

# A critical-cognitive analysis of Donald Trump's discourse across time: Trump as a businessman versus Trump as a president

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## Abstract

This study explores the discourse of Donald Trump as a businessman and as a president regarding the topics of immigration and economy. Data for this research were gathered from four speeches and four interviews delivered by Trump in the eighties-nineties, that is, as a businessman and four speeches and four interviews after being elected president of the United States. The analysis focuses on the way self/other-representation and mystification strategies are combined with conceptual metaphors in the construction of ideological discourse. The period in which the discourse happened seems to have a strong bearing on the discursive strategies employed by Trump.

**Keywords:** CDA, conceptual metaphors, mystification, stance-taking, representation, ideological structures.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background and preview

Over the last decades, the way in which Critical Discourse Analysis is combined with conceptual metaphors in the construction of political discourse has been an interesting area of research for critical discourse analysis (see, for instance, Charteris-Black, 2005, 2006, 2007; Hart, 2014; O'Halloran, 2003; Santa-Ana, 2002). In this respect, van Dijk (2001a: 352) states that CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. As a result, "critical discourse analysts take an explicit stance and, thus, want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (van Dijk 1998:352). Thus, CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. The main focus in this investigation is to see how speakers take stances in natural discourse. Both at the level of local meaning and local form analysis, we thus often witness an overall strategy of stancetaking, that is, the way in which speakers position themselves in relation to the ongoing interaction. Especially interesting for CDA research is the study of the many forms of implicit or indirect meanings.

Also, a cognitive analysis is carried out as a way to see how metaphors are used in the positioning taken by the speaker. Metaphor has been defined as an ornamental device which involves 'similarities' or 'comparisons' between the literal and the figurative meaning of an expression. In this line, metaphors in political discourse are relevant in terms of analyzing how this cognitive mechanism is useful as a way of expressing and representing ideas and thoughts through language (see for instance, Santa Ana, 2002 and Charteris Black, 2005, 2006, 2007)

In political discourse, a similar critical cognitive framework was applied to the analysis of Obama's speeches (see Wang, 2010), though the analysis was mostly based on "meaning" rather than on form. It should be furthermore noted that the use of metaphors in Obama's discourse are different to Trump's conceptual metaphors in the sense that Obama as a president had a tendency to use rather positive metaphors and therefore, his conceptualization was more optimistic (see Wageche and Chi, 2017). Moreover, it seems that so far, little attention has been paid to the discourse of Donald Trump, and, for that reason, I want to cast

light on how van Dijk's ideological structures, that is, meaning and form at local level are used in his speeches and how metaphors help in the construction of ideological discourse. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to make a comparative cognitive-critical study in Donald Trump's discourse as a businessman and as a president. In particular the following questions are addressed:

- a) How are immigrants represented in Donald Trump's discourse before and after he was elected president?
- b) How are economic issues portrayed in Trump's speeches before and after being the president of the US?

### *1.2. Objectives and hypothesis*

The focus of this study is to analyse the ideological strategies regarding the stance taken by Trump in his discourses before and after being elected president on the topics of immigration and economy. The aim of this research is to examine how a set of political speeches and interviews show the stance taken by Trump and for this, van Dijk's ideological strategies are used as to find differences from one period to another. The present study intends to use a critical-cognitive approach. Thus, the purpose of the present research is to connect cognition, ideology and discourse creating a threefold study. As we will see, discourse works at the same time at the ideological level and at the cognitive level.

The starting point of the present study is to see on the one hand, the ideological strategies that Trump uses in his discourse as a businessman and as a president and on the other hand, how Trump conceptualizes the topics of immigration and economy in both periods. In particular, the research hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

- (i) Trump as a businessman had a more positive stance towards immigrants in the sense of showing empathy and solidarity and this can be hypothesised for two main reasons: firstly, immigration was not regarded as a problem at the time and more importance was given to business and economy, and secondly, Trump had less authority and therefore, he was more tentative in his speeches. Economy was given more importance since he was regarded as a great developer and businessman, and therefore, his main role was to ponder the topic of economy as more prevalent.
- (ii) Given that the economy has been going through an economic turmoil in the last decade and there has been an increase of immigration, it can be hypothesised that Trump as a president will show a more negative stance towards immigrants, blaming them for the economic crisis.

