

Populism in Rishi Sunak's Speeches: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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The current paper is a critical discourse analysis of populism in the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's speeches. Generally, ideologically speaking, populism is a planned speech used by a speaker to claim people do not agree with a specific idea when the speaker tries to derogate it ; or saying all people agree with the idea when they adopt it . Populism, in this paper, is a way of positive self –representation throughout showing that one's actions are done for the benefit of people, demonstrating closeness to them.

Since there is lack of populism studies , specifically in terms of CDA , the study tries to bridge such a gap. As such, this paper aims to discover strategies of populism in Rishi Sunak's speeches in question. Furthermore, the paper endeavours to show the most and least employed strategies the prime minister's speeches. The paper hypothesizes that Sunak employs various strategies most of which are norms and situation adscription; while the least are lexical and functional categorization. To achieve its aims, the study employs amalgam of Van Dijke's (1995, 2002,2006) models of CDA. Finally, asserting the hypotheses, the paper concludes that Sunak implemented norms and situation adscription more than other strategies to gain credibility by showing the norms he adheres to and describing the situation to his people while the least strategies are lexical and functional categorization as they depict viewpoints and functions of his addressees.

Key words: Populism, critical discourse analysis, Van Dijk, CA, populist, Rishi Sunak.

الشعبوية في كلام ريتشي سوناك : تحليل نقدي للخطاب

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المستخلص

ان الدراسة الحالية هي تحليل النقدي للخطاب الشعبوي في خطابات رئيس الوزراء ريتشي سوناك. بشكل عام، و من الناحية الأيديولوجية، الشعبوية هي خطاب مخطط له يستخدمه المتحدث للدعاء بأن الناس لا يتفقون مع فكرة معينة عندما يحاول المتحدث الانتقاص منها؛ أو القول بأن جميع الناس يوافقون على الفكرة عندما يتبناها. وعلى وجه التحديد، فان الشعبوية،

ضمن هذه الورقة البحثية ، هي وسيلة للتمثيل الذاتي الإيجابي من خلال إظهار أن أفعال الفرد تتم لصالح الناس، وإظهار القرب منهم.

ونظرًا للنقص في مثل هذه الدراسات، تحاول الدراسة سد هذه الفجوة. وبالتالي، فهي تهدف إلى اكتشاف الاستراتيجيات الشعبوية في الخطابات المعنية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسعى الدراسة إلى إظهار أكثر الاستراتيجيات وقلها استخدامًا في كلام رئيس الوزراء. وتفترض الدراسة أن سوناك يستخدم استراتيجيات مختلفة معظمها عبارة عن معايير وتوصيف للمواقف؛ بينما أقل الاستراتيجيات هي التصنيف بالكلمات القاموسية والتصنيف الوظيفي. ولتحقيق الأهداف، استخدمت الدراسة مزيجًا من نماذج فان دايك (١٩٩٥، ٢٠٠٢، ٢٠٠٦) لتحليل الخطاب النقدي. وأخيرًا، وبتأكيد الفرضيات، خلصت الورقة إلى أن سوناك استعمل استراتيجيات المعايير ووصف الموقف أكثر من الاستراتيجيات الأخرى لاكتساب المصادقية من خلال إظهار المعايير التي يلتزم بها ولوصف الوضع لشعبه في حين كانت أقل الاستراتيجيات توظيفًا هي التصنيف بالكلمات القاموسية والتصنيف الوظيفي لأنها تصور وجهات النظر والمواقف ووظائف المتلقين للكلام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعبوية ، تحليل نقدي للخطاب ، فان دايك، التحليل النقدي ، شعبي ، ريتشي سوناك.

1. Preliminaries

Politicians have the intentions of showing that their acts are done in favour of the public or people in general, having their interests safeguarded. Populist politicians often depict themselves as representatives of the people, demonstrating the power to them, and affirming their sovereign rights. However, this perspective that is called populism has not get its due attention in linguistic studies i.e., there is rarity of studies tackling the ideology of populism, specifically, in terms of critical discourse analysis. Thus, this paper tries to bridge this gap.

