



ISSN: 1999-5601 (Print) 2663-5836 (online)

Lark Journal

Available online at: <https://lark.uowasit.edu.iq>



*Corresponding author:

Asst. Lect. Ehab Abid Alkaream

Department of English Language, College of Education, Wasit University

Email:

ehababid@uowasit.edu.iq

Keywords: Speech acts, Pragmatic analysis, Van Dijk's model, Iran's nuclear program, Speech events.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 Jul 2025

Accepted 12 Sep 2025

Available online 1 Oct 2025



A Pragmatic Analysis of Trump's Statements on Iran's Nuclear Agreement

Abstract

This research examines the prominent discursive strategies utilized by the US President Donald Trump to rationalize his the Iran nuclear agreement. The analysis was conducted using a transcript of Trump's speech regarding the termination of the agreement, which was delivered from the diplomatic room of the White House on May 8, 2018. By employing Van Dijk's model of claims analysis (2004), the most commonly employed discursive strategies by Trump included negative other representation, lexicalization, hyperbole, counterfactuals, authority, polarization, populism, and number Game. Using these strategies, Trump portrayed Iran, its nuclear program, and the agreement as a security threat to the United States, its allies in the Middle East, and the global community. As a result, Trump persuaded the audience that his decision to withdraw from the agreement was justifiably reasonable

© 2025 LARK, College of Art, Wasit University

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.31185/lark.4684>

المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث أبرز الاستراتيجيات الخطابية التي استخدمها الرئيس الأمريكي دونالد ترامب لتبرير قراره بالانسحاب من الاتفاق النووي الإيراني. أُجري التحليل باستخدام نص خطاب ترامب بشأن إنهاء الاتفاق، والذي أُلقي من القاعة الدبلوماسية بالبيت الأبيض في 8 مايو/أيار 2018. وباستخدام نموذج فان ديك لتحليل الادعاءات (2004)، أشارت النتائج إلى أن الاستراتيجيات الخطابية الأكثر شيوعاً التي استخدمها ترامب شملت التمثيل السلبي للآخر، والاستخدام المعجمي، والمبالغة، والوقائع المضادة، والسلطة، والاستقطاب، والشعبوية، ولعبة الأرقام. باستخدام هذه الاستراتيجيات، صوّر ترامب إيران وبرنامجها النووي والاتفاق كتهديد أمني للولايات المتحدة وحلفائها في الشرق الأوسط والمجتمع الدولي. ونتيجةً لذلك، أقنع ترامب الجمهور بأن قراره بالانسحاب من الاتفاق كان معقولاً ومبرراً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أفعال الكلام، التحليل تداولي، نموذج فان ديك، البرنامج النووي الإيراني، أحداث الكلام.

1.INTRODUCTION

Since the concluding phases of World War II, particularly following the initial deployment of atomic nuclear bombs by the United States in Japan in 1945, the issue of nuclear weapons and their use has remained a significant concern for nations. Despite the efforts of powerful and influential states to restrict the acquisition of nuclear weapons by other nations since that time, it cannot be asserted that they have achieved success, as attempts by various states to obtain nuclear weapons persisted towards the end of the century. After several rounds of negotiations, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was finalized on 14 July 2015 in Vienna between Iran and the Five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, along with Germany and other countries, to resolve a 12-year nuclear impasse by acknowledging Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear program (Kadkhoda & Tari, 2019). This agreement significantly curtailed Iran's known nuclear capabilities in exchange for relief from sanctions. However, in May 2018, US President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement and reinstated US sanctions (BBC News, 2021), asserting that he sought a more favorable deal that would

restrict Iran's ballistic missile capabilities and its involvement in regional conflicts. The present paper intends to examine how President Donald Trump rationalizes his decision to exit the Iran nuclear deal through the use of discursive strategies in his speech. To achieve this, claims analysis, which aims to uncover how 'social power abuse' is perpetuated through discourse in social and political contexts, is deemed an appropriate methodology for this research.

2.Aims

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examining how power is constructed in Trump's speech regarding the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal.
- 2.Revealing the way grammatical elements such as personal pronouns, conditional constructions, and lexical choices can reflect Trump's power, identity, and ideology.

3. Hypotheses

This study is set validate the following hypotheses:

1. Grammatical elements and lexical choices serve as effective tools to uncover Trump's power, identity, and his implicit political views regarding the Iranian political system.
2. Trump's political positions concerning the Iranian government are predominantly shaped by the subsequent politics of the United States.

