

A Socio-Critical Discourse Analysis of Bullying in English Posts on X-Platform

Rua Aqeel Abdullmajeed

Department of English

College of Languages, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

Corresponding ruaa.abd2201@colang.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Nawar Hussein Rdhaiwi Al-Marsumi

Department of English,

College of Languages, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

تحليل خطاب نقدي-اجتماعي للتنمر للغة الانكليزية في منصة أكس

رؤى عقيل عبدالمجيد

بإشراف أ.م. نوار حسين رضوي

جامعة بغداد كلية اللغات قسم اللغة الانكليزية

Abstract

This paper examines bullying discourse in English posts on the X platform through a socio-critical discourse analysis, focusing on the linguistic and visual strategies through which bullying is constructed and sustained in digital interaction. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research analyzes 10 English posts using Fairclough's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis model to examine textual features, alongside Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework for analyzing visual meaning. The findings indicate that bullying discourse is shaped by implicit power relations, strategic lexical choices, evaluative language, and visual cues that function to intimidate, marginalize, or delegitimize targeted individuals. By demonstrating how language and visual representation operate as social practices, the study offers insight into the reproduction of dominance and social inequality in online environments and contributes to a deeper understanding of harmful communicative practices on the X platform. **Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, online bullying, political discourse, power relations, evaluative language, social media communication, socio-critical approach.

Introduction

Discourse analysis has become a significant analytical approach for examining language use beyond the level of isolated sentences, focusing instead on how meaning is constructed within social, cultural, and ideological contexts. With the expansion of digital communication, social media platforms have emerged as influential sites where discourse is produced, circulated, and contested. Among these platforms, X has become a prominent space for public interaction, where users engage in rapid and highly visible exchanges that may reproduce various forms of social conflict, including bullying. Bullying in online environments differs from traditional forms of bullying in that it is largely enacted through discourse. Linguistic choices such as insults, evaluative expressions, sarcasm, and exclusionary language play a central role in constructing bullying messages, often reinforcing power imbalances between users. In addition to written language, visual elements such as images, symbols, and framing strategies contribute to meaning-making and may intensify the impact of bullying by amplifying ridicule, marginalization, or delegitimization of targeted individuals. As a result, online bullying should be understood not merely as individual misconduct but as a socially embedded practice shaped by discourse and power relations. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's (2001) model, provides an effective framework for examining bullying as a form of social practice. CDA views discourse as dialectically related to social structures, emphasizing how language both reflects and reproduces dominance,

inequality, and ideology. However, since communication on X is inherently multimodal, relying on the interaction between text and visual representation, the present study also adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model framework to examine how visual elements function alongside language in the construction of bullying discourse. Although cyberbullying has attracted increasing scholarly attention, much of the existing research focuses on psychological impacts or quantitative patterns of online harassment. Fewer studies have examined bullying from a socio-critical and multimodal perspective, particularly within the context of the X platform. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates bullying discourse in English posts on X by analyzing both textual and visual strategies. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- What linguistic strategies are employed to construct bullying discourse in English posts on the X platform?
- How do visual elements contribute to the reinforcement or intensification of bullying discourse in these posts?
- In what ways do bullying posts reflect underlying power relations and social inequality from a socio-critical perspective?
- How do textual and visual resources interact to sustain bullying as a social practice on the X platform?

Literature Review

Bullying is widely recognized as a social practice characterized by power imbalance, repetition, and intentional harm. Recent research increasingly conceptualizes bullying not merely as individual aggression but as a discursive phenomenon through which dominance and social inequality are constructed and maintained (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). From this perspective, language plays a central role in shaping bullying practices by enabling labeling, exclusion, and evaluative judgment that marginalize targeted individuals. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an effective framework for examining bullying discourse, as it conceptualizes language as a form of social practice closely linked to power and ideology (Fairclough, 2001). CDA studies demonstrate how strategic linguistic choices contribute to the normalization of aggression and the reproduction of unequal power relations in social interaction. In online environments, such as social media platforms, these discursive practices are intensified by rapid circulation and public visibility of discourse, which allow bullying messages to reach wider audiences and exert sustained social impact (Suler, 2004; boyd, 2014). From a socio-critical perspective, bullying discourse reflects broader social structures and cultural norms that legitimize domination and marginalization. Research on cyberbullying has shown that online harassment is shaped by ideological assumptions related to identity, power, and social hierarchy, rather than being isolated acts of hostility (van Dijk, 1993). Despite the growing body of research on online bullying, relatively limited attention has been given to socio-critical analyses of bullying discourse on the X-platform. Therefore, this study examines bullying in English posts on X through a socio-critical CDA approach to uncover how language functions as a social practice that reproduces power and inequality in digital spaces.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative socio-critical discourse analysis approach to examine bullying discourse in English posts on the X-platform. The qualitative design allows for an in-depth exploration of how language and visual elements function as social practices through which power relations and social inequality are constructed in online interaction. The data consist of ten English posts selected from X based on their explicit engagement in bullying behavior, such as verbal aggression, exclusion, and delegitimization. All posts were anonymized to meet ethical research considerations. For data analysis, Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis is applied to examine the textual features of bullying discourse, while Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model is used to analyze the visual aspects of the posts. Together, these frameworks enable the study to uncover how textual and visual resources contribute to the production and reinforcement of bullying discourse within a socio-critical context.