The theoretical framework used to analyse these speeches is based on van Dijk's socio-cognitive theories; in particular, this study uses the principles proposed by this author in his analysis of the ideological discursive strategies (1998, 2000). On the other hand, the conceptual metaphors are examined following Charteris-Black (2005, 2006, 2007), Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) and Santa-Ana (2002).

## **2. Theoretical Background**

The present paper accomplishes a multidisciplinary study that includes theoretical backgrounds with a miscellaneous origin. First, it draws on the Critical Discourse Analysis approach in order to examine the most frequent strategies in Trump's discourse. In particular, the paper employs both van Dijk's (1998, 2005) theories about ideology and ideological discourse structures and a cognitive approach so as to explain how metaphors are ideologically constructed, and for this Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) proposals are used as well as Charteris-Black (2005, 2006, 2007) and Santa-Ana (2002).

### *2.1. The level of meaning*

Ideological 'content' is most directly expressed in discourse meaning. So, special attention will be paid to the semantics of ideological discourse. Since the meaning of words, sentences and whole discourses is extraordinarily complex, a selection of its most relevant aspects will be made. In accordance with van Dijk (1998, 2000, 2001), the analysis of semantics underlays into what he calls as "local meaning". Here, we find lexicalisation, implicatures and presuppositions, examples and illustrations, contrast, disclaimers, propositional structures (predicates, actors/pronouns and modalities), clarity and vagueness.

### *2.2. Formal structures*

Formal schemata are understood in terms of superstructures. For instance, news schemata are defined with the help of conventional news categories, such as Summary, Main Event and Background, and their respective sub-categories. Formal structures can be divided into global (overall schematic structures) or local (e.g. sentence structure). However, for this research purposes local forms are only under scrutiny.

#### *2.2.1 Local forms*

Van Dijk (2010:53) suggests that an ideological analysis should not be only limited to semantics. Indeed, ideologies may also affect the various formal structures of text and talk: the form of a clause or sentence, the form of an argument, the order of a news story, the size of a headline, and so on. As van Dijk (1980: 106) asserts, those structures of text or talk that are much less consciously controlled or controllable by the speakers are regarded as 'forms' which generally do not directly express underlying meanings and hence beliefs, but rather signal 'pragmatic' properties of a communicative event, such as the intention, current mood or emotions of speakers, their perspective on events talked about, opinions about co-participants, and especially interactional concerns such as positive self-presentation and impression formation. In other words, negative opinions about others may be hidden, but indirectly these negative evaluations may be signalled by some features such as, intonation, syntactic structures, propositional structures, rhetorical figures, many properties of spontaneous talk, such as turn taking, repairs, pauses, hesitation, and so on.

### *2.3. A cognitive view of metaphors*

This study does not only address how ideological discursive strategies are used in discourse but also how cognitive devices, such as metaphors are conceptualised. According to Aitchison (1987) the world is understood through language and in order to do so, we need to define experiences in our mental lexicon. With respect to this idea, Aitchison asserts that words are stored in our mind in such an organized system that this process enables us to understand those words. This process is sometimes done by mappings between two conceptual domains, that is, the source and the target domain (Fauconnier, 1994). Langacker (1983:63) asserts that the use of a lexical item in actual speech is considered as a point of access to a network where typically one of its nodes will be activated. Other nodes in the network will be activated with different degrees of salience.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:57) words are flexible when considering meaning, that is to say, words are not fixed and never precisely explain our physical experiences free from social influences. For them (1980:3), metaphor goes beyond simply language, in the sense that metaphors are, to a great extent, the way we think and comprehend new concepts in our daily life. In other words, the way we think and act is to a major part metaphorical. As

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) highlight, metaphors are grounded in the interplay of our bodies with the physical and social world. We impose the same structure on aspects of our physical experiences and conceptualize them according to this (p. 107). For these authors, metaphors are not only linguistic structures but conceptual structures mapping two semantic domains in such a way that the TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN. What is really relevant in the light of this theory is how a concept is metaphorically structured.

Metaphor selection may be governed by persuasive interests, since metaphor choice can be motivated by ideology (see Chateris-Black 2005, 2007). The speakers use metaphors pragmatically, that is, to persuade by combining cognitive and linguistic resources. As a result, a cognitive approach to metaphors is not enough to understand the motivation of the use of a specific metaphor. Also, in this regard, Santa-Ana (2016) provides a combination of this cognitive approach with the CDA proposals as a way of showing the power of metaphors in the way social groups are represented.