4.Power

To highlight Trump's authority as a key objective in the present study, van Dijk's (1990) approach to power and dominance has been used. Van Dijk (1990) categorized power into several dimensions:

4. Dominance is defined in this context as a type of social power misuse, characterized by the legally or morally unjustifiable exertion of control over others for personal gain, often leading to social disparity;

5. Power is based on exclusive access to esteemed social resources, such as wealth, employment, status, or preferential opportunities in public discourse and communication;
 6. Social power and dominance are frequently structured and institutionalized to promote more efficient control and to support habitual forms of power reproduction.
 7. Dominance is seldom absolute; it usually develops gradually and may face different levels of resistance or counter-power from the groups that are dominated
- Van Dijk (1996). {fix}

5.Socio-cognitive Approach to Trump's Ideologies and Claims of Van Dijk's

Hypothesizing that Trump's political positions regarding the Iranian government are predominantly influenced by the subsequent politics of the United States, this paper uses according to Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach to emphasize the extent to which Trump's perspectives on Iran are rooted in the social or collective memory of American politics.

مجلة لارك للفلسفة واللسانيات والعلوم الاجتماعية

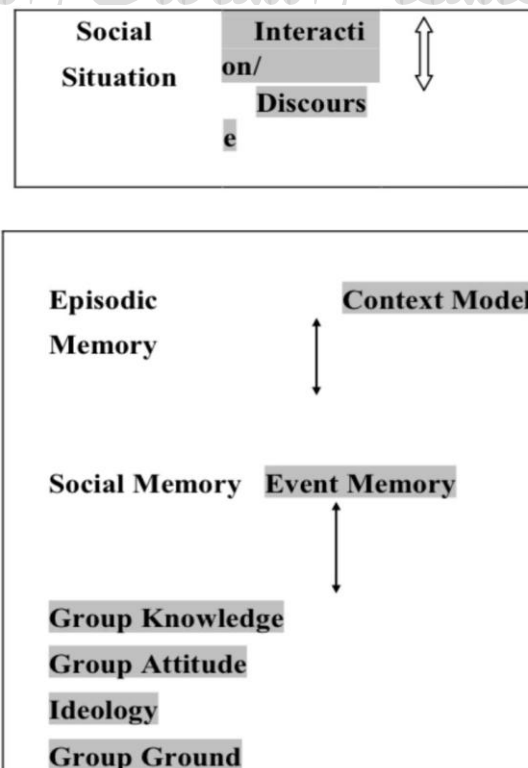
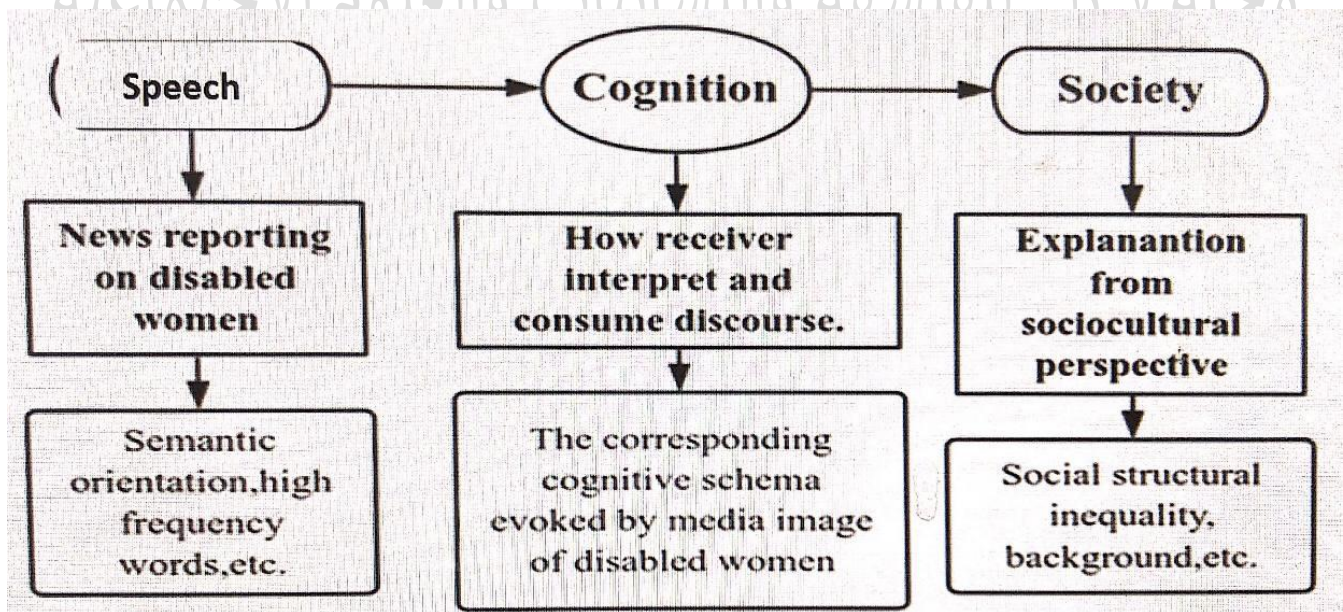