Fairclough's (2001) Model

Fairclough's (2001) model of Critical Discourse Analysis conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that is dialectically related to social structures, power relations, and ideology. The model proposes a three-dimensional framework that enables a comprehensive analysis of discourse by examining language not only as text but also as a process of production and interpretation situated within a broader social context. This approach is particularly suitable for the analysis of bullying discourse, as it allows for the investigation of how linguistic choices contribute to the construction and normalization of dominance and inequality. The first dimension, textual analysis, focuses on the formal and semantic features of language, including vocabulary, evaluative

expressions, and rhetorical strategies through which bullying is enacted. The second dimension, discursive practice, examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed within specific communicative contexts, highlighting how bullying discourse circulates and gains legitimacy on social media platforms such as X. The third dimension, social practice, situates discourse within wider socio-cultural structures, enabling the interpretation of bullying as a reflection of ideological assumptions and power relations embedded in digital communication. By integrating these three dimensions, Fairclough's model provides an analytical framework that connects micro-level linguistic features with macro-level social processes. In this study, the model is employed to reveal how bullying discourse on the X-platform functions as a socio-critical practice that reproduces marginalization, reinforces power imbalances, and sustains social inequality in online spaces.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Model of Visual Analysis

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model provides a systematic framework for analyzing visual communication by treating images as socially and culturally shaped forms of meaning-making. The model is grounded in social semiotics and emphasizes that visual elements, like language, function as social practices that reflect and reproduce power relations and ideological meanings. This perspective is particularly relevant to social media discourse, where images play a central role in shaping interpretation and amplifying the impact of textual messages. The model proposes three interrelated metafunctions: representational, interpersonal, and compositional meaning. Representational meaning concerns how participants, actions, and concepts are visually constructed, enabling the analyst to examine how individuals or groups are symbolically positioned within images. Interpersonal meaning focuses on the relationship between the image and the viewer, including elements such as gaze, distance, and angle, which can contribute to intimidation, ridicule, or alignment. Compositional meaning examines how visual elements are arranged within an image through framing, salience, and information value, influencing which elements are foregrounded and how meaning is prioritized. In the context of this study, Kress and van Leeuwen's model is used to analyze the visual components accompanying bullying posts on the X-platform. By examining how representational, interpersonal, and compositional resources interact with textual discourse, the model enables a socio-critical interpretation of how images contribute to the reinforcement of bullying practices and the reproduction of power and inequality in digital communication.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This section examines bullying discourse in ten English posts on the X-platform, focusing on how language and visual elements are employed to influence audience perception and reinforce power relations. Guided by Fairclough's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis model and supported by Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual framework, the analysis explores textual and visual strategies used to marginalize and delegitimize targeted individuals. Emphasis is placed on discursive choices rather than narrative sequences, highlighting how symbolic language and visual cues contribute to the construction of bullying as a social practice. Examining textual, interactive, and compositional aspects reveals how bullying messages gain impact through evaluative language, framing, and visibility. Organizing recurring patterns across the selected posts enhances clarity and facilitates the identification of dominant bullying strategies.

Data 1



Linguistic Analysis

١. Description of the Text

The tweet is constructed as a simple declarative clause—"This how the people who voted for Kamala Harris look like"—which follows a relational structure that defines identity rather than describing action. The subject "This" functions as a generalizing device, while the noun phrase "the people who voted for Kamala Harris" classifies a political group as a homogeneous category. The verb "look" operates as a relational process linking

the group to a visually implied attribute conveyed through the accompanying image. The omission of the auxiliary verb (“This how...”) reflects informal social media language and contributes to presenting the statement as casual yet assertive. Lexically, the tweet avoids explicit abusive language, relying instead on indirect bullying through association. The phrase “look like” introduces an evaluative comparison that allows the negative judgment to be carried primarily by the image rather than the text. Pronoun use is indirect and exclusive, as the third-person reference constructs ideological distance between the speaker, the audience, and the targeted group. The declarative mode frames the statement as factual, while the absence of modal verbs conveys high certainty, reinforcing the bullying stance by presenting the characterization as unquestionable.

2. Interpretation of the Text

Within its situational context, the tweet operates in a politically polarized digital environment where references to Kamala Harris immediately signal ideological alignment. The post draws on meme culture, which normalizes ridicule and visual exaggeration as tools for political mockery. At the speech act level, the tweet functions as indirect derision: although the written text appears descriptive, the combined text-image message performs an act of bullying by demeaning a political group through visual association. This strategy reinforces in-group solidarity while marginalizing the targeted out-group.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects broader discourses that normalize body-shaming as a means of political conflict. It reinforces ideological hierarchies by associating physical appearance with political legitimacy and intelligence. Institutionally, the X-platform enables the rapid circulation of such content through its meme-based affordances, facilitating collective ridicule and identity-based attacks. Situationally, the author occupies a dominant position by defining the appearance of an entire group, while the audience is positioned as evaluators or participants in the mockery, and the target group remains voiceless. This asymmetry is characteristic of online bullying discourse.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image lacks narrative action, as no vectors or interactions are present. Instead, it functions as a conceptual image, specifically a symbolic representation. The computer-generated figure is decontextualized and exaggerated, with physical features such as an overweight body, slouched posture, and bald head serving as symbolic attributes. These features encode ideological meanings that reduce a political identity to a stereotypical and degrading visual form, facilitating bullying through caricature.

2. Compositional Meaning

In terms of information value, the written text appears at the top of the composition, functioning as the general claim, while the image is placed below as visual confirmation. Salience is achieved through the central placement of the distorted body, its size, and the contrast against a dark background, ensuring immediate viewer attention. Framing is strong, as the figure is isolated with no contextual elements, removing individuality and humanity. This decontextualization reinforces the bullying function of the image by transforming the target into an abstract object of ridicule.