1.1. The Problem

Politicians' speeches have their impacts on people. One of the required impacts is affirming people's rights and interests in addition to showing that the defense is beneficial to people. The problem of the current study stems from the fact that there is lack of studies dealing with this idea of populism in political speeches, in terms of CDA. Rishi Sunak is one of the politicians. He is the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the leader of the Conservative Party since 2022 who speaks on behalf of the people he represents. Thus, his speech is effective.

As such, this paper endeavours to answer the following questions: First, what are strategies of populism in Rishi Sunak's speeches? Second, what are the most and the least strategies of populism in the speech in question. To achieve its aims, the study employs amalgam of Van Dijke's (1995, 2002, 2006) models.

1.2. Aims

Thus, the paper is set with the aim of identifying the strategies of populism in Sunak's inauguration speech, and pinpointing the most and the least strategies of populism in the speech in question.

1.3. Hypotheses

The study hypothesizes that, in terms of populism strategies in Sunak's speeches, norms and situation description are the most employed strategies, whereas the least are lexical and functional categorization.

1.4. Value

Finally, the paper is accomplished with the aim of being valuable for researches, CDA analyst, politicians, and above all linguists who are interested in the topic of populism tackled in this paper.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

To date back, Critical Discourse Analysis(henceforth CDA) springs from a critical theory of language a theory which looks at the use of language as an integral part of social practice (Janks, 1997:329).

One of the modern and most influential approaches to CDA is the socio-cognitive approach wherein cognition, society and discourse are recurrently integrated in communicational interaction. Within such approach Van Dijk (Bukhari and Xiaoyang, 2013:12), presents a model wherein the gist is the analysis of macro-structures is the analysis of thematic structures. Due to Van Dijk's (1995) perspective that discourse analysis is ideology analysis, the ideological square model involves both "emphasize Our good things and Their bad things (van Dijk, 2006:49). Yet , in the current paper only positive self –representation of the in-group is to be tackled since it is the main macro structure for populism analysis.

3. Populism

The term populism has various shades of meanings, and accordingly, it has to be specified in the current study . In *Cambridge Dictionary* , it occurs when a political approach that strives to attract ordinary people who feel that their concerns are neglected by the elite groups: e.g., "the question is whether he will tone down his fiery populism now that he has joined the political establishment" and "the Finance Minister performed a commendable balancing act, combining populism with prudence". It also means "support for populist politicians or policies" as in "the government

came to power on a wave of populism". Finally, it points to "the quality of appealing to or being aimed at ordinary people" e.g., "art museums did not gain bigger audiences through a new populism". In the current study , it means the quality of being aimed at ordinary people.Hence, to appeal to people and gain their support , politicians try to portray their deeds or actions as being for the benefit of those people.

For ,Van Dijk(2006:738) populism is a strategy used by a speaker to claim people or everybody does not agree with a specific idea when they try to derogate it .Populism is a way of positive self –representation throughout showing one's actions are done for the benefit of the in-group.

As a form of ideology, according to Mudde (2004: 543), populism emphasizes separation between two contrastive and non-homogeneous groups, "the pure people"v.s. "the corrupt elite", claiming that the main concern of politics should be expressing people's general will. Populist ideology , in its own perspective, considers people possessing the right to sovereignty, the elite or others threaten to prevent them from that right and the populist restores or protects their own sovereignty .

