presupposes that it is something normatively bad. This usage corresponds to common sense notions of what it means to be prejudiced, in this case, biased against someone or a group. For example, Saul (2013a: 40) writes that ‘in the case of women in philosophy, implicit biases will be unconscious biases that affect the way we perceive (for instance) the quality of a woman’s work, leading us to

evaluate it more negatively than it deserves'. Biases, here, are linked to distorted and negative evaluations.

## ii. Normatively Neutral

It is observed that those who focus on the badness of bias nonetheless acknowledge that bias may be used in a broader sense, to capture a wide range of phenomena that may be involved in implicit cognition. For example, in a footnote, Saul (2013b: 40) observes that one might use the term simply to pick out implicit associations. This usage resonates with the idea that the cognitive phenomenon at issue extends beyond those involved in social cognition about stigmatized groups. For example, psychologists working on market research have focused on the role of implicit associations in brand preferences and consumer choice (e.g. Gregg and Klymowsky 2013). Others have examined the role of implicit associations in the context of health behaviours and policy decisions (e.g. Macy et al 2013, Stacy et al 2000).

## 2. Types of Bias

Bias could be implicit or explicit. Implicit bias, according to Cameron et al. (2010: 274 ), is primarily unconscious in nature. For instance, Greenwald and Banaji (1995: 8) define implicit attitudes as “introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable thought, feeling, or action toward social objects”. Kelly (2013: 460) characterizes implicit biases as “outside of person’s conscious awareness”. Explicit bias, on the other hand, is the attitudes and beliefs someone has about a person or a group on a conscious level. People are more likely to express explicit biases when they perceive an individual or a group to be a threat to their well-being. These two general types could be:

### a. Racial bias

Barnshaw (2008: 5) defines race as a categorization of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into groups generally viewed as distinct within a given society.

### **b. Religious bias**

According to May et al. (2014:4), religion is an important part of the lives of billions of people around the world, and a cross culturally recurrent aspect of minds and cultures. Over the past decade, several theories have emphasized the natural basis of religious belief and experience, found in cognitive biases that are byproducts of brain functions.

### **c. Social bias**

language has enormous power to project social biases and reinforce stereotypes on people (Fiske, 1993). The way such biases are projected is rarely in what is stated explicitly, but in all the implied layers of meanings that frame and influence peoples judgments about others. For example, on hearing a statement that an all-Muslim movie was a “box office bomb”, most people can instantly recognize the implied demonizing stereotype that “Muslims are terrorists”.

### **d. Ethnic bias**

Crandall and Eshleman (2003: 417) suggest that “beliefs, ideologies, and attributions can liberate prejudice, leading to public communication and private acceptance of prejudices”. They further state that justifications for prejudice have an explanatory nature, and may form “logical” arguments in favor of prejudice. In examining lay perceptions in the intergroup domain, Monteith and Spicer (2000) find that Whites expressed negative attitudes toward Blacks that were strongly related to anti-egalitarianism, whereas Blacks expressed negative attitudes toward Whites that were reactions to perceived racism. The examination of lay beliefs

allowed the researchers to gain insight into how different individuals view and express their prejudices.

### **e. Sexual bias**

Sexism is defined by Sears (2007) as “any act, attitude, or institutional configuration that systematically subordinates or devalues women”. Built upon the belief that men and women are constitutionally different, sexism takes these differences as indications that men are inherently superior to women, which then is used to justify the nearly universal dominance of men in social and familial relationships, as well as politics, religion, language, law, and economics.

### **f. Cultural bias**

Saidan (2016: 1) describes cultural bias as discriminative because it introduces one group's accepted behavior as valued and distinguishable from another lesser valued societal group. Cultural bias was found to be the major determiner of where certain people live, what their opportunities in education and health.

## **3. Bias in Terms of Speech Act Theory**

Bias can be realized in terms of certain speech acts that is why it is important to tackle speech act theory. The theory of speech act(s) is inherently relevant to bias since it involves an intention on the part of the speakers/ writers and an inference on the part of the hearers/ readers and intentionality, as Mey (1994:112) says, is the cornerstone of pragmatics

Levinson (1983:236) views that language is full of implicit meanings. Sometimes, when a speaker utters something, he does not just utter the utterance, but he means something behind it.