Data 2



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The tweet “Biden is a great President” is structured as a simple declarative clause realized through a relational SVC process. The grammatical subject “Biden” is assigned an evaluative attribute through the complement “a great President,” presenting judgment as a stable and factual state rather than a subjective opinion. The absence

of modality or hedging contributes to a high degree of certainty, allowing the evaluation to appear objective at the grammatical level. Lexically, the adjective “great” carries a positive evaluative meaning; however, its function becomes ironic when interpreted alongside the accompanying image. The positive vocabulary does not operate as genuine praise but rather as a discursive strategy of ridicule, where evaluation is reversed through visual contradiction. The lack of personal pronouns further depersonalizes the statement, presenting it as a generalized claim rather than an individual stance. The declarative mode positions the speaker as an authority, while the absence of modal verbs reinforces high epistemic modality, intensifying the ironic bullying effect.

2. Interpretation of the Text

The tweet appears within a politically polarized context in which audiences are familiar with meme culture, political satire, and age-related critiques of leadership. Although the written statement appears complimentary, shared cultural knowledge enables viewers to recognize the message as sarcastic. At the speech act level, the tweet performs an indirect aggressive act in which apparent praise functions as mockery. The interaction between text and image produces irony, allowing the speaker to ridicule the political figure while maintaining a superficially positive linguistic form.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects broader discourses of political antagonism and ageism, where older political leaders are frequently represented as weak or obsolete. Institutionally, the X-platform facilitates such practices by privileging meme-based communication and visual satire, enabling rapid circulation of ironic and bullying content. Situationally, the interaction establishes an asymmetrical power relation in which the speaker assumes the role of evaluator, while the political figure is reduced to an object of symbolic judgment. This process normalizes ridicule as a form of political engagement and reinforces discursive dominance in online spaces.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image does not contain narrative action, as the represented participant appears in a static and unmoving state with no vectors indicating interaction. Instead, the image functions conceptually by symbolizing extreme age and deterioration. Visual attributes such as rigid posture, eroded texture, and immobility transform the political figure into a symbolic representation of decline. This conceptual construction dehumanizes the participant and supports the bullying intent of the post.

2. Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning is achieved through a vertical arrangement in which the written statement occupies the upper position as an abstract evaluative claim, while the image is placed below as visual grounding that contradicts the text. Saliency is created through the central placement and strong contrast of the figure, ensuring that the image dominates interpretation. Framing isolates the participant from any social context, restricting alternative readings and directing attention exclusively toward ridicule. This compositional organization strengthens the ironic and delegitimizing effect of the tweet.

Data 3



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The tweet is constructed through a sequence of informal interrogative and declarative clauses that imitate child-directed speech, such as “Aaaaaw is it past you beddy-bye time” and “aww Donny is so sleepy.” Grammatically, these clauses position the political figure as a passive object of evaluation rather than an active agent. Although interrogative in form, the questions do not function to seek information but instead operate as assertions of ridicule. Diminutives and baby-talk expressions assign attributes of childishness, dependency, and weakness to the target, functioning as relational processes that redefine identity rather than describe action.

Lexically, the vocabulary is overtly infantilizing, relying on exaggerated emotional markers and child-like terms that strip the target of adult authority and seriousness. The repeated use of third-person reference excludes the target from interaction and reinforces objectification. The interrogative mode, combined with high implicit modality, allows the speaker to present ridicule as self-evident, reinforcing a clear power imbalance in which the speaker controls evaluation and meaning.

2. Interpretation of the Text

The tweet operates within a polarized political context in which ridicule and mockery are common strategies for delegitimizing opponents. The use of baby-talk relies on shared cultural knowledge of meme practices and political trolling, enabling the audience to recognize the message as intentional infantilization rather than humor. At the speech act level, the tweet performs an expressive but derogatory act disguised as playful language. The apparent softness of the wording contrasts sharply with its hostile function, allowing bullying to be enacted indirectly through humor and exaggeration.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects broader patterns of political cyberbullying in which infantilization is used to undermine competence and authority. Such discourse reinforces ideologies that associate childishness with incapacity, contributing to the normalization of humiliation in political communication. Institutionally, the X-platform encourages these practices through its engagement-driven structure, which rewards exaggerated humor and viral mockery. Situationally, the interaction establishes an asymmetrical relationship in which the speaker assumes dominance by defining the target's identity through ridicule, legitimizing personal disparagement as a means of contesting political authority.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image presents a largely static representation of the political figure, with minimal movement and no clear action vectors. Although no explicit narrative action is depicted, the posture, facial expression, and closed or lowered eyes invite interpretation as fatigue or disengagement. This implicit narrative supports the bullying intent of the text by visually suggesting passivity and diminished alertness. Conceptually, the image also functions symbolically by categorizing the figure as weak or inactive, reducing political authority to a fixed visual sign of vulnerability.

2. Compositional Meaning

In terms of information value, the subject occupies the central position of the frame, making him the primary focus of interpretation. Salience is achieved through central placement, lighting, and visual clarity, directing attention toward facial expression and body language rather than contextual or institutional elements. Framing further isolates the subject, both through the separation between text and image and through the broadcast frame within the image itself. This framing restricts alternative readings and reinforces a reductive, bullying interpretation aligned with the infantilizing tone of the tweet.

Data 4



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The tweet relies mainly on relational clause structures that assign identity and evaluation rather than describe concrete actions. The construction “FakeKamala uses a phony accent” presents the accusation as an inherent attribute of the subject rather than a debatable claim. The replacement of the proper name with stigmatizing labels functions as a renaming strategy that reduces the individual to a single negative identity. Evaluative hashtags such as “#CringeWorthy,” “#FakeAccent,” and “#PhonyKamala” operate as condensed judgments that reinforce the attributed identity and intensify the bullying effect.

