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A Social Cognitive Analysis of Alina Habba's Speech at the 2024 Republican National Convention

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Abstract

This research conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis on Alina Habba's speech at the 2024 Republican National Convention using van Dijk's framework of "Discourse Analysis as Ideology". Three levels, discourse, cognition, and society, are adopted in the process of analysis.

The analysis at the discourse level examines syntax, rhetorical devices, semantics, schematic framework, pragmatics, and dialogical interaction in Habba's speech to reveal how she communicates the ideological messages that reflect the Republican Party's policy. The cognitive level investigates how Habba's personal mental representations—shaped by

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experiences, social identity, and political affiliation—reflect broader group-based ideologies of the Republican Party. This includes an analysis of the beliefs and knowledge structures that underlie her discourse and how these contribute to shared social cognition. At the social level, the study situates the speech within its broader sociopolitical context to reveal how ideology, power, and dominance are reproduced through political discourse. It explores how Habba's discourse reinforces in-group identity and legitimises partisan worldviews while marginalising opposing perspectives.

The analysis concludes that Habba's speech functions as a powerful discursive act of ideological reproduction, strategically mobilising language to influence public cognition and contribute to the maintenance of sociopolitical power structures.

Keywords: ideology, power, dominance, social identity, social cognition

تحليل إدراكي اجتماعي لخطاب ألينا حبا في المؤتمر الوطني الجمهوري لعام 2024

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قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة تكريت، تكريت، العراق

المستخلص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً نقدياً للخطاب الذي ألقته ألينا حبا في المؤتمر الوطني الجمهوري لعام 2024، وذلك باستخدام إطار "تحليل الخطاب كإيديولوجيا" الذي وضعه فان دايك. ومن خلال اعتماد نهج تصاعدي (من الأسفل إلى الأعلى)، يتناول البحث الأبعاد الأيديولوجية للخطاب على ثلاثة مستويات مترابطة: الخطاب، والإدراك، والمجتمع.

فعلى مستوى الخطاب، يحل البحث البنى السطحية (كالنحو، والمعجم، والأساليب البلاغية)، والدلالات العامة والجزئية، والبنية التخطيطية، والتداولية، والتفاعل الحوارية. ويظهر هذا المستوى الاستراتيجيات اللغوية التي استخدمتها حبا لبناء الرسائل الأيديولوجية ونقلها بما يتماشى مع قيم الحزب الجمهوري. أما على المستوى المعرفي، فيستقصي التحليل كيف تعكس التمثيلات الذهنية الشخصية لحبا — التي تشكلت من خلال خبراتها وهويتها الاجتماعية وانتماؤها السياسي — الأيديولوجيات الأوسع للجماعة السياسية التي تمثلها، أي الحزب الجمهوري. ويتضمن ذلك تحليلاً للبنى المعرفية

والاعتقادية الكامنة خلف خطابها وكيفية مساهمتها في الإدراك الاجتماعي المشترك. وعلى المستوى الاجتماعي، يضع البحث الخطاب ضمن سياقه السياسي والاجتماعي الأوسع، ليكشف كيف تتم إعادة إنتاج الأيديولوجيا والسلطة والهيمنة من خلال الخطاب السياسي. كما يستكشف كيف يعزز خطاب حبا هوية الجماعة ويضيف الشرعية على الرؤية الحزبية، مع تهميش وجهات النظر المعارضة.

ويخلص التحليل إلى أن خطاب حبا يُعد فعلاً خطابياً قوياً لإعادة إنتاج الأيديولوجيا، حيث تستخدم اللغة بشكل استراتيجي للتأثير في الإدراك العام والمساهمة في الحفاظ على الهياكل السياسية والاجتماعية القائمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأيديولوجية، السلطة، الهيمنة، الهوية الاجتماعية، الإدراك الاجتماعي

1. Introduction

Van-Dijk's socio-Cognitive model is a prominent theory in critical Discourse Analysis, and it is the way to discover the ideologies which underlie the discourse of powerful people to control and dominate others. According to this theory, there is a relation between discourse and power, controlling and dominance and levels of society. It also shows how to produce powerful discourses to persuade people.

According to van Dijk's model, there are three levels of ideology: the first is cognitive (beliefs in people's minds), the second is social (structuring beliefs in a social group), and the third is discourse (linguistic tools as pragmatics, semantics, and rhetorical aspects). Language is considered the most important tool to serve ideological purposes because it is a means of communication and interaction between people and plays a significant role in organising social groups and institutions. It is also related to how attitudes and perceptions are expressed and how group behaviours are identified internally and externally (Yule, 2006). In addition, language reflects people's beliefs and thoughts, affects them directly and indirectly, and can change their attitudes accordingly.