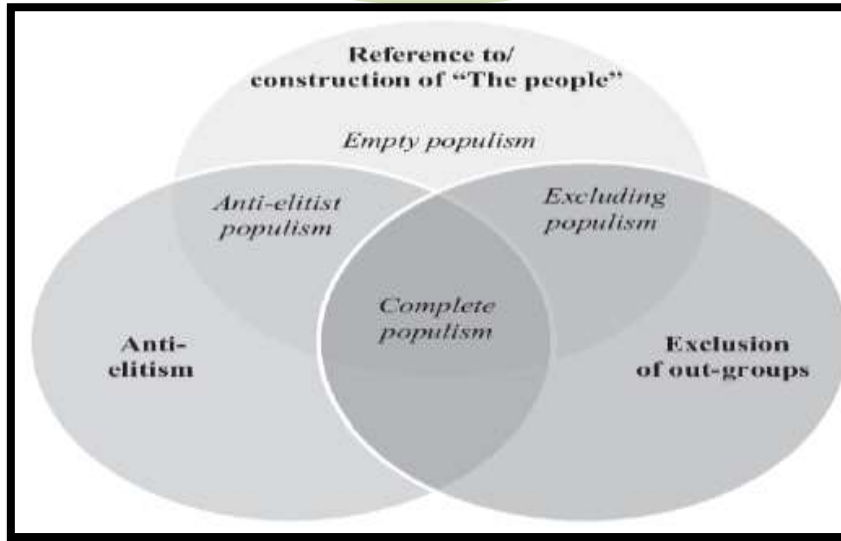
As for Jagers and Walgrave (2007: 322),who consider populism as a "communication style", it is conceptualized either as a thin populism i.e., a communication style employed by political actors that refers to people only ; or a thick one where all the components are combined (ibid:323). Cranmer (2011:288) refers to populist communication as a style referring to the people employed by various political actors for various aims. Populist style occurs only when a political actor claims that :1)his effort to be the will of people, 2)his defense is beneficial to people .So, s/he legitimizes her/ his claim by referring to the people. Additionally, there is a homogeneity indicator to thick populism, this indicator measures whether or not an in-group or its values are depicted as being opposed by an out-group.

Populist style take one of three main forms each with its strategies :

1)Anti-elitism:i.e., Excluding the elite from people (Wirth, et al.,2014: 52).

2)Restoring Sovereignty: Denying power to elite, and demanding it for people .

3)People Centrism(stressing virtues of people ,praising their achievement, stating monolithic people, demonstrating closeness to people) (P. 52).



Figure(1) Elements of Populism.

Furthermore, populism elements are people, anti –establishment , and exclusion (Jagers and Walgrave,2007:322) .These three elements are employed to differentiate four types of populist communication:

- 1- Empty populism i.e., the only existing element is references to the people .
- 2- Exclusionary populism i.e.,joining references to people and excluding out-groups .
- 3- Anti-elitist populism involves references to the people joined with attacks on the elites (ibid).
- 4- Complete populism i.e., joining the three above mentioned elements (see Figure 1 above). The structure of these four types of populism is meaningful, underscoring that individual features of populism are likely found in specific combinations .

4.Methodology

Following Van Dijke's model of the socio-cognitive approach,the current paper seeks to analyze populism employing an eclectic model composed from various models of van Dijk's (1995, 2002,and 2006) works. Thus, the following strategies are involved :

1-Norm expressions: Stating something as an explicit norm statements about what people should or should not do (van Dijk , 2006: 738).

2-Situation Description : where the whole situations is described. Indeed, describing the situation is significant in making a point, since the *way* it is described reflects implications concerning causes, reasons, aftermaths, consequences and appraisal(van Dijk , 2006:739).

3-Categorization: This strategy occurs when a speaker categorizes people. Hence, for van Dijk (2006b:735-9) this means assigning individuals as belonging to certain groups. To elaborate, it involves: 1) **Lexical categorization** when a speaker's, a society's, a text's worldview is mediated (King and Anderson, 2006:120). 2) **Functionalization:** referring to them in terms of the acts, activity, or something they do (Van Leeuwen, 1993, 42) e.g., terrorist, protestor. 3) **Identification:** here, social actors are identified in terms of age gender, provenance, class, wealth, ethnicity, religion and so on. 4) **Appraisal:** Social actors are described or pointed to by evaluation such as calling them good or bad, loved or hated, or admired (p.45) .

4-Disclaimers: A familiar joining of both of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Often, they are not an expression of attitudinal ambiguity, in which both positive and negative representations are mentioned, Rather, in sum, they save face by mentioning positive things, then concentrate on others' negative attributes. Consequently, self-qualification of the positive part of the disclaimer is apparent, as in apparent denials, concessions, or empathy, etc.:

-Apparent Empathy: I understand that many people want to come to Britain to work, but there is a procedure whereby people can legitimately become part of our community (p.736).

-Apparent Denial: I did not say that every eastern European's application for asylum in this country was bogus, but I have another opinion.