Lexically, items such as “fake,” “phony,” and “cringeworthy” are overtly derogatory and function to delegitimize the target by framing linguistic behavior as deception. The declarative mode asserts authority and certainty, while the absence of modal verbs conveys high epistemic modality, presenting personal evaluation as objective reality.

2. Interpretation of the Text

The tweet emerges within a politically charged context in which accusations of inauthenticity are commonly directed at public figures. The use of hashtags situates the post within a broader stream of antagonistic political discourse, where ridicule functions as a persuasive strategy. At the speech act level, the tweet performs an accusatory and derisive act disguised as commentary. Linguistic accommodation is reframed as manipulation, inviting the audience to adopt a suspicious and judgmental stance toward the target.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects broader ideologies that police language use and stigmatize linguistic variation. Accent-shaming operates as a mechanism for maintaining social boundaries by equating difference with moral deficiency. Institutionally, the X-platform amplifies such discourse through engagement-driven structures that reward sensationalism and ideological alignment. Situationally, the interaction positions the author as an evaluator of authenticity, exercising symbolic power by defining acceptable political speech and delegitimizing the target through ridicule.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image captures a moment of public speaking in which the political figure appears at a podium. Although originating from a live event, the still frame allows the moment to be reinterpreted symbolically. Conceptually, the image reduces the participant to a fixed sign of alleged inauthenticity, where posture and gesture are detached from their context and reframed as evidence supporting the textual accusation.

2. Compositional Meaning

The written text appears at the top of the post, functioning as an evaluative frame that guides interpretation. The image below anchors this judgment by presenting a visual moment as apparent confirmation. Saliency is achieved through central placement and visual clarity, directing attention toward the speaker’s facial expression and gestures. Framing tightly couples text and image, limiting alternative interpretations and reinforcing the delegitimizing and bullying intent of the tweet.

Data



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The tweet employs grammatical structures that position Joe Biden as a passive target of evaluation rather than an active agent. Relational constructions such as “#SleepyJoe is back in the public eye” assign a fixed negative identity through labeling, while declarative clauses like “This was all predictable” foreground the author’s evaluative authority. The imperative “Keep stumbling and fumbling Joe” functions as a taunt rather than a genuine directive, reinforcing a hierarchical relationship in which the writer exercises control over meaning. Lexically, derogatory expressions such as “Sleepy Joe,” “stumbling,” and “fumbling” construct incompetence and weakness, while intertextual tagging aligns the message with partisan discourse. The combination of declarative and imperative modes, together with high expressive modality, presents personal judgment as unquestionable.

2. Interpretation of the Text

The tweet appears within a polarized U.S. political context where public figures are routinely subjected to ridicule. The use of hashtags and references to partisan media narratives relies on shared ideological knowledge, enabling the audience to interpret the message as political mockery. At the speech act level, the post combines

assertive judgments with expressive contempt. The imperative form intensifies the bullying effect by publicly addressing the political figure in a dismissive manner, encouraging audience alignment against him.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects broader discourses of political polarization in which leadership is undermined through personal attacks rather than policy critique. Institutionally, the X-platform facilitates the circulation of such content, while references to media institutions lend perceived legitimacy to the criticism. Situationally, the interaction establishes an asymmetrical power relation: the author assumes the role of evaluator and ridiculer, while the political figure is rendered passive and voiceless. This interaction normalizes bullying as an acceptable form of political engagement and contributes to the erosion of respect for political authority.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image, taken from a paused news broadcast, lacks clear narrative action and does not display strong vectors of movement. The represented participant appears in a static pose, with facial expression and posture open to interpretation as fatigue or emotional strain. Rather than narrating an event, the image functions conceptually by symbolically representing vulnerability and diminished authority. News graphics and banners frame the participant within an institutional context, reinforcing the impression of evaluation and judgment.

2. Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning is organized through a top-bottom structure in which the written commentary functions as the interpretive frame, while the embedded screenshot below serves as visual grounding. Saliency is achieved through the central placement and size of the participant's face, strong color contrast, and prominent news banners that draw attention to emotional expression. Framing is reinforced by the enclosed broadcast layout, which isolates the political figure within an authoritative visual space. The vertical alignment of text and image allows the author's commentary to guide interpretation, strengthening the bullying effect by anchoring ridicule in a seemingly objective visual source.

Data ٦



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The tweet constructs a derogatory representation of Hillary Clinton through strongly evaluative grammatical and lexical choices. Grammatically, the clause “(Crooked) Hillary Clinton confirms she will not run in 2020” follows a relational SVC structure in which the parenthetical adjective “Crooked” pre-modifies the subject. This embedding of evaluation within the nominal group turns the proper name into a stigmatized label, assigning moral judgment before the proposition unfolds. The reporting verb “confirms” presents the statement as factual and authoritative, masking its evaluative bias. The clause “does that mean I won’t get to run against her again?” is realized as a rhetorical interrogative with an underlying SVO structure. Although grammatically framed as a question, it functions pragmatically as mockery rather than a genuine request for information. Vocabulary such as “Crooked,” “Aw-shucks,” and “She will be sorely missed!” is overtly evaluative and sarcastic, reversing literal meaning to intensify ridicule. Pronoun use foregrounds the speaker through “I,” positioning his stance as central, while “her” reduces the target to an object of commentary. The tweet combines declarative and interrogative modes to assert superiority, while expressive modality signals certainty and emotional judgment rather than neutral reporting.