The current study shows how politicians use linguistic tools to serve their ideological purposes. With powerful speeches, they influence the audience and help to sway ideology in their favour.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

There are different definitions of Critical Discourse Analysis that illustrate its nature and scope. Van Dijk (1993), Fairclough (1995), and Wodak (1996) say that Critical Discourse Analysis is a field that studies and analyses spoken and written texts to reveal the source of power abuse, dominance, racism, and social inequality. Van Dijk (1993) mentions that “Critical Discourse analysts want to understand, expose, and resist social inequality”. Critical Discourse Analysis deals with the abuse of power, domination, and inequality. It aims to reveal inequality in different social environments and how the dominant group exercises its power and domination over others. In short, critical discourse critically analyses the hidden ideologies of social control, power, dominance, discrimination and inequality as exercised, constituted and legitimised in language.

There are different aims of critical discourse analysis; Fairclough (1989) states that the aim of critical discourse analysis is to “show up connections which may be hidden from people, such as the connections between language and power”. In other words, the goal is to show the hidden connections, such as the connection between language and power, and to reveal any kind of deception and ideological manipulation hidden in the texts that the general public does not notice.

As for van Dijk (1995), he believes that the goal of critical discourse analysis is to “uncover, reveal, disclose the hidden structures, features, strategies and manifestation of social power, dominance, inequality, discrimination, bias, etc.” It also attempts to determine the relationship between power and domination, and it is a powerful tool for studying the ideological process of domination (Fowler et al., 1979).

In general, Critical Discourse Analysis aims to provide people with explanations and criticism to reveal and distinguish the strategies of (written and spoken) texts. It reveals any hidden ideologies, removes ambiguity, and attempts to expose, in a scientific and systematic way, the manipulative discourse practices adopted by dominant groups in these texts.

3. Ideology

Wodak (2001) states, “One of the main aims of critical discourse analysis is to demystify discourses by deciphering ideology”. In other words, the main aim of critical

discourse analysis is to decode discourses through decoding ideology. So, one may ask: What is ideology? It refers to “the science of ideas”, and this term attracted the attention of different scholars, such as “Wodak, Fairclough, van Dijk”.

Van Dijk (1998) defines ideology as “social beliefs which are shared by members of society”. Van Dijk (2011) adds that ideologies are simply “a system of ideas shared by members of a social group, ideas that will influence their interpretation of social events and situations and control their discourse and other social practices as group members”. Van Dijk(*ibid*) argues that the concept of shared or distributed ideology does not mean that all members will have an identical version of the ideology or that they will interpret and apply it in the same manner. Fairclough (1992) mentions that discourse, as an ideological practice, shapes, normalises, maintains, and transforms the meaning of the world from various positions within power relations. Therefore, ideology serves power, and ideology can be a way of exercising power.

4. Power

The second key term is power, which refers to the ability to affect the minds, opinions, attitudes, directions, and events. It also means imposing certain agendas, ideas, values, and plans on others (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Moreover, power can shape events, ideas, and directions, with each individual in an organisation aiming to exercise it to accomplish particular goals and ideologies.

The power aims to control others under two levels, the first one is based on “force” and the second one is based on “cognition”. Political authority, religious institutions, wealth, strength, gender, age, and state, together, can be regarded as sources of power (Holmes,1995). Ideology and Language act as instruments of power and can be used to exercise control. Essentially, power relies on “ideology” which includes beliefs, ideas and values. Language acts as a means to influence others. Wiess and Wodak (2003) state that “language indexes power, expresses power, and is involved in contention over and challenging power.” Power employs specific persuasion, deception, and manipulation. In summary, by using language and ideology, those in power can persuade, manipulate and socially and mentally influence others to serve their interests.

5. Model of the Study

This study adopts **Teun A. van Dijk's Social Cognitive Model** (2008), which offers a multidisciplinary framework for understanding ideology as it operates across **discourse, cognition, and society**. This model allows for the integration of linguistic structures, mental representations, and sociopolitical contexts, providing a comprehensive tool for critical discourse analysis.

According to van Dijk (1998, 2006), ideologies are organised systems of socially shared beliefs used by groups to sustain their interests and reproduce their power through discourse. His model is structured into three interconnected levels:

5.1 Discourse Level

This level focuses on how ideologies are expressed through language. Discourse here refers to both spoken and written communicative events, which are shaped by social and cognitive factors (van Dijk, 1993, 1995b). It includes the following:

1. **Surface Structure & Syntax:** Sentence form, simplicity or complexity, and rhetorical patterns (van Dijk, 1997).
2. **Lexicon:** Ideologically charged vocabulary that expresses positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 2000).
3. **Semantics:** Includes local (presuppositions, implications) and global (thematic) meaning structures (van Dijk, 1995a).
4. **Schematic Structure:** The overall organisation of the speech (van Dijk, 1988).
5. **Rhetorical Strategies:** Use of metaphor, analogy, repetition, and emotional appeals (Charteris-Black, 2005).
6. **Pragmatics:** Use of implicature, presupposition, politeness, persuasion, and indirect speech acts to shape audience interpretation (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Yule, 2006).