Searle (1969: 23-24) starts with the notion that when a person speaks, he performs three different acts, i.e. utterance acts, propositional acts, and

illocutionary acts. Utterance acts simply consist of uttering strings of words (morphemes, sentences). Meanwhile, propositional acts (referring, predicating) and illocutionary acts (stating, questioning, commanding, promising, etc.) characteristically consist of uttering words in the sentences in certain context, under certain conditions and with a certain intention. To these three notions, Searle (1969: 25) adds Austin's notion of the perlocutionary act. There is a correlation between illocutionary acts and their consequences or effects on the actions, thoughts, or beliefs, etc. of hearers. Examples include:

- (1) by arguing I may persuade or convince someone
- (2) by warning him I may scare or alarm him
- (3) by making a request I may get him to do something,
- (4) by informing him I may convince him (enlighten, edify, inspire him, get him to realize)

Searle classifies speech acts into five general classes. His classification of illocutionary acts is used because it is actually a modification of Austin's general theory of speech acts; Searle's classification is based on what the speaker wants to imply in his utterances.

### **1. Representatives or Assertives**

Searle (1979: 12) states that the point or purpose of the members of the representative class is to commit the speaker to something being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition, e.g. stating, boasting, complaining, claiming and reporting. Therefore, testing a representative can be done by simply questioning whether it can be categorized as true or false. This is similar to Yule's (1996:53) definition that representatives state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. By performing a representative or an assertive, the speaker makes the words fit the world (belief). For example,

(5) The earth is flat.

In example (5) the speaker asserts that he believes that the earth is flat.

## 2. Directives

Searle (1979: 13) states that directives are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something such as ordering, commanding, requesting, advising, and recommending. They express what the speaker wants. According to Yule (1996: 53), by using a directive, the speaker attempts to make the world fit the words (via the hearer). The following sentence is an example of directive:

(6) Would you make me a cup of tea?

In example (6), in saying an interrogative sentence, the speaker has an intention to perform a request that has a function to get the hearer to do something that the speaker wants, i.e. requests someone to make him a cup of tea. The speaker does not expect the hearer to answer the question with 'yes' or 'no', but the action of making him a cup of tea.

## 3. Commissives

Searle (1979: 14) notes that commissives are the illocutionary acts whose point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action. They express what the speaker intends such as promising, threatening, refusing, pledging, offering, vowing, and volunteering. In using a commissive, the speaker undertakes to make the world fit the words (via speaker). The example is as follows:

(7) We will not do that.

In example (7), the speaker has an intention to perform a refusal. The speaker refuses to do something that the hearer asks.

## 4. Expressives

Searle (1979: 15) states that expressives are illocutionary acts used to express the psychological state of the speaker. They state what the speaker feels and can be statements of joy, pain, sorrow etc., but also expressions of thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating, etc. (Yule, 1996: 53). In using an expressive, the speaker makes the words fit the world (of feeling). The example is as follows :

(8) I'm really sorry!

Example (8) is an expression to show sympathy.

## 5. 5. Declarations

Searle (1979: 16) argues that declarations effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs that is they change the world via the utterance. According to Yule (1996: 53), the speaker has to have a special institutional role, in a specific context, in order to perform a declaration appropriately; typical examples include excommunicating, declaring war, marrying, firing from employment, nominating, etc. The example is :

(9) Boss: "You are fired"

Utterance (9) can be used to perform the act of ending the employment.

## 4. Data Analysis

This section is concerned with the analysis of the data of the study. It also introduces two types of analysis: pragmatic and statistical. The following are six biased speeches delivered by Donald Trump in different occasions. Types of speech acts used to issue bias will be identified.

### Text (1)

**Trump:** "When did we beat Japan at anything? They send their cars over by the millions, and what do we do? When was the last time you saw a Chevrolet in

Tokyo? It doesn't exist, folks. They beat us all the time. When do we beat Mexico at the border? They're laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friends, believe me. But they're killing us economically. The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems.

Thank you. It's true, and these are the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They're sending us not the right people. It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming probably from the Middle East. But we don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don't know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast”.