### **3. Corpus and methodology**

#### *3.1. Donald Trump's profile*

Trump held a Bachelor of Science in economics and finance in 1968. That is to say, business has been present in Trump's life from a very early age. It should be furthermore noted that even today Trump owns several million square feet of prime Manhattan real estate and remains a major figure in the field of real estate in the United States and a celebrity for his prominent media exposures. Trump's interest on national politics began in the early 2000s and he set his eyes on the presidential office. That is why the speeches and interviews as a businessman were selected from the 80s-90s, since he started his career as a politician in the early 2000. His campaigning focused on domestic issues such as illegal immigration, crime, Islamic terrorism, offshoring of American jobs, and the U.S. national debt, and his campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again" resonated among American citizens.

#### *3.2. The data*

The corpus consists of a set of eight speeches and eight interviews, four speeches and four interviews from the 80s-90s, that is, when Donald Trump was only a businessman and four speeches and four interviews from January 26th 2017 onwards, when he was elected president. The speeches were chosen from the CNN, NBC and C-SPAN and the interviews from the CNN, ABC news and The Economics. The topics were chosen since they are hot topics in Trump's discourse.

Most of these speeches and interviews were found online but other had to be transcribed by the author of this dissertation, mainly those which belonged to the period of Donald Trump as a businessman, that is, the 80s-90s. They were selected given the relevance of their content, that is, they were thoroughly read and the information was categorized and chosen in accord with the topics under scrutiny in this paper.

#### *3.3. Procedure*

The present paper carries out a qualitative analysis of the data. In a first stage, the speeches and interviews were examined following van Dijk's (1998, 2000) socio-cognitive theory in order to try to analyse how the ideological structures of discourse are involved in the topics of immigration and economy. First, the study identified the structures at the local level regarding

meaning and form. More specifically, the levels of description of lexicalisation, propositional structures and implicatures were considered.

In a second stage, the research turned to the analysis of the conceptualisation of immigration and economy. At this point, the transcripts were examined so as to find the conceptual metaphors used by Trump. The metaphorical analysis, follows Charteris-Black (2005, 2006, 2007), Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003), and Santa-Ana (2002) assumptions as a way to achieve a more complete analysis and thus, accomplishing the purpose of this investigation.

The analysis includes a set of diverse conceptual metaphors that are crucial to understand how immigration and economy were and are conceptualised. Finally, both ideological assumptions and the conceptualisation of the speeches and interviews in the two different periods were discussed together as to illustrate the stance taken by Trump. At this stage, it was presumed that both ideological discursive structures and conceptual metaphors worked together and that is why the study analysed the interaction between these two domains.

#### **4. The representation of immigration and economy**

In particular, I will first deal with “meaning”, at a local level regarding lexis, propositional structures and implicatures, and, then, with the syntax of sentences in terms of “form”. Also, the conceptualization of economy by Donald Trump is under study following Charteris-Black (2004, 2005, 2007), Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) and Santa-Ana (2002, 2016).

##### *4.1. Lexicalization*

Lexis is probably the major dimension of discourse meaning controlled by ideologies and which consists of the selection of a word that stresses certain features and conceals others.

###### *4.1.1. The notion of trouble*

The notion of trouble is used in Trump as a businessman in the sense that economy is immersed into a difficult situation, and that the proper economic measures have not been taken by the government, and that is the reason why the economy is not going well, as can be seen in example (1). However, Trump as a president considers that the economy of the country is not increasing due to the immigration system and therefore, regarding immigrants as a problem for the economic improvement, as in example (2).

(1). We are a debtor nation *because of the measures taken by the government*. (I. Nov 12, 1988).

(2). I am going to bring back millions of jobs. Protecting our workers also means *reforming our system of legal immigration*. *The current, outdated system depresses wages* for our poorest workers, and puts great pressure on taxpayers. (S. Feb 28, 2017).

##### *4.2. Propositional structures*

###### *4.2.1 The use of actors and pronouns*

Trump makes use of the pronoun “I” and “my” as to refer to himself as promoting the economic improvements of the country. Trump utilizes the pronoun “I” and “my” when regarding the economic enhancement that his business has elicited in the country, and therefore, in this way, he implies that despite the economic depression that the country was immersed into at the time, the economy is not as bad as it should be thanks to his business and contributions. However, Trump as a president uses the pronoun “we” as a way of including himself and others, as in the case of Americans. Accordingly, Trump as a president views

Americans as an “ingroup” regarding the economic improvement as a result of the cooperation of all the Americans.