2. Interpretation of the Text

Within its situational context, the tweet emerges from a highly polarized U.S. political environment in which public figures are routinely evaluated through ridicule rather than policy discussion. A neutral political

announcement is recontextualized as an opportunity for personal mockery. The audience is assumed to share background knowledge of the political rivalry, enabling them to interpret the sarcasm and derogatory labeling as humorous rather than informative. At the speech act level, the tweet performs a combination of assertive and expressive acts that function as bullying. The quoted announcement operates as an assertive framed through derogatory evaluation, while expressions such as “Crooked” and the sarcastic “She will be sorely missed!” convey contempt. The rhetorical interrogative invites the audience to align with the speaker’s mock disappointment, transforming ridicule into a shared stance and reinforcing ideological alignment.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet contributes to a broader culture of political antagonism in which personal denigration replaces substantive debate. By normalizing derogatory labeling and mockery, the discourse reinforces polarized identities and legitimizes bullying as an acceptable form of political communication. At the institutional level, the X platform enables influential figures to circulate such discourse with minimal constraint. The verified status and visibility of the account lend institutional authority to the attack, amplifying its impact and shaping public perceptions of political legitimacy. At the situational level, the interaction enacts asymmetrical power relations. The speaker assumes the role of evaluator and judge, while the targeted political figure is rendered passive and voiceless within the exchange. Ridicule framed as humor (“Aw-shucks,” “sorely missed”) weakens the opponent’s perceived authority and invites audiences to accept personal disparagement as both entertainment and political judgment.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image does not realize a narrative structure, as there are no clear vectors indicating action, movement, or interaction. Posture and gaze do not establish a reactional process, and the participants are presented in a static manner. The absence of narrative action means the image does not depict what is happening, but rather presents the figures as fixed visual entities. Conceptually, the image functions as a symbolic representation in which Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are reduced to ideological figures. Meaning is conveyed through visual attributes such as posture, clothing, positioning, and lighting rather than action. Trump’s foreground positioning and open stance function as attributes of dominance and visibility, while Clinton’s more restrained posture conveys institutional authority. Together, these attributes classify the figures as representatives of opposing political identities, aligning the image with the evaluative framing of the tweet.

2. Compositional Meaning

Information value is organized vertically, with the tweet text occupying the upper position and establishing the evaluative frame. The image below anchors this interpretation by providing a visual reference that is read through the lens imposed by the text. Clinton appears as the most visually prominent figure, making her the primary carrier of meaning, while Trump’s secondary positioning gains significance through the textual framing. Salience is achieved through visual contrast, posture, and facial expression. Bright clothing and expansive posture draw attention to the foreground figure, while typography and placement of the tweet text enhance the prominence of the verbal attack. Framing is established through the digital boundaries of the tweet box and the cohesive structure of the image beneath it. Although text and image are visually distinct, their vertical alignment integrates them into a single communicative unit. Within the image, spatial separation between the two figures reinforces ideological opposition, supporting the divisive and derogatory framing advanced by the accompanying discourse.

Data 7



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The grammatical choices in the tweet establish a strongly evaluative and antagonistic stance toward the two targeted political figures through declarative, elliptical, and imperative structures. The clauses “Obama’s legacy? Trump in 2016” and “Biden’s legacy? Trump in 2024” are elliptical constructions that reduce each political figure to a simplified cause–effect relationship. These structures erase agency and frame their political careers as failures defined exclusively by the electoral success of a rival figure. The declarative clause “Hopefully, you two war pigs will retire to your mansions” positions the author as a moral commentator who claims evaluative authority, while the imperative “shut up forever” functions as a direct command aimed at silencing the targets. Lexical choices such as “war pigs” are explicitly dehumanizing and operate as a bullying strategy that animalizes the figures and attributes moral corruption to them. The reference to “your mansions” presupposes wealth and elitism, reinforcing the portrayal of the targets as detached and privileged. Pronoun usage further strengthens this antagonistic stance. The second-person plural “you two” groups the targets into a single negatively evaluated unit, while the possessive “your” embeds presuppositions of excessive privilege. The tweet employs interrogative, declarative, and imperative modes simultaneously: rhetorical questions frame judgment, declaratives present evaluation as fact, and imperatives assert dominance. Modality is highly expressive, offering no space for alternative interpretations and constructing a hierarchical relationship in which the author assumes discursive superiority.

2. Interpretation of the Text

Within its situational context, the tweet is produced in a highly polarized political environment where public figures are routinely subjected to aggressive online commentary. Although framed superficially as an evaluation of political “legacy,” the discourse shifts toward personal attack through insults and silencing directives. The presupposition that the two figures are wealthy, corrupt, and morally compromised invites readers to interpret the message through an antagonistic lens aligned with the author’s ideological stance. At the speech act level, the tweet combines assertive, expressive, and directive acts. Assertive acts appear in the claims about political legacy, while expressive acts are realized through emotionally charged bullying terms such as “war pigs.” The imperative “shut up forever” functions as a directive intended to silence and degrade the targets, transforming the post from political critique into overt verbal bullying. Intertextual references to electoral outcomes rely on shared political knowledge and encourage audience alignment with the author’s hostile evaluation.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects broader patterns of political polarization and the normalization of verbal aggression in digital spaces. Dehumanizing language and moral condemnation replace substantive critique, contributing to a public discourse in which hostility becomes an accepted mode of political expression. This reinforces social divisions and legitimizes bullying practices against public figures. At the institutional level, the X platform facilitates the rapid circulation of such hostile discourse, granting individual users visibility and reach with minimal regulation. The integration of verbal attack with a symbolic cartoon image further amplifies the message, illustrating how platform structures encourage emotionally charged and antagonistic political communication. At the situational level, the interaction functions to delegitimize political authority by framing former leaders as corrupt elites unworthy of respect. Power is asserted through exclusionary language and silencing commands, positioning the author as an external judge who claims the right to dismiss the targets from political relevance. Rather than inviting debate, the discourse operates through ridicule and moral condemnation, reinforcing an oppositional power dynamic between the speaker and the political figures addressed.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image does not strongly realize a narrative process, as it lacks clear vectors of action such as movement, interaction, or directed gaze. Obama and Biden are depicted seated in static poses, facing forward, with no unfolding action or visual goal. Objects such as money, drinks, and microphones do not function as vectors but serve as symbolic elements. Consequently, the image does not narrate an event but relies on symbolic inference shaped by the accompanying text. Conceptually, the image operates as a symbolic representation. The two figures are visually categorized as embodiments of political power and elite privilege, positioned in front of a mansion and surrounded by money. Their relaxed posture, formal attire, and the accumulation of wealth-related symbols reduce them to ideological types rather than individuals engaged in action. This conceptual representation aligns with the tweet’s evaluative stance by visually constructing them as beneficiaries of power and corruption.