### **Analysis**

Donald Trump describes illegal immigrants to the American people, telling them that immigrants will cause problems, chaos and American murder by saying *“They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists”*. This type of speech act is assertive Trump describes Mexican immigrants as a dangerous out-group to gain political power. Negative other presentation, which involves attributing negative values to others, is pragmatically fulfilled by means of the insincere speech act of accusing. A further instance of assertive speech act is that of reporting which is found in *“They're sending us not the right people. It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and*

*Latin America, and it's coming probably probably from the Middle East*". Another assertive speech act is that of stating in *The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems*. It implies that everyone has a problem which could have an economic impact on America's future.

An assertive speech act of stating is found in *"It's true, and these are the best and the finest"*. It is used to inform listeners that Mexico has beaten America economically. The directive speech act of questioning is found in *"When do we beat Mexico at the border?"* It is used to ask the American people about the way of beating Mexico by building a wall on the border. Another speech act is the assertive speech act of stating which is found in *"They're laughing at us, at our stupidity"* which is intended to state that Mexico is sending lots of its people to America to beat them economically. The employment of these speech acts in this way may be attributed to the idea that the speaker, Trump, wants to reveal to the audience that American people have suffered from many crimes and killings because of immigrants.

## **Text (2)**

*"Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on. We have no choice; we have no choice, we have no choice. According to Pew Research, among others, there is great hatred towards Americans by large segments of the Muslim population"*

## **Analysis**

In New York in the United States of America, Trump orders to "ban" all Muslims from entering USA by saying *"Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States"*. Trump describes Muslims as

terrorists and all types of upheavals and disruption in the world. This type of speech act is a directive speech act which results from power or influence because bias is generally viewed as an insincere assertion aimed at garbling the vision of the world in the minds of the targets and causing false beliefs in them. Trump orders to ban Muslims from entering into United States. He also employs the assertive speech act of claiming wherein he claims that “*there is great hatred towards Americans by large segments of the Muslim population*”. It is utilized to claim that Muslims hate and destroy the American people.

### **Text (3)**

**Trump:** In foreign affairs, we are renewing this founding principle of sovereignty. Our government’s first duty is to its people, to our citizens -- to serve their needs, to ensure their safety, to preserve their rights, and to defend their values. As President of the United States, I will always put America first, just like you, as the leaders of your countries will always, and should always, put your countries first. All responsible leaders have an obligation to serve their own citizens, and the nation-state remains the best vehicle for elevating the human condition. But making a better life for our people also requires us to work together in close harmony and unity to create a more safe and peaceful future for all people. The United States will forever be a great friend to the world, and especially to its allies. But we can no longer be taken advantage of, or enter into a one-sided deal where the United States gets nothing in return. As long as I hold this office, I will defend America’s interests above all else. But in fulfilling our obligations to our own nations, we also realize that it’s in everyone’s interest to seek a future where all nations can be sovereign, prosperous, and secure.

America does more than speak for the values expressed in the United Nations Charter. Our citizens have paid the ultimate price to defend our freedom and the freedom of many nations represented in this great hall. America’s devotion

is measured on the battlefields where our young men and women have fought and sacrificed alongside of our allies, from the beaches of Europe to the deserts of the Middle East to the jungles of Asia.

It is an eternal credit to the American character that even after we and our allies emerged victorious from the bloodiest war in history, we did not seek territorial expansion, or attempt to oppose and impose our way of life on others. Instead, we helped build institutions such as this one to defend the sovereignty, security, and prosperity for all. For the diverse nations of the world, this is our hope. We want harmony and friendship, not conflict and strife. We are guided by outcomes, not ideology. We have a policy of principled realism, rooted in shared goals, interests, and values.