Figure 1: Van Dijk's (2014) Socio-cognitive Approach to Claims

Trump's perspective on Iran is also examined and interpreted through Van Dijk's Speech Analysis. Van Dijk (2014) posits that speech, as a sociocognitive process, is influenced and modified by two types of cognitive memories: episodic memory and social memory. Episodic memory pertains to the recollection of daily events, including contextual details (when, where), emotions, individuals (who), objects (what), and the rationale behind the knowledge that is explicitly articulated. Van Dijk (2014) asserts that episodic memory encompasses past experiences gathered at a specific time and location. Recollection is a fundamental concept of episodic memory. The process of retrieving contextual information related to a particular event or experience that has already taken place is activated through this mechanism. The explicit memory category, which constitutes one of the two subdivisions of episodic memory, arises from the linkage of semantic memory to episodic memory. The other subdivision is implicit.



sociocognitive approach

Figure (2), within the framework of a study, probably denotes a visual depiction that demonstrates the application of Van Dijk's sociocognitive approach to the analysis of Speech. This methodology investigates the relationship between social

structures, cognition, and Speech, acknowledging that social power, dominance, and inequality can be expressed, perpetuated, and challenged through language in various social and political settings.

Trump's stance towards Iran is further described and examined through Van Dijk's Speech Analysis. Van Dijk (2014) posits that speech, as a sociocognitive process, is molded and remolded based on two types of cognitive memories: episodic memory and social memory. Episodic memory pertains to the recollection of daily events, including contextual details (when, where), emotions, individuals (who), objects (what), and the rationale behind explicitly stated knowledge. Van Dijk (2014) asserts that episodic memory encompasses past experiences accumulated at specific times and locations. Recollection is a fundamental concept of episodic memory. The retrieval of contextual information related to a particular event or experience that has already transpired is triggered through this process. The explicit memory category, which constitutes one of the two subdivisions of episodic memory, arises from the connection between semantic memory and episodic memory. The other subdivision is implicit.

Social memory, as defined by Van Dijk (2014), investigates the relationship between social identity and historical identity. In this context, one can address the inquiries regarding how and why individuals from various personal backgrounds perceive themselves as members of a common group. Social memory is also referred to as collective memory, as it is organized and transmitted by both small and large groups. Nations, generations, and communities serve as examples of this concept.

6.Methodology

The research design employed in this investigation is qualitative, adhering to the principles of Speech Analysis as a methodological approach. It is qualitative because it is specifically tailored to uncover the attitudes and opinions of a limited

group of individuals (Creswell, 2003). As a speech analysis study, the unit of analysis encompasses words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and the entire text in relation to the external environment. More specifically, this research endeavors to interpret the significance of words, phrases, and clauses as the fundamental components that constitute a sentence. Furthermore, it extends beyond the confines of the sentence to examine the entire text in relation to the external world. To accomplish these objectives, the following theoretical frameworks have been followed: Fairclough's (1989) relational values and Van Dijk's (1990) speech, power, and access, and Van Dijk's (2014) socio-cognitive approach.