2. Compositional Meaning

Information value is organized vertically, with the tweet text occupying the upper position and functioning as the “ideal” that frames interpretation. The image below serves as the “real,” visually anchoring and naturalizing the verbal criticism. The two figures are centrally placed, making them the primary carriers of meaning, while the surrounding symbols reinforce the imposed interpretation. Salience is achieved through central placement, relative size, and visual contrast. The figures dominate the foreground, while the mansion and money-filled background enhance rather than distract from their prominence. Symbolic props contribute to thematic salience by directing attention to wealth, power, and privilege. Framing is established through clear digital and visual boundaries. The tweet text is distinctly framed above the image, positioning it as the dominant interpretive guide. Within the image, Obama and Biden are framed together against a shared background, visually grouping them within the same ideological category. Their isolation from the viewer reinforces detachment and elite separation, guiding interpretation toward collective responsibility within the critical narrative advanced by the text.

Data 8



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The grammatical choices in the tweet construct a hierarchical and demeaning relationship between the author and the addressed audience through declarative clauses loaded with superiority claims. The opening phrase “Sorry losers and haters” functions as an evaluative clause that implicitly assigns a derogatory identity to the audience, positioning them as inferior from the outset. The declarative clause “my I.Q. is one of the highest—and you all know it!” foregrounds self-praise and presents a subjective claim as an unquestionable fact, reinforced by the presuppositional phrase “you all know it,” which eliminates the possibility of disagreement. The statement “Please don’t feel so stupid or insecure; it’s not your fault” is grammatically structured as reassurance, yet semantically operates as bullying by embedding negative attributes (“stupid,” “insecure”) as assumed truths about the audience. Lexically, the tweet relies on explicitly derogatory terms such as “losers,” “haters,” “stupid,” and “insecure,” which function to demean and delegitimize the audience, while self-aggrandizing expressions like “my I.Q. is one of the highest” construct an exaggerated image of intellectual superiority. Pronoun usage reinforces this hierarchy: first-person pronouns (“my”) center the author as the locus of authority, while second-person plural forms (“you,” “you all”) generalize the audience into a single undifferentiated target of ridicule. The tweet blends declarative and expressive modes, presenting evaluation as fact while conveying disdain. Modality is high and absolute, leaving no space for negotiation and constructing a relational hierarchy in which the author is superior and the audience is positioned as deficient.

2. Interpretation of the Text

Within its situational context, the tweet functions as a self-presentational act rather than an exchange of information. The interaction is structured around the construction of identity and status, with the author asserting personal authority and intelligence while positioning the audience as inferior. The relationship between participants is asymmetrical: the author assumes a dominant evaluative role, while the audience is reduced to passive recipients of ridicule. At the speech act level, the tweet combines assertive, expressive, and indirect directive acts. The claim about possessing a high IQ operates as an assertive act of self-legitimation. Expressive acts are realized through insulting labels that convey contempt and ridicule. The phrase “please don’t feel so stupid” functions as an indirect directive that pressures the audience to accept the author’s superiority. Collectively, these speech acts construct a discourse of humiliation in which dominance is achieved through verbal belittlement.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects a broader culture of antagonism in digital political discourse, where self-promotion and rhetorical humiliation are normalized strategies for asserting power. Such discourse reinforces confrontational modes of interaction and marginalizes respectful engagement, contributing to a climate in which bullying language becomes socially acceptable. At the institutional level, the affordances of the X platform enable the rapid circulation of such hostile discourse by allowing public figures to address large audiences without editorial mediation. Engagement-driven visibility rewards provocative and aggressive language, increasing the normalization of bullying practices. The pairing of the tweet with a prestigious visual frame further amplifies the authority of the message by merging institutional imagery with personal attack. At the situational level, the interaction reproduces unequal power relations within the immediate communicative event. The author controls meaning by defining intelligence, status, and legitimacy unilaterally, while the audience is denied any reciprocal role. Authority is presented as self-evident rather than accountable, reinforcing dominance and limiting alternative interpretations of political identity and status.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

The image does not realize a narrative structure, as it lacks vectors of action, interaction, or directed gaze. The represented participant appears in a static, posed position, with meaning generated through visual presentation rather than action. This absence of narrative shifts interpretation away from events and toward symbolic classification. Conceptually, the image functions as a symbolic representation. The TIME magazine frame and the label “Person of the Year” operate as symbolic attributes that assign prestige, authority, and public recognition to the represented figure. The static pose, controlled posture, and formal styling detach the figure from any specific context or action, presenting him as an abstract emblem of power and legitimacy. This conceptual reduction reinforces ideological meanings of dominance and superiority that align with the evaluative stance of the tweet.