### Analysis

In New York in the United States of America, Trump gives promises to the American people by saying “*to serve their needs, to ensure their safety, to preserve their rights, and to defend their values*”. Trump vows himself to defend and protect the American people from any external aggression or harm to the public interest. This type of speech act is a commissive speech act which results from power or influence. There is also an expressive of expressing feelings as shown in “*The United States will forever be a great friend to the world, and especially to its allies*”. It is used to express the speaker’s feelings of happiness in defending the United States on the battlefields. An assertive speech act of stating is obvious in “*Our citizens have paid the ultimate price to defend our freedom and the freedom of many nations represented in this great hall*”. It is used to state that citizens of America have sacrificed their soul in different places on the world. An assertive speech act of exposing is found in “*The United States will forever be a great friend to the world, and especially to its allies*”. It is used to express that U.S. has decided to defend and support allies. Another assertive speech act is that

of stating which is found in “*We want harmony and friendship, not conflict and strife*”. This act is employed in order to state that Americans do not cause harm to anyone; they want to live in peace, free from violence. The directive speech act of requesting is identified in “*But making a better life for our people also requires us to work together in close harmony and unity to create a more safe and peaceful future for all people*”. This act is employed in order to ask the American people to live a decent life, to live in peace to close the gap and end racism.

#### **Text (4)**

**Trump:** My fellow Americans. Tonight, I am speaking to you because there is a growing humanitarian and security crisis at our southern border. Every day customs and border patrol agents encounter thousands of illegal immigrants trying to enter our country. We are out of space to hold them and we have no way to promptly return them back home to their country. America proudly welcomes millions of lawful immigrants who enrich our society and contribute to our nation. But, all Americans are hurt by uncontrolled illegal migration. It strains public resources and drives down jobs and wages. Among those hardest hit are: African-Americans and Hispanic Americans. Our southern border is a pipeline for vast quantities of illegal drugs, including meth, heroin, cocaine and fentanyl. Every week 300 of our citizens are killed by heroin alone, 90 percent of which floods across from our southern border. More Americans will die from drugs this year than were killed in the entire Vietnam War.

In the last two years, ICE officers made 266,000 arrests of aliens with criminal records including those charged or convicted of 100,000 assaults, 30,000 sex crimes, and 4,000 violent killings. Over the years thousands of Americans have been brutally killed by those who illegally entered our country and thousands more lives will be lost if we don't act right now. This is a humanitarian crisis, a crisis of the heart and a crisis of the soul.

Last month, 20,000 migrant children were illegally brought into the united States, a dramatic increase. These children are used as human pawns by vicious coyotes and ruthless gangs. One in three women are sexually assaulted on the dangerous trek up through Mexico. Women and children are the biggest victims by far of our broken system. This is the tragic reality of illegal immigration on our southern border. This is the cycle of human suffering that I am determined to end.

My administration has presented Congress with a detailed proposal to secure the border and stop the criminal gangs, drug smugglers and human traffickers. It's a tremendous problem. Our proposal was developed by law enforcement professionals and border agents at the department of homeland security. These are the resources they have requested to properly perform their mission and keep America safe. In fact, safer than ever before. The proposal from Homeland Security includes cutting-edge technology for detecting drugs, weapons, illegal contraband and many other things. We have requested more agents, immigration judges, and bed space to process the sharp rise in unlawful migration fueled by our very strong economy. Our plan also contains an urgent request for humanitarian assistance and medical support. Furthermore, we have asked Congress to close border security loopholes so that illegal immigrant children can be safely and humanely returned back home. Finally, as part of an overall approach to border security, law enforcement professionals have requested \$5.7 billion for a physical barrier. At the request of Democrats, it will be a steel barrier rather than a concrete wall.

### **Analysis**

Trump states to American people that thousands have been killed, thousands will lose their life if they do not stop immigrants to enter into U.S. This is obvious in *“Over the years thousands of Americans have been brutally killed by those who illegally entered our country and thousands more lives will be lost if we don't act*

*right now. This is a humanitarian crisis, a crisis of the heart and a crisis of the soul”.*

Trump regards immigrants as illegal, brutal, criminals and murderers destroyer of Americans’ job. This type of speech act is an assertive speech act. The expressive speech act of deploring is found in “*Women and children are the biggest victims by far of our broken system*”. This speech act is used to deplore women and children that he will be the first victim in case that emigration continues. An assertive speech act of claiming is found in “*all Americans are hurt by uncontrolled illegal migration*”. It is used to claim that the hurt is related to the immigrants that causes problem is an ethnic one. An expressive speech act of reporting is found in “*We have requested more agents, immigration judges, and bed space to process the sharp rise in unlawful migration fueled by our very strong economy*”. This extract concentrates on the negative impact of illegal immigrants upon the national security of the U.S. He indirectly refers to this increase of sharp rise in unlawful immigration which affects the economy of America.