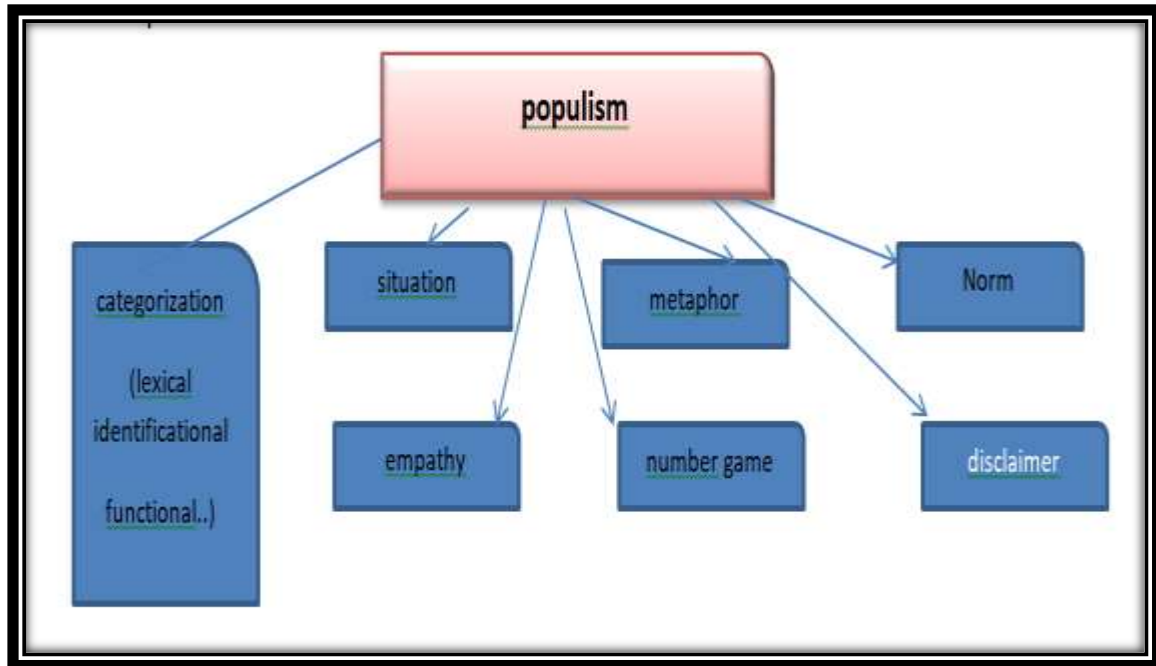
5-Metaphor : Few semantic-rhetorical figures are as persuasive as metaphors, also in debates on immigration. Abstract, complex, unfamiliar, new, or emotional meanings may thus be made more familiar and more concrete. Virtually a standard metaphor e.g., the use of "flood" as a metaphor to refer to "refugees" showing " the unstoppable threat of immigration. Another notorious semantic realm of metaphors is to describe people in terms of animals, e.g., Asylum seekers as 'parasites,' (p.738).

6-Empathy : involves showing sympathy or empathy with the dilemmas or plights e.g., "the poor taxpayer" (van Dijk, 2002, p.156).

7-Number game . It is an argumentation strategy wherein argument is oriented to sustaining authenticity by moves that emphasize credibility considering numbers and statistics as the main way in our culture to convincingly display objectivity, and they routinely show news reports in

the press(van Dijke, 2006:782). Arrivals of immigrants are normally joined by numbers, also in parliament. The same occurs for their costs:

- It would open the floodgates again, and presumably the £200 million a year cost that was estimated when the legislation was introduced(p.783) .



Figure(1)The framework of Analysis

5.Data Analysis

In this section data are to be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Data collection :data are selected from the webservice one wherein it is available and authentic (see webservice2).They are collected on the bases that they contain populism i.e., excluding others that do not encompass it.

Data description : Data in this study encompass Rishi Sunak's speeches . They vary from three to five pages in length. The Prime Minister, tried to show concern about British people and enhance public's support . Contextual factors are setting : place PM building ; time19, 2024 ; the speaker is Rishi Sunak; addressees are Britain people; key is serious ;channel is oral; act sequence is successive pieces of speech, the end is to convince British people that what is done is for their interests ; and finally, the norms are the rules of communication between a president and his fellow citizens.

I-Qualitative Analysis

This section deals with the qualitative analysis following some steps: First , choosing representative extracts on the bases that they contain Populism. Second , explaining the meaning of each extract before determining the micro strategies. Third, pinpointing the strategies in each extract.