(3). Some 75,000 New Jerseyans and their families are working *because of my business*; more than 43,000 directly in Atlantic Cty. In 1992 alone I paid more than a billion dollars in wages and benefits to our people. (S. Oct 5, 1993).

(4). *We have got a pool*. It’s a high-risk pool. And this pool *we just funded* yesterday (I. May 11, 2017).

#### 4.2.2. The use of modality

Trump as a businessman employs modal verbs that indicate probability, possibility and uncertainty in his period as a businessman. We can conclude that Donald Trump as a businessman used modal verbs of possibility as a way of being less certain (e.g. could) and thus, reducing the degree of responsibility to what he said. Nevertheless, Trump as a president seems to involve more responsibilities in his discourses and this is carried out with the help of modals that indicate certainty (e.g. will).

(5). *I think that America is a country that has tremendous tremendous potential, I think that America is using very very little of its potential*. I feel that this country with the proper leadership *could go on to become what it once was* and I *hope* and certainly *hope that it does go on to be what it what it should be*. (I. Oct 6, 1980)

(6). Walmart announced it will create 10,000 jobs in the United States just this year because of our various plans and initiatives. *There will be many, many more, many more, these are a few that we are naming*. (S. Feb 16, 2017).

#### 4.3. Implicatures

Trump as a businessman implied that the economy was not going well as a consequence of other countries blaming those countries for the economic depression. This implicature creates on the reader’s mind a connection between those countries which are deceiving the US and the depression that the US is immersed into. However, Trump as a president implies that the economy is not nourishing as a consequence of the immigration system as if the immigrants were the culprits of the economic situation.

(7). We've been ripped as a country by virtually every country we do business with. (I. Oct 8, 1999).

(8). By finally enforcing our immigration laws, we will raise wages, help the unemployed, save billions of dollars, and make our communities safer for everyone. (S. Feb 28, 2017).

As regards the local forms Trump as a businessman had the tendency to use the passive voice in order to make more emphasis on the actions that needed to be done. Notwithstanding, Trump as a president does not use the passive voice since he does not have the intention of obfuscating actions and therefore referring to himself positively as the rescuer of the economy.

(9). Virtually it’s a total disaster but the real state business is in an absolute depression and one of the reasons with that is what happened in the 1986... 100 percent right and something *has to be done, it has to be brought back, it has to be reformed, it has to be taken care of*. I think for certain types of building such as housing. (S. Nov 21, 1991).

Trump as a businessman shows economy as if the economic problems were as a consequence

of the government's administration, and hence, showing the economy as if it was affected by internal factors, that is, problems as a result of any mis-management inside the country. However, Trump as a president represents the economy as affected by immigrants.

#### 4.4. Metaphorical conceptualisations

##### 4.4.1. Economy is a living entity

The present subsection analyses those metaphors that use the domain of death. Within this domain we can distinguish that the economy is represented as a threat. Economy is conceptualised as a dying being attributing human features to something non-human. Nevertheless, Trump as a president also represents economy as a living entity, although, in this case, industries are people (personification), as can be seen in example (11). Furthermore, Trump uses the domain of fire, turning the employment into a dangerous element that needs to be under control as in example (12).

(10). First of all, an Indian casino operation in northern New Jersey would be *the economic death* to Atlantic City. (S. Oct 5, 1993).

(11). *Dying industries* will come *roaring back to life*. Heroic veterans will get the care they so desperately need. (S. Feb 28, 2017).

(12) (...) Among their responsibilities will be ending *the flame of jobs* from our country and negotiating fair trade deals for our citizens. (I. Feb 16, 2017).

## 5. Preliminary conclusions

The starting point of this investigation was the assumption that the discourses of Donald Trump as a businessman and as a president concerning the topics of immigration and economy differed in terms of ideological structures and conceptual metaphors.

At the discursive level regarding meaning, the findings show that Trump as a businessman considered economy as a problem because of the wrong measures taken by the government. Notwithstanding, Trump as a president describes immigrants not only as a problem for the economy but as a problem for the country. On the other hand, regarding form, the findings manifested that Trump as a businessman made more emphasis on actions that had to be done. Also, Trump used the active voice as a way of fronting "the government" and thus, depicting them as the culprits of the economic depression the country was immersed into at the time. By contrast, Trump as a president portrayed immigration negatively treating them adversely to the degree of making them responsible for the unfavourable happenings, as in the case of the economic crisis.

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