### **Text (5)**

Trump: “*My fellow Americans, tonight, I want to speak with you about our nation’s unprecedented response to the coronavirus outbreak that started in China and is now spreading throughout the world. Today, the World Health Organization officially announced that this is a global pandemic. We have been in frequent contact with our allies and we are marshaling the full power of the federal government and the private sector to protect the American people. This is the most aggressive and comprehensive effort to confront a foreign virus in modern history*”.

### **Analysis**

By saying “*the coronavirus outbreak that started in China and is now spreading throughout the world*”, Trump declares to American people that China is the source of spreading diseases in all the world. This type of speech act is declaration speech act. He also utilizes an assertive speech act to inform people to overcome this *global pandemic* so that, the country will be safe from the threat outside. This statement indicates the feature of direct request. There is also an assertive speech act of stating “*Today, the World Health Organization officially announced that this is a global pandemic*”. The sentence “*I want to speak with you about our nation’s unprecedented response to the coronavirus outbreak that started in China and is now spreading throughout the world*” is representative in its structure with the illocutionary force of reporting. The sentence “*we are marshaling the full power of the federal government and the private sector to protect the American people*” is a commissive with the illocutionary force of promising. It is utilized to commit the government to protecting the American people. “*Today, the World Health Organization officially announced that this is a global pandemic*” is a declaration because of the use of the word adverb *officially* which indicates full confidence in declaring something; it is also supported by the verb *announce*.

## **Text (6)**

“But this invasion of Ukraine would never have happened if I was in the White House, not even a chance would have never happened not even and I knew Putin very well you know they say oh he knows Putin oh that’s a good thing not bad thing medical democrats are spending billions and billions of dollars trying to secure the borders of distant foreign countries many of which you’ve never even

heard of but I believe Americans deserve president who will secure our borders the borders of our nation who will protect our citizens who will defend our sovereignty and who will stop the biggest invasion ever of our country and probably of any country there's never been anything like it. We're being invaded and that's the word we're being invaded by millions and millions of people secretary of State to clean up Michigan's election for good".

| No. | Speech Acts Types | President Trump | Total | Percentage |
|-----|-------------------|-----------------|-------|------------|
|-----|-------------------|-----------------|-------|------------|

### Analysis

In Michigan in the United States of America, Trump states an opinion about the invasion of Ukraine using the representative speech act of stating in *"this invasion of Ukraine would never have happened if I was in the White House"*. This act is employed to state that Biden caused problems for America as a current president in the White House. Also, a directive speech act of advising is found in *"I believe Americans deserve president who will secure our borders the borders of our nation"*. It is used to ask the American people to choose a president to protect them from any outside invasion.

Statistically, Table (1) illustrates the frequency of speech acts in Donald Trump's Speeches. It indicates that the total number of speech acts used by Trump is (24). Assertives have the highest frequency (13), (54.16%). Directives are employed (4) times with the percentage (16.66%). Expressives come next (12) times with the percentage (12.50%), then comes commissives and declarations at equal frequency (2) times scoring (8.33%).

|       |             |    |    |        |
|-------|-------------|----|----|--------|
| 1     | Assertive   | 13 | 39 | 39.39% |
| 2     | Directive   | 4  | 28 | 28.28% |
| 3     | Commissive  | 2  | 10 | 10.10% |
| 4     | Expressive  | 3  | 20 | 20.20% |
| 5     | Declarative | 2  | 2  | 2.02%  |
| Total |             | 24 | 99 | 99.99% |

## 5. Conclusions

Regarding the speech acts employed by Donald Trump in his biased speeches, it is found that assertives and directives are used more than other speech acts in biased discourse. This can be construed in the sense that American politicians try to state information, announcements, and facts to propagate bias more than express their feelings and ideas towards the other parties. That is to say, they try to explain the insult and belittling they issue towards their opponents and enemies more than depending on reflecting and expressing their psychological states towards them.

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