

Representing Identity and Otherness in the First Inaugural Speech of the Elected Presidents: Case Study of the Elections of Iran, USA, and France

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Abstract

In a linguistic analysis, different levels such as words, sentences, textual structures, combinations etc. interact with each other and make the bases, principles and the context of a thought and an ideology. In fact, ideology lets any thought and approach to draw its identity-based and other-making borders with its antagonists. Power construction and social context interact with each other in the political elections. In this arena, the political elites represent their discourse in a manner leading to grasping the utmost votes. Therefore, in this rivalry, besides legitimizing their ideology, these elites delegitimize their antagonists. Besides, what is presented before the elections, what the candidates utter in their inaugural speeches is somehow a different material. What is uttered in the inaugural speech generally contains all the political currents, parties, groups and thoughts. In this era other-makings is articulated through a hidden discourse. It seems that elections provide a ground in which power and hegemony get integrated in a peaceful manner. Therefore, it is important to find the reason of the supremacy of an ideology and the failure of the other.

In the years 2016 to 2017, three presidential elections were held in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States of America and France. Iran elections were held on May 19th, 2017 and Hassan Rouhani was re-elected for a second term. The United States presidential election of 2016 was held on November 8th and Donald Trump won the White House. The presidential election of France was held on May 7th, 2017 in which Emmanuel Macron was elected. In this study, by considering the context-based situation of each discourse, the authors investigate how identity making, representing self and others and different social actors is formulated throughout these political events.

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There are many questions asked regarding what happens throughout the elections period. How can language-use foreground a discourse and let it gain its expected results? How does the hegemon discourse attract all the groups and parties? What is the role of linguistic mechanisms? However, this investigation is about to answer the question that “how are the identity-based borders of producing and reproducing authority represented in the first inaugural speech of the elected presidents after the elections?” This analysis is done in the micro and macro levels. The study’s hypothesis is that “the elected candidates in the presidential elections of Iran, the US and France have based their semiotic system on the articulation of their maximal positive identity and defining a minimal other-making circle (maximal inclusion and minimal exclusion)”.

The corpus of this study is composed of three inaugural addresses of the three case discourses. Their usage of different pronouns, the manner they address their audience and their high frequency references is part of the analysis and the manner they represent their identity is another part. Therefore, the study’s theoretical framework has two main levels, a micro and a macro one. The micro level investigates the linguistic strategies each president applies and the macro one is found through critical discourse analysis (CDA). So, the framework is based on a combination of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discursive theory and some ideas obtained from Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. As a result, firstly, the linguistic mechanisms are analyzed through the implicit and explicit implication of Barthes and the presence and absence ideas of Derrida. Then, other factors like self and other, other-making, foregrounding and backgrounding, chain of equivalence and logic of difference in each of the speeches is analyzed. As the interdisciplinary studies like this one are based on a two-level method, they can provide an appropriate ground for understanding the linguistic trends, processes and structures that have a special importance in policy-making.

The data analysis proves that the three analyzed discourses, despite their different contexts, have common grounds in the application of the linguistic mechanisms. The findings present us three macro-structures the first one of which is “the pronouns”. Using the pronouns “I” and “we” is a strategy for the ideological representations and the political inclusions and exclusions. In fact, the first person singular pronoun is used for foregrounding the self and displaying the positive side and the plural one gathers all the parties and thoughts together. The second macro-structure is the “speech content”. The analyses reveal different topics each having their special importance in the related context. The repeated issues are some strategies that are consciously used to encourage the audience and create hope for a better future by the help of the government. This is a repeated subject in all the analyzed speeches. The third macro-structure is the opening and closing remarks containing appreciation in the beginning part and the commitment to compliance in their closing part.

Another point is that the findings prove that the chain of equivalence and the identity-maker one is evidently described in Rouhani’s speech. Furthermore, backgrounding the negative others of Rouhani’s discourse is done implicitly. On the other hand, while the discursive others of Trump and Macron are implicitly represented, they do not have an evidently drawn chain of equivalence. In each of the studied discourses, a kind of ideological reality is hidden. In other words, the ideological context reproduced by each discourse represents self and other in a

special way that outlines the borders of each discourse positively and negatively. This kind of representation in each discourse describes how each one is legitimized.

As politics has mostly been studied from a social and political lens, and linguists have had fewer productions in this field, it is recommended that linguists apply their specialized view in this domain and prove how language can affect politics. As this study demonstrates, linguistic mechanisms help the candidates have an effective representation of their identity, legitimize themselves, delegitimize their others, and finally win the votes.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Self and other, Foregrounding and backgrounding, Presidential Inaugural Speeches, Iran, USA, France