2. Compositional Meaning

Information value is organized vertically, with the tweet text occupying the upper position as the “ideal,” framing interpretation, and the magazine-style image below functioning as the “real,” visually grounding the verbal claims of superiority. The central placement of the participant emphasizes authority and importance, guiding the viewer from textual assertion to visual validation. Saliency is achieved through central positioning, scale, and visual clarity. The represented figure dominates the composition, while secondary elements are minimized, ensuring that attention is focused on the participant as the primary meaning carrier. Lighting and contrast further enhance prominence, supporting the intended evaluative reading. Framing is realized through the clear separation between text and image, each enclosed within its own visual boundary. Despite this separation, vertical alignment creates a cohesive interpretive path, directing the viewer to read the image through the lens of the tweet’s evaluative discourse. The absence of contextual background within the image intensifies symbolic meaning and reinforces the construction of authority and superiority.

Data 9



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The tweet constructs a derogatory representation through reduced and asymmetrical grammatical structures that foreground evaluation and control. The expression “Dollar store Obama” appears as a nominal group rather than a full clause, consisting of the head noun “Obama” with the pre-modifying phrase “Dollar store,” which functions adjectivally to impose a negative evaluative classification. The absence of a verb compresses judgement into a fixed label, presenting the evaluation as presupposed and non-negotiable. This syntactic

reduction grammatically confines the represented individual within a demeaning category. The subsequent clause “You can’t make this go away” is a declarative structure containing a second-person subject and a modal verb expressing impossibility. This construction positions the addressee as powerless and lacking agency, reinforcing a hierarchical relationship. Lexically, the phrase “Dollar store” invokes connotations of cheapness, inferiority, and imitation, while the reference to a prominent political figure intensifies the comparison. Emojis function as evaluative intensifiers, signaling ridicule and framing the message as humorous mockery rather than neutral commentary. Pronoun usage further reinforces power asymmetry: the second-person “you” directly targets the represented individual, while the absence of first-person pronouns removes shared perspective and accountability. The tweet combines declarative and expressive modes, delivering judgement while simultaneously expressing amusement. Modality is high and absolute, particularly through “can’t,” which asserts certainty and reinforces the speaker’s authority to define identity and social worth.

2. Interpretation of the Text

At the situational level, the interaction operates as meme-based political mockery rather than information exchange. The activity centers on ridicule through visual comparison and evaluative labeling. Participants include the tweet author, a digitally mediated audience, and the represented individual, who is discursively framed through comparison with Barack Obama. The author controls the framing of the situation, while the audience is invited to align with the mocking stance.

At the speech act level, the tweet combines expressive, assertive, and indirect directive acts. The label “Dollar store Obama” functions as an expressive act of ridicule, while “You can’t make this go away” operates as an assertive claim that establishes control over the narrative. Implicitly, it also functions as a directive, reminding the target of their inability to resist or challenge the mockery. The emojis reinforce the expressive force of laughter and invite collective participation in the bullying, transforming the post into a public performance of derision.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reflects broader digital practices in which individuals are mocked through exaggerated comparison with well-known public figures. Such discourse normalizes identity-based ridicule and trivializes public shaming, contributing to the reproduction of bullying as entertainment within online culture.

At the institutional level, the X platform facilitates this form of bullying by providing a space where mocking content can be widely circulated and validated through likes and shares. Platform affordances encourage performative ridicule, while the presentation of the tweet lends authority to the author’s evaluative stance, amplifying power imbalance between speaker and target. At the situational level, the interaction reproduces unequal power relations by positioning the author as the sole evaluator and Barack Obama as the implicit standard against which another individual is judged. Through imposed comparison, the represented individual is denied agency and reduced to a degraded category, while the audience is positioned as spectators aligned with the speaker’s judgement. Authority and legitimacy are thus negotiated through mockery rather than deliberation, reinforcing situational dominance.

Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

From a narrative perspective, the image does not realize a narrative process, as it lacks clear vectors of action, interaction, or directed gaze. The represented participant appears in a static, posed position, with meaning generated through visual presentation rather than action. The absence of narrative structure shifts interpretive emphasis away from events toward symbolic classification. Conceptually, the image functions as a classificatory symbolic representation. Visual attributes such as facial features, clothing, and stylized accessories invite comparison with Barack Obama, reinforcing the evaluative label introduced by the text. This symbolic resemblance reduces the represented individual to an abstract type defined by imitation and inferiority rather than individuality. By removing the figure from a specific temporal or situational context, the image decontextualizes political identity and supports the belittling discourse of the tweet.

2. Compositional Meaning

Information value is organized vertically, with the written tweet positioned above the image to function as the primary interpretive frame. The image below anchors and concretizes the evaluative meaning introduced by the textual label. Within the image, central placement ensures that the represented individual becomes the main carrier of meaning, prioritizing evaluative categorization over neutral representation. Saliency is achieved through central positioning, bright lighting, and exaggerated visual elements such as the oversized hat and

artificial mustache. These features draw immediate attention and heighten the comic effect, aligning visual prominence with textual mockery. Framing is established through the clear separation between text and image, each enclosed within its own digital boundary. Despite this separation, vertical alignment creates a cohesive reading path that directs viewers to interpret the image through the evaluative lens provided by the text. The absence of contextual background isolates the individual visually, reinforcing symbolic reduction and positioning the figure as an object of ridicule.