Extract 1

Today I'd like to talk about the growing number of people who have become economically inactive since the pandemic... ..and the moral mission of reforming welfare to give everyone who can, the best possible chance of returning to work.

The values of our welfare state are timeless. They're part of our national character – of who we are as a country.

To enhance his speech with positive words praising Britain, Prime Minister Sunak employs the strategy of situation description explaining the reason behind economic stagnation. To deepen his view, the prime minister joins this with the strategy of norms where he depicts the values as the “moral mission”. The prime minister assures his people that their activities are the reason behind their living in welfare. Showing his concern of people's affairs reflects populism.

Extract 2

We are a reasonable country and a decent people. Our story is one of progress, of great achievements and enduring values. Immigrants who have come here have integrated and contributed. They have helped write the latest chapter in our island story.

To praise his country and its people , the prime minister employs the strategy of appraisal utilizing the qualification of “reasonable” and “decent” . As such , he categorizes them positively. This reflects his positive self- representation as a politician who appreciates his nation along with its public. Furthermore, he employs the strategy of situation description stating that those who are immigrated to Britain are merged within the society sustain its positive picture of writing its history as a great nation. To conclude, Sunak's speech points to his deep appreciation of people.

Extract 3

They have done this without being required to give up their identity. You can be a practising Hindu and a proud Briton as I am. Or a devout Muslim and a patriotic citizen as so many are. Or a committed Jewish person and the heart of your local community.....and all underpinned by the tolerance

of our established, Christian church. We are a country where we love our neighbours.

Utilizing identificational categorization, Sunak shows respect for people of all faiths. Assuring that mutual respect and understanding between members of different religions are the key to build the country creating a better world to live in. Alligned with all religions, Sunak tries to represent himself as considerate and caring about varieties of the society .Since the appraisal (appraisal categorization) for country is an evaluation of its people , he mentions that they live peacefully with their neighbors.

Extract 4

And some who can no longer work because of injury or illness. And they and their loved ones must always have the peace of mind that comes from knowing they will always be supported.

But we also have a long-standing and proudly British view that work is a source of dignity, purpose, of hope.

In this extract , the strategy of lexical categorization ,in terms of world view, is joined with the empathy and disclaimer. To elaborate, the prime minister's compassion is made clear through his continuous support for those injured or who are sick . Additionally, disclaimer is performed by the use of the word “but” that what comes after does not admit what comes before since he considers work as the reason behind respect, aims, and good expectations. Consequently, people are told that people are the center of the concern .

Extract 5

And we must never tolerate barriers that hold people back from making their contribution... ..and from sharing in that sense of self-worth that comes from feeling part of being something bigger than ourselves. That is why this is a moral mission. And why the value of work is so central to my vision for welfare reform. And it's fitting to be setting out that vision here, at the Centre for Social Justice

Showing concern to people's economic state , Sunak says that they have to destroy all obstacles in the way of the dramatic achievements that people are to make. Here, the strategy of norms paves the way for the public, that the prime minister is addressing, to feel that they have a responsible government caring about their interests. Words like “self-worth, “something bigger than ourselves”, “moral mission” and “my vision for welfare reform” are supporting the main aim in this respect.

Extract 6

We will also act to prevent people entering this country whose aim is to undermine its values. The Home Secretary has instructed that if those here on visas...choose to spew hate on protests or seek to intimidate people.....we will remove their right to be here.

To represent himself positively, Sunak makes use of the strategy of norms showing that those who enter the country to belittle its basics or principles or do something bad to its people, are going to be displaced. Additionally, he employs metaphor saying “spew hate” to give a vivid picture of what procedures of protections he provides to his country people. Positive self- representation is apparent in this extract as a way to gain public support.

Extract 7

But we also have a long-standing and proudly British view that work is a source of dignity, purpose, of hope. The role of the welfare state should never be merely to provide financial support... as important as that will always be.....but to help people overcome whatever barriers they might face to living an independent, fulfilling life. Everyone with the potential should be supported...And not just to earn, but to contribute and belong.