7. **Dialogical Interaction:** Strategies of speaker-audience engagement, such as call-and-response and direct address, which reflect power and alignment (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1998).

5.2 Cognitive Level

This level refers to how discourse is shaped by and shapes the mental representations of individuals and groups. These mental models include **attitudes, values, emotions, and ideological beliefs**, which are shaped by the individual's membership in specific social groups (van Dijk, 2011). In political discourse, speakers use **strategic self-presentation** and in-group vs. out-group framing to cognitively align with their audience's beliefs and reinforce shared ideologies (van Dijk, 2006).

5.3 Social Level

From a social point of view, discourse can be situated within large social structures (macro structures) that may include history, culture, political beliefs, and institutions (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993), while smaller social structures (micro structures) represent specific speech events that reflect power relations. At the social level, ideologies are presented, reproduced, and justified as natural as discourse processed (Wodak, 2001; Weiss & Wodak, 2003)

6. Analysis Framework

This study analyses Alina Habba's speech at the 2024 Republican National Convention <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHntbF2b-SM>. The analysis takes the following steps:

1. At the discourse level, Habba's speech will be analysed following van Dijk's framework. It includes surface structure, syntax, lexicon, local and global semantics, schematic structure, rhetorical devices, pragmatics, and dialogical interaction.

2. The cognitive level will examine Habba's individual cognition as it represents the beliefs and values of the Republican Party.
3. The social level will present the ideological and societal structures as they are represented in the speech event.

6.1. Discourse Level

Category	Observations from the Speech	Examples from the Speech
1. Surface Structure & Syntax	1. short, direct sentences 2. Parallel structures 3. Rhetorical questions and exclamations	1. "President Trump loves this country. He does 2. <i>"His kindness. And his commitment to saving this great country."</i> 3. <i>"So if you're ready. To end the destruction."</i>
2. Lexicon	1. Positive framing of Trump 2. Negative framing of opponents 3. Religious and patriotic language	1. <i>"champion," "empowering," "unwavering spirit," and "resilience"</i> 2. <i>"corruption," "desperation," "sham indictments," and "madness"</i> 3. <i>"devout Catholic," "beacon of liberty," and "God bless America"</i>
3. Local Semantics	1. Presuppositions 2. Implications	1. <i>"Every attack on President Trump only strengthens our movement"</i> 2. <i>"The only crime President Trump has committed is loving America"</i>
4. Global Semantics	Binary opposition	Trump as a savior vs. the left as corrupt

Category	Observations from the Speech	Examples from the Speech
5. Schematic Structure	1. Personal introduction 2. Personal connection to Trump 3. Trump's past success 4. Attack on opponents 5. Call to action	1. <i>Introducing herself as proud first-generation Arab American woman</i> 2. <i>Considering Trump as her friend</i> 3. <i>Mentioning Trump's presidency achievements</i> 4. <i>Framing the left as corrupt and desperate</i> 5. <i>Encouraging voting for Trump</i>
6. Rhetoric	1. Metaphors & Symbolism: 2. Repetition 3. Emotional appeals	1. <i>"No bulldozer big enough to remove his legacy."/ "He has and will continue take bullets for us."</i> 2. <i>" President Trump loves this country."</i> 3. <i>family, faith, and patriotism</i>
7. Pragmatics	1. Shared knowledge 2. Implicit directives	1. <i>Trump's legal battles</i> 2. <i>"We no longer have to hold on. We just have to show up."</i>
8. Dialogical Interaction	1. Direct address 2. Call-and-response moments	1. <i>"America, we are winning."</i> 2. <i>"Amen." "That's right."</i>

Discussion

1. **Surface Structure & Syntax:** The speech relies on short sentences to enhance clarity, parallel structures to reinforce key points and give an emotional impact, and rhetorical questions and exclamations to actively engage the audience.

2. **Lexicon:** The speech employs positive/negative framing to evoke strong emotional responses -glorifying Trump while vilifying his opponents. Additionally, it

combines **religious and patriotic language** to resemble the audience's values and spread an atmosphere of shared identity.

3. Local semantics: There is a **presupposition** in the phrase *"Every attack on President Trump only strengthens our movement"*, assuming that Trump is under an unfair attack, reinforcing the idea of victimisation, while **implication** is found in statements like *"The only crime President Trump has committed is loving America"*, pointing that the legal actions against him are politically motivated.

4. Global Semantics: The speech constructs a **binary worldview**. On one hand, Trump is framed as the protector of America, while his opponents are corrupt and desperate (*Good vs. Evil*). She speaks about Trump as a leader who defends people, *"takes bullets"*.