Data 10



Linguistic Analysis

1. Description of the Text

The grammatical structure of the tweet is strategically designed to ridicule and violently mock the referenced public figure through fabricated impersonation. The text is presented as a false direct quotation written entirely in capital letters, accompanied by exaggerated phonetic screaming (“AHHHH AHHH”), which performs hysteria and instability. The clause “IM OBAMA” operates as a simplified SVC structure that assigns identity purely for the purpose of mockery rather than self-representation. This is followed by paratactically coordinated clauses such as “IM A GAY BLACK RETARD,” which stack identity labels without syntactic complexity, producing a crude caricature rather than meaningful description. Lexically, the tweet relies on explicitly abusive and discriminatory vocabulary. Terms associated with sexual orientation, race, and disability are mobilized as insults rather than neutral descriptors, reflecting a discourse of hate and dehumanization. The ableist slur “retard,” in particular, invokes historically stigmatizing language used to marginalize disabled individuals, intensifying the severity of the attack. The exaggerated interjections function as evaluative intensifiers that portray the referenced figure as irrational and ridiculous. Pronoun use is central to the bullying strategy. The first-person pronoun “IM” is falsely attributed to the referenced figure, transforming the tweet into an act of forced self-denigration. This ventriloquized use of “I” removes the target’s voice and agency, while the absence of second-person pronouns shifts the interaction from confrontation to impersonation. The tweet combines expressive, declarative, and performative modes, with declarative identity statements functioning not as information but as hostile parody. Modality is conveyed through exaggeration and absolute certainty embedded in the fabricated declarations, while relational modality positions the author as controller of the target’s voice, reinforcing dominance and humiliation.

2. Interpretation of the Text

At the situational level, the tweet operates within a context of online political antagonism where impersonation and ridicule of public figures are normalized. The fabricated quotation presupposes shared ideological hostility among the audience and frames the impersonation as humorous entertainment rather than defamatory abuse. The interaction encourages viewers to interpret the referenced figure through mockery rather than political agency, relying on shared cultural tolerance for exaggerated parody in digital spaces. At the speech act level, the tweet consists of hostile expressives, aggressive performatives, and fabricated assertives. The impersonated identity statements function as performative acts staged by the author to portray the referenced figure as contemptible. Identity-based slurs act as expressive speech acts conveying disdain, while the repeated screaming interjections serve as paralinguistic markers of ridicule. Collectively, these speech acts constitute a clear instance of bullying in which humiliation is achieved through forced self-representation and identity degradation.

3. Explanation of the Text

At the societal level, the tweet reinforces broader discourses of hate speech and political dehumanization. By mobilizing slurs related to race, sexuality, and disability, the discourse contributes to the reproduction of stigmatizing narratives about marginalized groups. The reliance on parody rooted in identity-based aggression reflects a wider social pattern in which bigotry is normalized as political humor. At the institutional level, the social media platform enables the circulation of such content by allowing offensive impersonations to be

publicly broadcast and amplified. Engagement mechanisms transform the bullying into a performative spectacle, granting visibility and legitimacy to harmful discourse and reinforcing the platform's role in facilitating political harassment. At the situational level, the interaction recontextualizes a public communicative moment involving the referenced figure into an act of humiliation. Through fabricated impersonation, the author replaces the original context with a hostile performance that strips the target of agency and positions them as an object of ridicule. This situational framing reinforces hierarchical power relations by granting the author full control over representation.

4.11 Visual Analysis

1. Representational Meaning

From a narrative perspective, the image constructs meaning through the represented participant's exaggerated facial expression and hand gesture during a public speech. These elements function as vectors suggesting action and emotional intensity. Although the gesture may originate from a genuine communicative act, the image is recontextualized by the tweet into a mocking narrative, encouraging viewers to interpret the action as absurd rather than communicative. Conceptually, the image functions symbolically to represent the participant as foolish or irrational. The selected moment, captured mid-gesture, classifies the participant as a political actor while simultaneously attributing incompetence through visual exaggeration. This symbolic framing aligns with the verbal mockery, reinforcing the constructed portrayal of instability and ridicule.

2. Compositional Meaning

In terms of information value, the textual component occupies the upper position and functions as the "ideal," providing a hostile interpretive frame. The image below operates as the "real," visually anchoring the fabricated impersonation and presenting the gesture as evidence of absurdity. The represented participant's central placement establishes them as the focal point of the multimodal act of ridicule. Salience is achieved through central positioning, bright lighting, and the exaggerated facial expression and gesture. Background elements, including the audience, are visually minimized, ensuring attention remains fixed on the participant. Framing is established through the separation between text and image within the platform interface. The dark background isolates the text and grants it interpretive authority, while tight cropping of the photograph intensifies focus on expression and gesture. Together, these framing strategies integrate visual and verbal elements into a cohesive discourse of bullying.

Conclusion

This paper has examined political bullying in online discourse by analyzing how language and visual elements are used to construct ridicule, dominance, and exclusion. Using critical discourse analysis and visual analysis frameworks, the paper has shown that political communication on social media often shifts from debate and critique toward personal attack and humiliation. At the linguistic level, the analysis revealed recurring strategies such as derogatory labeling, impersonation, grammatical reduction, and high-certainty assertions. These features work to present subjective evaluations as unquestionable facts, positioning the author as an authority while reducing targeted figures to simplified and devalued identities. Such linguistic practices transform political commentary into a form of verbal bullying that limits dialogue and reinforces asymmetrical power relations. At the visual level, images function primarily to reinforce the negative evaluations introduced by the text. Through choices of representation, salience, and framing, visual material guides viewers toward a preferred interpretation that aligns with ridicule and delegitimization. Images are detached from their original contexts and reinterpreted to support hostile readings, strengthening the overall impact of the attack. On a broader level, the paper demonstrates how these discursive practices reflect and reproduce a culture of polarization and normalized hostility in digital political spaces. The structural features of social media platforms facilitate the circulation of aggressive content, allowing bullying discourse to gain visibility and legitimacy. Overall, this paper highlights how online political bullying operates as a powerful discursive practice that shapes public perception through mockery and exclusion rather than reasoned political engagement.

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