Employing the strategy of disclaimer three times, Sunak has the intention of showing his people that though it is the government's job to provide welfare , yet to get rid of the obstacles hindering their progress is a must. Furthermore, despite the fact that everyone has to be supported, but they should “contribute”. Lexical categorization of Britain as having the worldview that is “longstanding “and “proudly”. Hence, setting the bases for assistance, the viewpoint that he is a sustainer for his people is asserted. As such his attempt to demonstrate closeness to them is made crystal clear.

Extract 8

And we'll save the taxpayer £600 million by legislating to access vital data from third parties like banks. Just this month, DWP secured guilty verdicts against a Bulgarian gang caught making around 6,000 fraudulent claims...

The current extract involves exploiting number game strategy twice to enhance the speaker's credibility. Thus, saving “£600 million” for taxpayers and “6,000 fraudulent claims”. Focusing on numbers, people are made able to envision the situation and thus, situation description strategy is combined effectively. Being attentive to his people's needs of cutting

taxes and avoiding fraudulent attempts , Sunak assures them that they are being paid attention to and , thus, demonstrating closeness to them.

Extract 9

Fifth, we cannot allow fraudsters to exploit the natural compassion and generosity of the British people. ...We've already cracked down on thousands of people wrongly claiming Universal Credit... ...including those not reporting self-employed earnings or hiding capital ...

In this extract , Sunak shows himself as attentive to exploitations that might occur to his people. Thus, norm strategy is evident in showing that it is part of his government's values to pay attention to fraud. Thus, he "cracked down thousands of people ...". It is a number game strategy that serves to explicate the huge number of people cheated . People's interests are taken into consideration.

Quantitative Analysis

Aiding the qualitative analysis, Table(1) below depicts the variation in the implementation of various strategies .

Table(1)Frequencies and percentages of populism strategies

No.	Strategy	Sub strategy	Frq.	%
1	Norms		8	25%
2	Situation description		5	16%
3	Categorization	Lexical	1	3%
		Functional	2	6%
		Identification	3	9%
		Appraisement	5	16%
4	metaphor		4	12.5%
5	disclaimer		4	12.5%
6	empathy		3	9%
7	number game		3	9%
Total				

Accordingly, norms is the most utilized strategy that achieves 8 frequencies with the percentage of 25%. Next, appraisement categorization, as well as situation description, score 5 frequencies which means 16%. As for

disclaimer, and metaphor, they appear 4 times which means it has the percentage of 12.5%.

Regarding empathy, number game, and functional categorization they all score 3 frequencies which achieves 9%. Finally, lexical categorization occurs once and this means it has the percentage of 3%.

7.Results

Considering Sunak's speech, and depending on the above mentioned analyses, it expressly appears that he implemented various strategies in various percentages. To present populism, Sunak utilizes both norms strategy, situation description and categorization by appraisal. Obviously, they help him achieve or gain credibility and support as a politician addressing his public. Hence, he tries to explain his plans as going with the norms of the country. Additionally, he tries to envision the situation, and praise people so that it appears for their interests and with great benefit.

Furthermore, Sunak empathy to reflect his compassion towards his people as an indication of feeling their suffering which is one of the ways that attract the attention of fellow-citizen to humanitarian perspectives of their leader.

It appears that these two strategies assist showing deep concern with the nation and its people which is the main aim of gaining public's support. Additionally, disclaimer has been implemented to emphasize the focal point after presenting the speech.

8. Conclusions

The paper concludes the following:

- 1-Populism is a way of positive self-representation throughout showing one's actions are done for the benefit of people. It is, ideologically speaking, a plan used by a speaker to claim that people do not agree with a specific idea when they try to derogate it; or saying all people agree with the idea. This means that it is the quality of appealing to people by doing all what is beneficial for them.
- 2-Expressly, Sunak uses the following strategies in his speech: norms, situation description, categorization, disclaimer, number game, empathy, and metaphor. This asserts the first hypothesis(see 1.1.).
- 3- In terms of the most employed strategies, they are: norms, situation description and appraisal (the latter within categorization). Next, metaphor and disclaimer are introduced, where perspectives enhanced, are utilized to achieve populism.

- 4- Sunak employs strategies that enable him gain credibility like number game (to prove what he says) empathy (to look considerate to his people), and ideational categorization (to depict worldviews as authentic legitimized).
- 5- Finally, the least strategy is lexicalization(within categorization), which asserts the second hypothesis .

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