6.1.Criteria of Data Selection

Investigating how language is utilized in various social contexts is the primary function of Speech analysis (Coulthard 1977, Stubbs 1983). The core message of this speech, which had a contentious impact globally, was to announce the United States' withdrawal from the aforementioned deal. A coalition of world powers, and five countries representing the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, which includes the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, China, Germany, and the European Union, signed an agreement in 2015 with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This agreement, which pertains to Fairclough's (1989) Three Stages of Speech Analysis: 1. Description 2. Interpretation 3. Explanation, and Van Dijk's (1990) Dimensions of Power: 1. Social power, 2. Group 1 social power, 3. Power of a specific group, 4. Power access to valued social resources, 5. Dominance as a form of power reproduction, and 6. Dominance and counter-dominance, also incorporates Van Dijk's (2013) Socio-Cognitive Approach to Speech Analysis. Social Situation 1. Episodic memory, social memory. For example:

“it must demand that Iran allow immediate inspections at all sites requested by international inspectors”

Trump's speech on the Iran Nuclear Agreement, announced on July 14, 2015 in Vienna, is recognized as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between Iran and the five countries and the EU. Regarding this agreement, the capacity, level, and stockpile of Iran's enrichment would be restricted for specified durations only. The European Union and the United States would mutually terminate economic and financial sanctions against Iran (Ritter and Hersh, 2018).

6.2.Data Collection

The data utilized in this study pertains to a speech delivered by Trump in video format. The video focused on the potential conflict between two opposing nations: the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The video was obtained from the official BBC webpage, along with their transcripts, which assisted the researcher in identifying nearly every detail related to the focal points of the current study. For example:

"it must ensure that Iran never even comes close to possessing a nuclear weapon"
The BBC was chosen due to its status as the most recognized platform viewed globally. The rationale for this selection was based on the date (May 2019) when the military and political tensions between Iran and the USA reached their peak.

6.4. Analysis

According to Creswell (2003: 185), having a broad understanding of information, categorizing and coding the units of information, as well as recognizing and labeling themes are essential components of qualitative research. Units of information, including pronouns, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that convey meaning, were categorized and coded. Themes were identified and labeled accordingly. Additionally, codes were employed to illuminate Trump's identity, power, and ideology. Remarks of Trump's:

"unlike the nuclear deal, these provisions must have no expiration date. My policy is to deny Iran all paths to a nuclear weapon—not just for ten years, but forever"

Trump's describe the Iranian is unjust regime the legislation must explicitly state in United States law—for the first time—that long-range missile and nuclear weapons programs are inseparable, and that Iran's development and testing of missiles should be subject to severe sanctions.

7.Conclusions

1.Trump's address regarding the Iran nuclear agreement highlighted several themes conveyed through grammatical elements (such as personal pronouns and conditional structures), lexical choices, and the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. The identified themes include: narcissism, aggressiveness, the shaping of social structures, and hypothetical realities. Through lexical analysis, the research indicated that the theme of "aggressiveness," which appeared 11 times throughout the speech, was the most prominent.

2.Numerous pejorative terms and phrases were utilized by Trump in his speech on Iran. To sustain his antagonistic position towards the Iranian government, Trump employed such language to misrepresent the Iranian political system.

3.The frequent use of these terms underscores the significant role of Trump's cognitive background in forming his recent aggressive stance towards Iran; both his social memory and episodic memory were interconnected in relation to this attitude. The theme of aggressiveness was also evident in the intimidation tactics used by Trump.

4.The intimidation strategy embodies the form of dominance that the USA has maintained over the years.

References

- BBC News (2021, April 21). Iran Nuclear Crisis in 300 words. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48201138> .
- BBC News (2019, November 14). Iran Hostage Crisis: The Students' Spokeswoman. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-50391547>.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analyzing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

- Coulthard, M. (1977). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language & Power*. New York: Longman Group Ltd.
- Kadkhoda, E. & Tari, Z.G. (2019). Otherizing Iran in American political Speech: case study of a post-JCPOA senate hearing on Iran sanctions. *Third World Quarterly*, 40:1.
- Ritter, S. & Hersh, S. (2018). *Dealbreaker: Donald Trump and the unmaking of the Iran nuclear deal*. New York: Clarity Press.
- Stubbs, M. (1983). *Discourse analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Languages*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Trump, D. (2018). Speech on Iran's nuclear deal. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-trumps-statement-on-iran-nuclear-deal/>
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1990). "Discourse, Power, and Access". *Texts and Practices*, 1(2) 84-104.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (2006). "Discourse, Context, and Cognition". *Discourse Studies*, 4(1) 159-177.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (2014). *Discourse and knowledge. A sociocognitive Approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Webster, M. (2019). *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. New York: Merriam-Webster Inc.