5. Schematic Structure: She starts her speech talking about herself *"proud first-generation Arab American women"* and her relationship with Trump *"He is my friend"* to give an impression of authenticity. Then she moves to talk about Trump's past success and achievements during his first presidency as an action of encouragement to vote for him.

6. Rhetoric: She uses a number of rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, emotional appeal, and repetition, to convince the people. Metaphor is used to describe Trump's legacy as unshakable *"No Bulldozer big enough to remove his legacy"*. On the other hand, the repetition of phrases such as *"President Trump loves this country"* reinforces the idea of his patriotism. The use of words such as family, faith, and national pride is intended for emotional appeal.

7. Pragmatics: She uses presupposition to assume that the listeners already know about Trump's legal cases and they supposedly support him in order to establish an in-group ideological relationship. She uses the expression *"we no longer have to hold on"* to indirectly convince them to go vote for Trump, while an expression, such as *"We have just to show up"* refers to the idea of collective aim. The speech emphasises in-group unity by presupposing shared ideology.

8. Dialogical interaction: She attracts the listeners with expressions such as *"America, we are winning,"* to create a shared identity. She also attracts them with expressions such as

“Amen” and “That’s right” as a call-and-respond strategy. These expressions strengthen in-group ideological solidarity.

6.2. Cognitive level

Category	Observations from the Speech	Examples from the Speech
Self-Presentation	The link between her success and Trump’s support	"As a proud Arab American woman, Trump empowered me."
Group Identity	Republicans Vs. opponents	Republicans = patriots, faithful; Opponents = corrupt, lawless
Polarization	Trump as savior Vs. Left as destructive	" <i>The left has tried to demolish President Trump.</i> " (Frames opposition as destructive)

Discussion

The ideological perspective of the speech frames positive self-representation of the in-group. Through her speech, Habba attributes her career success to Trump, asserting his support to her to establish a successful profession. Through her speech, she describes the republicans as “patriots” and “fighters” and those against them as “corrupt” and “lawless” drawing a distinction between the in-group and the out-group (the good people vs. Evil people).

6.3. Social level

Category	Observations from the Speech	Examples from the Speech
Cult of Personality	The focus is on Tramp as a leader rather than his policies	<i>"Trump has and will continue to take bullets for us."</i>
Religious & Nationalistic Appeals	The use of faith and patriotism to strengthen political identity	<i>"God bless President Trump. God bless the United States of America."</i>
Lawfare Narrative	The portraying of legal cases as politically motivated	<i>"Sham indictments and baseless allegations will not deter us."</i>
Call to Action	The encouragement of the audience to take action	<i>"Let's send Trump and JD Vance to the White House in November!"</i>

Discussion

The analysis at this level reveals Habba's speech moves the narrative towards describing Trump as heroic figure rather than mentioning his policies, by combining religious and nationalistic appeals. This method of speech puts Trump on a frame of moral and religious obligations. The speech describes Tramp's legal battle as politically motivated and has no bases still to emphasize the idea that it is like a struggling for America's survival and voting for Tramp is a cultural defense for salvation.

Conclusion

In her Republican National Convention speech, Habba clearly represents her institutional identity through reinforcing in-group ideology and solidarity. Van Dijk's framework shows that carefully selected linguistic choices, cognitive representation, and

social discourse framework together work to maintain emotional engagement with the audience.

It is noted that at the discourse level, syntactic simplicity, parallelism and rhetorical devices are used to attract audience attention. On the other hand, lexicons are carefully chosen, portraying Trump as a heroic figure, and emphasising a positive image of the in-group while describing his opponents as corrupt, emphasising a negative image of the out-group. From a pragmatic perspective, a tool such as presupposition motivates the audience indirectly to reinforce shared beliefs.

Analysis at the cognitive level shows that Habba sees herself as both a beneficiary of Trump's leadership and a representative of his political ideology. She reinforces a strong group identity, portraying Republicans as patriots and moral heroes while framing opponents as threats to national values. These words of clear division portray Trump as a leader who can "save" America from political and ideological decline.

The third level of analysis reveals how the speech socially goes beyond political rhetoric, portraying Trump as a leader whose legal fights represent a larger struggle between good and evil. Religious and patriotic methods of engagement raise a political involvement. On the other hand, the lawfare narrative portrays Trump's legal battle as persecution instead of justice. By depicting the 2024 election as a vital fight for America's future, the speech turns political participation into a moral and cultural obligation.

Habba's speech aims to reinforce the Republicans' identity and beliefs to win the support of the audience using emotional language. The speech event narrative integrates linguistic, cognitive, and social tactics in a try to construct a persuasive discourse in which Trump is viewed not just as a preference but as essential for safeguarding national identity and core values.

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